

# Oral Histories of Tompkins County

## *Archival Finding Aid*

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### **Religion & Belief in Tompkins County: Oral History Collection**

The *Religion & Belief in Tompkins County Oral History Collection* was established in 2021 to highlight interviews and stories in our archives that explore the themes of religious belief and practice. This collection includes interviews with subjects from multiple faiths and religious practices. 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 warning(s):** child abuse, child sexual abuse, violent imagery, gender-erasure, descriptions of anti-Black racism, police brutality, antisemitism

#### *Interviews with:*

##### **Nancy Bereano (62 minutes)**

Nancy Bereano recounts her experience participating in anti-war activity during the 1960s and becoming a feminist. She also discusses her relationships with writers during the fifteen years Firebrand Books existed and her later advocacy in the City of Ithaca.

*Trigger warning: gender-erasure*

- *Recorded 3/11/2020*
- *Audio File: OHTC\_2020-3-11\_Bereano-Nancy*
- *Transcript: OHTC\_2020-3-11\_Bereano-Nancy\_Transcript*
- *Recorded as part of the Local Sisters of Change Project in 2019 and 2020.*

##### **Barry Derfel (45 minutes)**

Barry Derfel discusses his background in New Jersey, degrees in teaching and school administration, and the importance of equity and anti-racist work in his life and career. He also speaks on the importance of understanding oppressive institutions and intersectionality and empowering communities through education.

*Trigger warning(s): descriptions of anti-Black racism*

- *Recorded 10/18/2018*
- *Audio: OHTC\_2018-10-18\_Derfel\_Barry*

- *Transcript File: OHTC\_2018-10-18\_Derfel-Barry\_Transcript*
- *Recorded as part of the Cornell Anthropology 1900 Project in 2018.*

**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.*

**Rabbi Scott Glass (92 minutes)**

Rabbi Scott Glass, former rabbi of Temple Beth El, discusses his upbringing and education, experience with his congregation throughout his rabbinate, and relationship with other religious leaders in the community, particularly their acts of solidarity around instances of antisemitism. Rabbi Glass also speaks on his experience converting members of the Abayudaya, a Jewish community in Uganda, and his relationship to Israel and anti-Israel discourse in the community.

*Trigger warning(s): police brutality, antisemitism*

- *Recorded 7/24/2019*
- *Audio File: OHTC\_2019-7-24\_Scott-Rabbi-Glass*
- *Transcript File: OHTC\_7-24\_Scott-Rabbi-Glass\_Transcript*

**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.*

**Dr. Abdul Jalil (34 minutes)**

Dr. Abdul Jalil discusses his education in Bangladesh and Japan, employment as a scientist in several countries, and work at Cornell University. He also discusses his role in Ithaca's Muslim community and his business, Ithaca Halal Meat and Grocery.

- *Recorded 4/15/2019*
- *Audio File: OHTC\_2019-4-15\_Jalil-Abdul-Dr*
- *Transcript File: OHTC\_2019-4-15\_Jalil-Abdul-Dr\_Transcript*
- *Recorded as part of the Immigration & Food Project in 2019.*

**Mimi Melegrito (61 minutes)**

Mimi Melegrito discusses her childhood in the Philippines and the story of how she immigrated to the United States. She reflects on her first memories of the US, the story of how she met her husband and moved to Ithaca, and her work in Ithaca as a volunteer in nursing homes, food banks, and local 4-H youth clubs and programs.

*Trigger warning: violent imagery*

- *Recorded 3/2018*
- *Audio File: OHTC\_2018-Melegrito-Mimi*
- *Transcript File: OHTC\_2018-Melegrito-Mimi\_Transcript*
- *Recorded as part of the Generation to Generation Oral History Project in 2018.*

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Mimi Melegrito (recorded in 2017): Mimi Melegrito discusses working with teenagers at GIAC since the 1980s and her efforts to resolve conflicts among these teenagers, often dealing with issues of racial prejudice and substance use. She also discusses her mission of improving people's lives and her observations about housing discrimination in Ithaca.

*Trigger warning: violent imagery*

- *Recorded 10/25/2017*
- *Audio File: No audio*
- *Transcript File: OHTC\_2017-10-25\_Melegrito-Mimi\_Transcript*
- *Recorded as part of the Cornell Anthropology 1900 Project in 2017.*

**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.*

### **Martha Preston**

Martha Preston discusses her Greek heritage, including the store her great-grandfather opened in Connecticut and later relocated to Ithaca (ca. early 1900s), which was later run by her grandparents. She speaks to her experience in the Greek community in Ithaca, from Greek dances to the St. Catherine Greek Orthodox church that opened in 1966.

- *Recorded 10/25/2017*
- *Audio File: OHTC\_2017-10-25\_Preston-Martha*
- *Transcript File: OHTC\_2017-10-25\_Preston-Martha\_Transcript*
- *Recorded as part of the Cornell Anthropology 1900 Project in 2017.*

### **Baldev and Kamaldeep Sekhon (61 minutes)**

Baldev and Kamaldeep Sekhon discuss moving from Punjab, India, to the United States, where Baldev first worked in agriculture in California, then in construction in New York City, before opening New Delhi Diamond's restaurant in Ithaca. They reflect on the downsides to being disconnected from their family and friends in India and discuss traditional family structures and activities where they grew up.

- *Recorded 4/23/2019*
- *Audio File: OHTC\_2019-4-23\_Sekhon-Baldev-and-Kamaldeep*
- *Transcript: OHTC\_2019-4-23\_Sekhon-Baldev-and-Kamaldeep\_Transcript*
- *Recorded as part of the Immigration & Food Project in 2019.*

### **Mitch Weiss**

Mitch Weiss recounts his experiences in the spiritual community in and around Ithaca in the 1970s. He recounts his memories of the Yea God commune, which moved to West Danby in 1973, and the Be Light community, which was focused on yoga and related spiritual practice.

- *Recorded 10/19/2019*
- *Video File: OHTC\_2019-10-19\_Weiss-Mitch*
- *Recorded as part of the Communes of Upstate New York Project in 2019.*

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