



Federación de Clubes Michoacanos en Illinois (FEDECFMI)



NEWS RELEASE

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P'urhepecha community discover written history in Chicago

CHICAGO, Illinois – Members of the P'urhepecha community in the Chicago area came face to face for the first time with historical books in their language at the Newberry Library on Friday April 26th.

The four books on show were two Spanish-P'urhepecha dictionaries and two religious texts, translated into P'urhepecha. In total, the four books have a combined age of over 1500 years. They form part of the Edward E. Ayer collection at the Newberry Library “one of the largest collections of books and manuscripts on American Indian and Indigenous Studies in the world” (<https://www.newberry.org/collection/subjects/american-indian-and-indigenous-studies>).

Until recently, the P'urhepecha community in the Chicagoland area were unaware that historical texts in their language could be found a stone's throw from their homes and workplaces.

On March 23rd 2024 at Casa Michoacán, DuPage, Dr. Kate Bellamy, a researcher at the Leiden University Centre for Linguistics (The Netherlands) presented her work so far on one of these books: the *Bocabulario brebe*. The book arrived at the Newberry by way of Mexico City, Bonn (Germany) and London (UK): <https://www.leidenlanguageblog.nl/articles/four-cities-and-a-dictionary-the-fascinating-journey-of-a-purhepecha-manuscript>.

The talk garnered such interest that Dr. Bellamy, in collaboration with colleagues at the Casa Michoacán, organized a visit to the Newberry to see the books in person. Luz Márquez, originally from the P'urhepecha community of Cheran Atzicurin (Michoacán) found the visit both emotional and motivating:

“I felt very fortunate and very proud to be able to connect with my ancestors through these books. Seeing them for the first time when we arrived gave me goosepimples! There were so many interesting things to see that I'm really looking forward to coming back soon”.

Her daughter, Mintsí Campos, also really enjoyed the visit:

“Before, I knew our language but didn't know much about its history, so I was very struck by how things were earlier. I also didn't know that these books were here and possible to visit, so I am very happy to have been introduced to these heirlooms.”

The exhibition of P'urhepecha texts was supplemented by an 18th century map of Michoacán, the home state of the P'urhepecha people, as well as the First Latin edition of Hernán Cortés' second letter to Charles V, King of Spain, and the *Codex Tepoztlan*, a Nahuatl document asserting their land rights, composed on amate (fig tree bark) paper.

Analú López, Ayer Librarian and Assistant Curator of American Indian and Indigenous Studies, who organized the visit at the Newberry Library was delighted to welcome the group:

“It was a pleasure to host members of the P’urhepecha community at the Newberry Library to view materials related to their community. Meeting and reuniting Indigenous community members to materials such as these is one of the favourite parts of the work I do here at the library. Despite the genocidal consequences of settler colonialism in North America, many Indigenous peoples have preserved their languages. Improving access to published and unpublished works, such as the materials I was able to share with members of the P’urhepecha community, helps shed light on the diversity of Indigenous languages in so-called Mexico, while opening opportunities to reinterpret historical works from a contemporary perspective.”

Importantly, these books provide a connection between the living speakers of the language and their history, their heritage. They demonstrate the value the language has, and the importance of writing it for future generations.

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