

Jim Thorpe and NAGPRA

A Personal Opinion

By Sandra Massey, Historic Preservation Officer

On April 19, 2013 federal judge Richard Caputo ruled that the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act (NAGPRA) applied to the remains of Jim Thorpe and that he could be repatriated to his two surviving sons, William and Richard, and the Sac and Fox Nation.

When NAGPRA turned 20 in November of 2010, I provided personal commentary to the *Sac and Fox News* because NAGPRA is personal, and I couldn't write about it in any other way.

NAGPRA provides for the protection of graves and for the repatriation, the return of Native American human remains to the people with whom they are "affiliated" or to whom they may have a close association.

NAGPRA has always been a law of Return.

Jim Thorpe is going to return home

The day after I heard the news, I sat in reflection at the Jim Thorpe Home in Yale. The sign outside identifies the house in big letters: JIM THORPE HOME.

Although I've been there and seen that sign many times, that day I read it as JIM THORPE – HOME.

He's coming home.

The only home he ever owned is in Oklahoma.

He belongs to the Sac and Fox, whose former homelands include several states over the centuries and who are now based in what is now Oklahoma.

He was born in Sac and Fox territory. He had an "Indian name" from the Thunder clan of the Sac and Fox. (The ruling came during the Thunder clan's spring feast.) He went to school at the Sac and Fox Agency. Always, wherever he went out in the world, he identified himself as Sac and Fox.

Native Americans were not considered citizens of the United States in 1912, when he won Olympic medals and the heart of a nation. He was Sac and Fox.

He came home to the Sac and Fox during his lifetime for activities held by the tribe. Even today are still persons who were here then and remember him. There are generations not far removed from his who have family stories from someone he knew. They don't talk about his Olympic accomplishments. They remember how he liked to hunt, how he always had dogs with him, how he liked to come back for "doin's". They remember *him*.

When the time came, he told his brother Frank and his sons where he wanted to be buried: in Oklahoma, in Sac and Fox territory.

When the time came, his family started a traditional Sac and Fox funeral ceremony for him.

Then came the unthinkable. His widow took him away from the traditional services, and she later had him buried where he had never been. He wanted to be buried on the land where he had been born, where he left his footprints, and where his people are.

Instead he ended up in a place where he was a tourist attraction, where his name was no longer his alone but of a town's.

The people there were told a story and some of them wanted to do the right thing for him. They thought that meant burying him there.

His sons wanted him to have what he wanted. Some in the town learned the truth and again wanted to do the right thing by letting him come home, but by then were some who felt they had a greater claim to Jim Thorpe's remains than his own sons and his people. It seemed that his fame meant

that he didn't have a right to have what he wanted. His wife's wishes were considered more important than his.

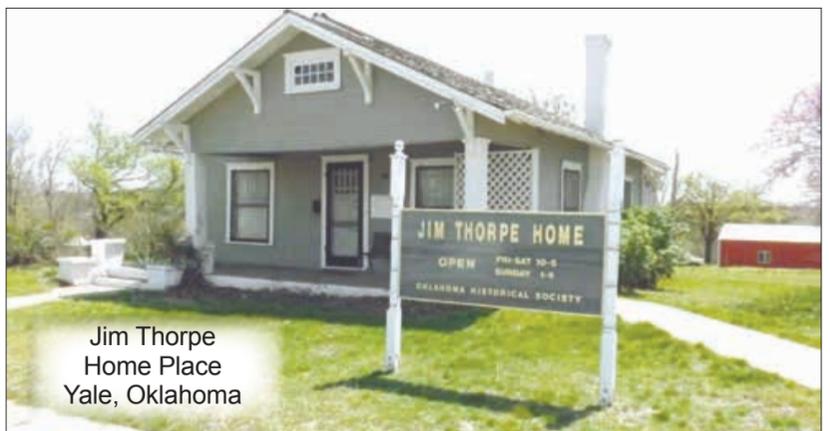
That's what NAGPRA had been enacted to stop. NAGPRA says we have a right to say what we want and how we want it done. NAGPRA says we belong to our people. NAGPRA says all the people on museum shelves have a right to go home. Judge Caputo's decision says NAGPRA is right, and NAGPRA prevails. Jim Thorpe is Sac and Fox and deserves to go home.

Jim Thorpe is known for his Olympic and professional sports successes, but he also thought about Indian people. His professional sports opened the door for more Native American athletes, and he had football and basketball teams made up solely of Native Americans.

Sixty years after he died people still call him their hero.

The ruling about Jim Thorpe helps all of Native America. I think he would like that.

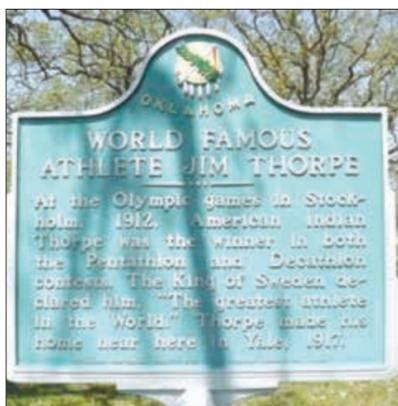
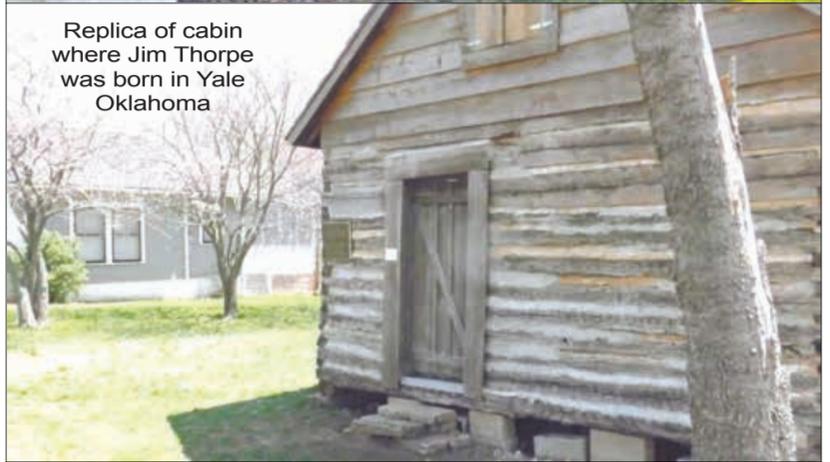
Jim Thorpe died before I was born, but I can now say what I wasn't here to say before: Welcome home, Jim.



Jim Thorpe Home Place Yale, Oklahoma



Replica of cabin where Jim Thorpe was born in Yale Oklahoma





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