

NC A

Nebraska Commission on Indian Affairs



CHIEF STANDING BEAR

A JOURNEY TO STATUARY HALL

A DOCUMENTARY



New documentary tracks Standing Bear statue's journey to Statuary Hall at the U.S. Capitol



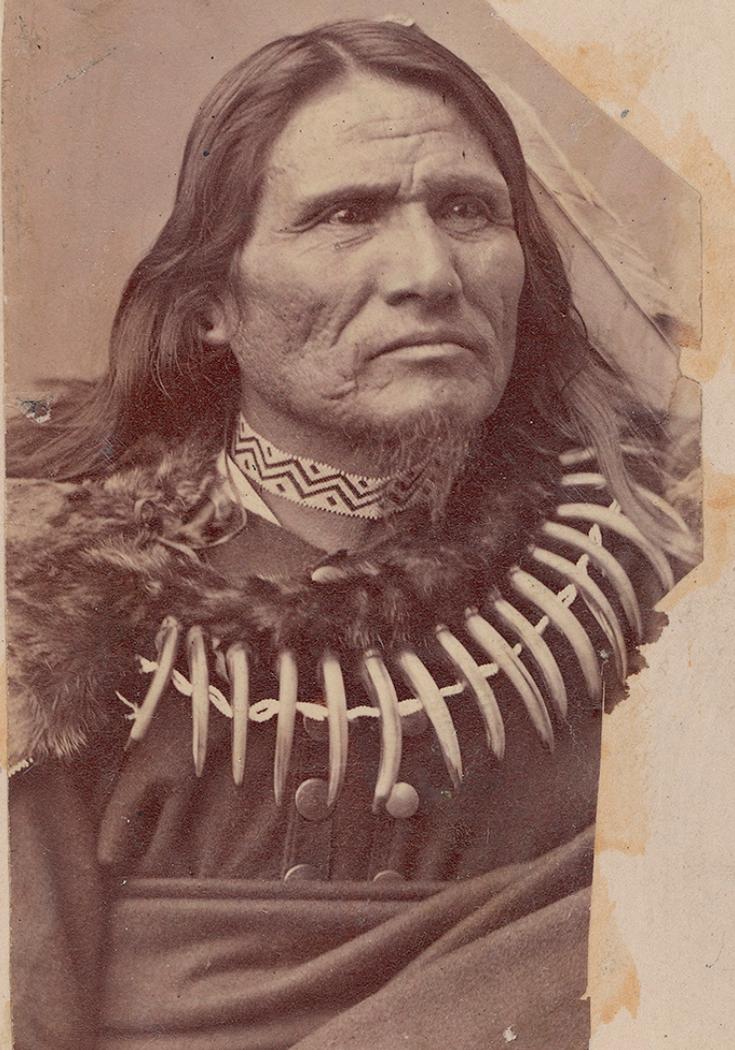
A new documentary from the Nebraska Commission on Indian Affairs follows the creation, journey, and installation of a bronze sculpture of Ponca Chief Standing Bear in Statuary Hall at the U.S. Capitol in September 2019 and the remarkable story behind the statue's subject.

From his birth on the banks of the Niobrara River in Nebraska until his death in 1908, Chief Standing Bear spent his life in a constant struggle to gain equality and justice for Native Americans. Chief Standing Bear and the Ponca Tribe were forced in 1877 by federal treaty to leave their homeland in Nebraska for Indian Territory in what is now Oklahoma. The hardship of travel and the conditions of Indian Territory caused the deaths of many members of the tribe, including Chief Standing Bear's son. Determined to bury his son in his homeland, Chief Standing Bear led 30 members of his tribe back to Nebraska, where federal authorities detained him. As a result, Chief Standing Bear became the first Native

American recognized as a person in a federal court decision rendered in Omaha at the trial following his return.

The Nebraska State Legislature voted to commemorate Chief Standing Bear by creating a statue for the U.S. Capitol's Statuary Hall, where two historical figures represent each state. The decision was part of a larger bill that also added a statue of Red Cloud author





*“This hand is not the color of yours,
but if I pierce it, I shall feel pain.
If you pierce your hand, you also feel pain.
The blood that will flow from mine
will be of the same color as yours.
I am a man.
The same God made both of us.”*

*Chief Standing Bear
Manchu-Nanzhin*

Willa Cather to replace J. Sterling Morgan. Chief Standing Bear would replace William Jennings Bryan.

Chief Standing Bear: A Journey to Statuary Hall follows the journey of the new statue along with Chief Standing Bear’s story and interviews with his descendants, sculptor Benjamin Victor, and the leaders who helped secure its place in Statuary Hall. Though it is a story of how Chief Standing Bear came to be recognized in this way, it is also a story about issues of equality and social justice in today’s complex world. The story and court case are 140 years old but just as relevant today. The orderly selection by a state legislature of an Indigenous social justice hero serves as an important counterpoint to the anger and division that has resulted in the tearing down of statues depicting historic figures.

“Standing Bear’s story is a part of history that we as a country need to know for what it is, both good and bad. His journey from Oklahoma to a Nebraska courtroom and now to Statuary Hall as told in this movie is a triumph. His story is even more relevant today, serving as a thought provoking piece about contemporary issues of equality, equal rights and justice,” said Judi gaiashkibos, executive director of the Nebraska Commission on Indian Affairs. “It is my hope

that this movie will have a long and vital life in sharing this important narrative about a Native American hero.”

This short film was created by documentary filmmaker Ingrid Holmquist, a journalist and filmmaker from Nebraska who recently won the British Academy of Film and Television Arts (BAFTA) Student Film Award for Best Documentary Film in 2019. She has worked on four CNN Fareed Zakaria documentaries and served as photo/video editor for “National Geographic” photographer Joel Sartore.

Trailer: <https://youtu.be/avjfmCCBbM>

Project information: <https://chiefstandingbear.org/>

Follow along: <https://www.facebook.com/Chief-Standing-Bear-Trail-144446865615350>



Featuring



Nancy Pelosi

Speaker of the House of Representatives

“If we’re going to improve the future, we must acknowledge the past. Chief Standing Bear faced injustices beyond imagination: the injustice of being forced from his ancestral homeland, the injustice of losing hundreds of members of his tribal family, including his son Bear Shield, to starvation and suffering because the US government’s broken treaty promises.”

Tom Brewer

Statuary Hall Selection Committee Chair, State Senator

“One of things we did was we walked through the trial and the decision of Judge Dundy on the floor of the legislature; we actually read portions of it. It was right after we read that that then we took a vote. And once we shared the story of Standing Bear with the legislature, it was an easy sell. There was no opposition whatsoever.”



Benjamin Victor

Standing Bear Sculptor

“The real point of having a national statuary hall isn’t just to celebrate individuals that we all know and already celebrate, it’s to pick those unsung heroes from your state that really are deserving of a national stage but haven’t maybe had their story told around the country.”

Katie Brossy

Ponca Tribal member / Akin Gump Strauss Hauer & Feld Attorney

“I felt like he was looking at me and that was the moment for me where I felt like he is here in the United States capital and that so many people would get to witness that and see him. My children, my sons, will be able to see a Ponca person in the United States Capitol and that we are still here.”





Featuring



Larry Wright, Jr.

Chairman of Ponca Tribe of Nebraska

“This land’s everything for us. I mean, it’s where all of our ancestors are buried for centuries. You know, the bones of our relatives, our ancestors, go back into the earth. All the grass, the animals, the vegetation, all those things that grow after our people were buried, our DNA’s is in all those things. You can’t take us from the land because that’s part of us.”

Joe Starita

Author of “I Am A Man: Chief Standing Bear’s Journey for Justice”

“So, after all of this walking and after all of this heartbreak and after all of this effort and fight to bury his son, ... the journey finally ends in September of 2019 when he [Standing Bear] walks into Statuary Hall in the United States Capitol in Washington D.C.”



Steve Laravie, Jr.

Direct Descendant of Chief Standing Bear

“Indigenous people are the embodiment of Standing Bear’s words. His words stood for us. That’s why it’s so important — because it stood for Indian people. We are all relatives. He was asking, ‘why can’t you see what I’m trying to do is something in honor of my son.’ Wouldn’t you do the same?”



Dr. Michele Cohen

Architect of the Capitol Curator

“The only rules that the federal government enacted as part of this legislation is that the person needed to be notable, they had to be deceased, the rest was really sort of a state decision.” ... “Part of my role is guiding the design process, and then the other part of my role is being here when the statues arrive, which generally happens in the dead of night. It’s a little different than going to a gallery and hanging paintings on a wall.”





Artist Statement



which Standing Bear epitomized. Finally, as the viewer looks at the face of Standing Bear, with its leathery, sun-worn skin; we see a man that is the very image of fortitude. His intense eyes captivate us as they lead us to his mighty, outstretched hand. His hand reaches out as a metaphor of the challenge that he faced in

Ponca Chief Standing Bear was a man of compassion and courage. My goal was to create a representation worthy of the man who stood against injustice.

As the viewer stands in front of the bronze sculpture, they are drawn in by the strong lines along the weighty blanket. As I worked on the blanket, I thought about the arduous journey when the Ponca were forced, at gunpoint, to leave their home in Nebraska and march to Oklahoma through rain and storms. I thought of the suffering and the tragic deaths that they saw along the way. Standing Bear's composure throughout the horrific circumstances is moving beyond words.

I visited the grave site of White Buffalo Girl, the young girl who died along the Ponca trail of tears. When I stood in front of her grave, I thought of Standing Bear's warning to the Government agents that many would die if they were forced to take this journey. I stood silently as I was moved beyond words at the thought of the poor girl who perished because of the inhumane, forced journey.

The intricate beadwork is a reminder of the beautiful culture that was nearly destroyed by the broken promises and forceful actions of an unjust government. The peace pipe axe represents a brave man who wasn't afraid to fight but chose to act in peace. The breastplate and bear claw necklace communicate the concept of strength, both spiritual and physical,

the groundbreaking court case.

When I think of what it must have been like for Standing Bear to lose his 16-year-old son, Bear Shield, who died in Oklahoma "Indian Territory," it moves me to tears. While I was creating the sculpture, my own son was about 16 years old. As a father, I can't help but think of the strength it must have taken for Standing Bear to lead on as he mourned the tragedy of his son and so many others.

As Bear Shield was dying, he made a request to his father to be buried with his ancestors in their homeland in Nebraska. It is hard for any non-native person to truly understand the depth of this request. For the Ponca, the animal, plants and the land are an inseparable part of their spirit.



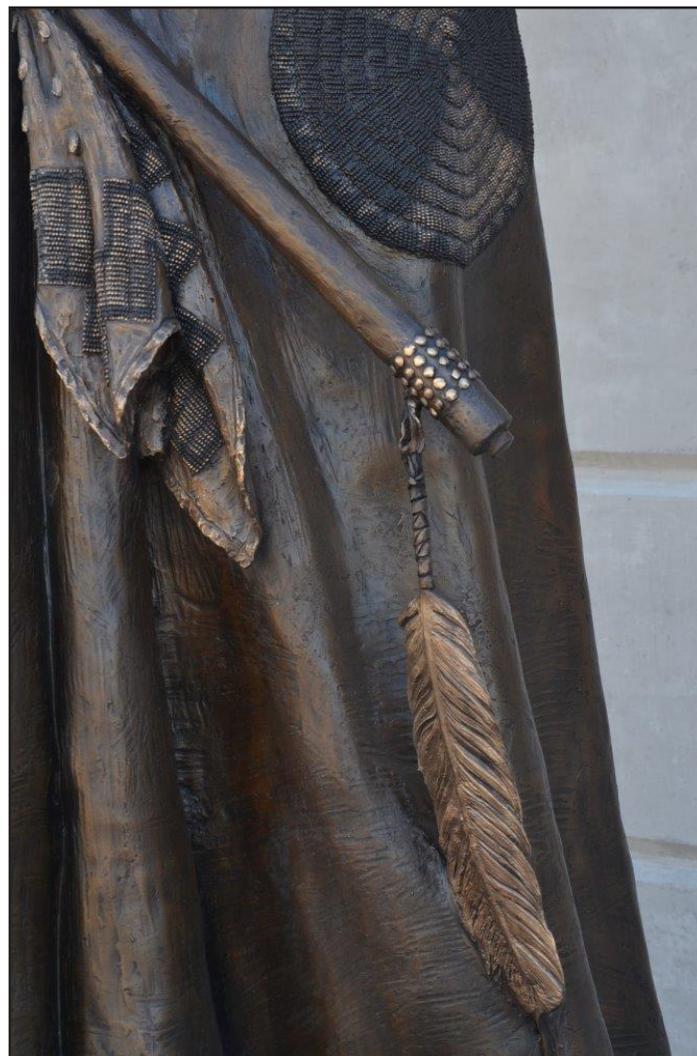


By being ripped away from their homeland, they were torn away from not only their land but their memories and their ancestors. However, the spirit of Standing Bear and the Ponca was strong. He kept his promise to his son and returned to his homeland. The media in Standing Bear's day told his story. They railed against injustice and advocated for a grieving father's freedom to return home. His story moved the public, and it is as powerful today as it was then.

We can't help but sympathize with the man who kept a promise to his son and walked over 700 miles to honor his word. We can't help but be moved as we read about Standing Bear reaching out his hand in that courtroom and saying, "I am a man".

We all have the responsibility to stand up, reach out, and lead. The sculpture of Chief Standing Bear serves as a reminder that we must do what is right no matter the cost. It is a testament to the triumph of his spirit. It is an expressive and meaningful monument for all people to experience. Standing Bear personifies the strength of the Native American people. When young Native children look up to him in the United States Capitol building, they will see a strong, moral Native leader who stood fearlessly, led courageously, and walked victoriously. It will be a fitting testament to the legacy of Ponca Chief Standing Bear.

—*Benjamin Victor*





Production

Co-Director & Executive Producer

Judi gaiashkibos has been the executive director of NCIA since 1995. She has worked with the government and private sector to provide opportunities for Nebraska Indians, fostered diversity and cultural sensitivity in the Nebraska State Legislature, promoted state and federal legislation, and advanced sovereignty issues.

She is an enrolled member of the Ponca Tribe of Nebraska and holds degrees in Human Relations and Leadership from Doane College. She was the 2012 recipient of the Humanities Nebraska Sower Award and has developed educational opportunities for native youth including the ongoing Sovereign Native Youth Leadership Camp and the Chief Standing Bear Scholarships.

Ms. gaiashkibos has served as Advisor and Adjunct Professor to the Native Daughters Projects One and Two at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln's School of Journalism and served on countless non-profit and institutional boards including University of Nebraska President's Advisory Council, United Way, Doane University Board of Trustees and the Governor's Education and Workforce Roundtable.

Her vision and commitment to celebrating the stories of Nebraska's Native heroes have included launching the Dr. Susan La Flesche Hospital Renovation project recognizing the story of the United States first Native American doctor. She was also the visionary that fostered the installation of a trio of sculptures honoring Ponca Chief Standing Bear, beginning on Lincoln's Centennial Mall in 2017 and ending with a historic placement and dedication in Statuary Hall in Washington, D.C. in 2019.

Working with the Nebraska Legislature, she has played a key role in the 2019 passage of LB 154 tasking an in-depth study of the crisis of missing Native women and children in Nebraska which has led to a greater understanding of the scope and causes of this National problem.



Co-Director's Statement

"Standing Bear's story is a part of history that we as a country need to know for what it is, both good and bad. His journey from Oklahoma to a Nebraska courtroom, and now to Statuary Hall as told in this movie, is a triumph. His story is even more relevant today, serving as a thought provoking piece about contemporary issues of equality, equal rights and justice. It is my hope that this movie will have a long and vital life in sharing this important narrative about a Native American hero."



Production

Co-Director

Ingrid Holmquist is a filmmaker and video journalist working primarily on documentary projects. She most recently worked as an Associate Producer on eight feature-length historic documentaries produced by CNN Specials. Independently, with her production partner Sana A. Malik, Ingrid produced, shot, and edited the student BAFTA-award winning documentary, Guanajuato Norte. The film follows Wenceslao Contreras Galvan, a migrant farmworker in Connecticut, and his sacrifice of being away from his family to provide a better life for his children in Mexico. The film went on to screen multiple film festivals, including DOC NYC, and was acquired by The New Yorker. She most recently co-directed the short film, Chief Standing Bear's Journey to Statuary Hall, alongside Judi gaiashkibos, an educational commission focused on the history of Chief Standing Bear and the story of his statue being erected in the U.S. Capitol. Ingrid is dedicated to producing films that provide nuance, context, and sensitivity about people and histories. She is available for commission and collaboration at ingridholmquist@gmail.com.



Co-Director's Statement

It has been an immense honor to help Judi gaiashkibos tell this story for the screen. The history of Chief Standing Bear, the Ponca Tribe, and the story of his statue being erected in the U.S. Capitol is one that has relevance in all aspects of life on this land.

Chief Standing Bear's actions as a civil rights leader for Native people is one that should be shared widely. As Steve Laravie Jr. says in the film regarding Chief Standing Bear's words in Elmer Dundy's courtroom: "Indigenous people are the embodiment of these words. It stood for Indian people."

Who we choose to memorialize in stone and bronze and put on a literal pedestal is vital for representation, equity, and historical preservation.

What is being said when we put the wrong people on a pedestal? When young people visiting the nation's monuments lock eyes with figures who amassed their stature through exploitation, oppression, and genocide, we have venerated the wrong "heroes." Chief Standing Bear's depiction is one to elevate, to look up to, along with the stories of all Native leaders who came before and after him.

I'm grateful to have worked with Judi gaiashkibos on the creation of this film to further boost the story of Chief Standing Bear for the public in this one cinematic way. I hope it can serve as a spark for further conversations and learning.



Production



Chief Standing Bear Statuary Hall
Committee (left to right)

Tom Brewer, State Senator, District 43,
Chairman

Ed Zimmer, City of Lincoln Historic
Preservation Planner

Judi M. gaiashkibos, Executive Director,
Nebraska Commission on Indian Affairs

Kathryn LeBaron, Co-Chair, Public Art Lincoln



For questions or comments, contact NCIA
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402-471-3475.





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