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For Immediate Release: May 14, 2004
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LENEXA, Kan. – The dedication today of the American Indian Records Repository at the National Archives and Records Administration (NARA) records facility here marks a new chapter in the Interior Department's undertaking to improve federal management of Indian records, said Interior Assistant Deputy Secretary Abraham E. Haspel.

He was joined by Assistant Secretary – Indian Affairs David W. Anderson, Special Trustee for American Indians Ross O. Swimmer and NARA Assistant Archivist for Regional Records Services Thomas E. Mills at a ceremony to formally open the repository that will house consolidated non-active records of the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) and the Office of the Special Trustee as part of the department's ongoing trust reform effort. The repository is part of NARA's underground regional records service facility in Lenexa.

"The business of records management is a vital part of trust reform," Anderson said. "I am very pleased that the collaboration between the department, NARA and Haskell has resulted in a partnership that will ensure Indian trust records are properly maintained and produce trained American Indian records management professionals."

On September 12, 2003, Secretary Gale Norton and Archivist of the United States John W. Carlin signed a joint agreement creating a national repository for American Indian records at the Lenexa facility. The Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between DOI and NARA will ensure that the highest standards will be observed in the preservation and protection of American Indian records, including fiduciary trust records.

"I recognize that one of the most important roles of the Special Trustee is to ensure that adequate records are kept to document transactions and activities occurring during the administration of the trust," Swimmer said. "With the dedication today of the American Indian Records Repository, the effort to ensure proper records management is successfully completed. All Indian tribes and individuals now can be assured that their records will be appropriately cared for and available to them as a result of the work being done here."

The MOU also created an archival records management studies program at Haskell Indian Nations University (HINU), a BIA operated post-secondary institution located in Lawrence, Kan., to train and certify Indian students in archival and records management.

"With the American Indian Records Repository in NARA's state-of-the art records center and Haskell Indian Nations University's archival records management studies program, Indian trust records will be better maintained and Haskell students will have an exceptional opportunity to become records management professionals," Swimmer said.

The Assistant Secretary - Indian Affairs has responsibility for helping to fulfill the department's trust responsibilities to individual and tribal trust beneficiaries, as well as promoting tribal self-determination, self-governance and economic development for the nation's 562 federally recognized

American Indian and Alaska Native tribes and their members. The Assistant Secretary also oversees the BIA, the 179-year old agency that provides services to individual American Indians and Alaska Natives from the federally recognized tribes; the Office of Federal Acknowledgment, which administers the Federal Acknowledgment Process; and the BIA school system which serves approximately 48,000 American Indian children located on or near 63 reservations in 23 states.

The Special Trustee for American Indians is responsible for the oversight and coordination of the department's efforts to reform its practices relating to the management and discharge of the Secretary's Indian trust responsibilities.
