

Oral Histories of Tompkins County

Archival Finding Aid

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Indigenous Experience in Tompkins County: Oral History Collection

The *Indigenous Experience in Tompkins County Oral History Collection* was established in 2021 to highlight interviews and stories in our archives that explore the experiences of Native American, American Indian, Native Hawaiian, and people from Indigenous communities and cultures around the globe living in Tompkins County. Tompkins County is located in the traditional homelands of the Gayogohó:nq' Nation (generally known as the Cayuga Nation) one of the Six Nations of the Haudenosaunee Confederacy. Our oral history efforts have focused on recording the stories of Haudenosaunee community members whose ancestors have lived on this land for time immemorial, but this collection will also include narratives from Indigenous peoples not part of the Haudenosaunee Confederacy. The topics of these interviews explore a wide range of experiences, community, and culture, and the stories shared may have been guided by the specific project the interview was recorded for. This collection will continue to expand as our oral history archives continue to grow.

Trigger warnings: modern colonial trauma, Indigenous erasure, drug and alcohol addiction.

We are still processing this collection, and are creating accompanying transcripts and listing details for each interview.

Interviews with:

Audrey Cooper* (Sand Hill Band of Lenape and Cherokee Indians) (43 minutes)

Audrey Cooper speaks about her work in the community since moving to Ithaca in 1967 at the age of seventeen. Having worked with GIAC, the Southside Community Center, and the Multicultural Resource Center, she has organized events serving marginalized members of the community, including the West End Breakfast Club, GIAC's annual MLK Jr. commemorative breakfast, and Sister Friends.

Trigger warning: anti-Black sentiment, domestic abuse, death

- *Recorded 10/29/2019*
- *Audio File: OHTC_2019-10-29_Cooper-Audrey*
- *Transcript File: OHTC_2019-10-29_Cooper-Audrey_Transcript*
- *Recorded as part of the Local Sisters of Change Project in 2019.*

Sachem Sam George (Cayuga Nation, Bear Clan)* (39 minutes)

Sachem Sam George discusses growing up on Seneca territory, becoming aware of his connection to the Cayuga people, and the process of taking on a role of leadership within the Cayuga community. He reflects on the struggles that the

Cayuga people have recently faced, his experience learning the Cayuga language, and his hopes for cooperation between the Cayuga Nation and others in the area.
Trigger warning(s): modern colonial trauma, Indigenous erasure, drug and alcohol addiction

- Recorded 10/23/2018
- Recorded as part of the Cornell Anthropology 1900 Project in 2018.
- Per request of the interviewee, this oral history is only available for listening in person at our Research Library.

Steve Henhawk (Cayuga Nation)* (61 minutes)

Steve Henhawk discusses his upbringing by his grandparents on the Six Nations reserve in Canada, where he learned about his Cayuga heritage and spoke the Gayogohó:nq' language at home. He also discusses the Cayuga way of measuring time in growing cycles and his experience teaching and learning the Cayuga language within the community. Finally, Steve Henhawk states the importance of understanding the presence of the Cayuga people in Ithaca, both historically and presently.

Trigger warning(s): modern colonial trauma, Indigenous erasure

- Recorded 2/5/2019
- Per request of the interviewee, this oral history is only available for listening in person at our Research Library.

Yen Ospina* (34 minutes)

Yen Ospina discusses her art, spirituality, and cultural identity. She reflects on how art has helped her express herself in times of stress and trauma and how her respect for women and the planet have inspired her to include these themes in her art.

Trigger warning(s): child abuse, child sexual abuse

- Recorded 11/14/2019
- Audio File: OHTC_2019-11-14_Ospina-Yen
- Transcript File: OHTC_2019-11-14_Ospina-Yen_Transcript
- Recorded as part of the HERSTORY Project in 2019.

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