



# GDENWÉMGENANĚK YAJDANAWA

*(OUR RELATIVES TELL IT)*

A Guide to Oral History Interviews

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## **Introduction**

The Tribal Historic Preservation Office (THPO) is excited to announce the launch of the Gdenwémgenanëk Yajdanawa Project. Gdenwémgenanëk Yajdanawa means “our relatives tell it” in Bodwéwadmimwen. The program is modeled off of the University of North Carolina – Wilson Library’s same titled program, “Archivist in a Backpack.”

For this first year, the THPO has put together the Archivist in a Backpack kits as a means to assist Tribal Citizens conduct and record oral history interviews. This abbreviated guide includes tips on designing an oral history project; notes on preparing, conducting and processing interviews; overview of equipment; and additional resources. If you have further questions or are interested in donating your materials, please call the Tribal Historic Preservation Office at 269.397.1780.

## **Project Goals**

- Making history and historical production accessible through community-based workshops
- Engaging Tribal Citizens in the historical and cultural preservation goals of the Tribal Historic Preservation Office
- Create an archive of sound and/or visual recordings documenting Potawatomi History and Culture

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## **What is Oral History?**

Oral history and oral tradition are terms used to describe how people pass down of personal memories and family/community stories from generation to generation. Oral history focuses on documenting the interviewee's first-hand encounters and experiences, while oral tradition addresses various ways of knowing and "doing" or documenting history. Oral tradition may include family stories, place-based stories, traditional stories, or memories of cultural values/lifeways. Examples of these means of documenting and remembering history will come up during interviews. When family and community stories and traditional views are brought up do not be afraid to ask how those experiences of others also affected or influenced the interviewee (if appropriate).

One contemporary option to maintain and/or share these memories and stories is by recording them through an interview process. Citizens have a variety of options of protecting, stewarding, and/or sharing the recording(s). One option is to have the MBPI Archives steward, or store, the recording. The THPO staff will ensure the interview is transcribed, filed, and potentially made available to others under terms mutually agreed upon by all participants (interviewees and interviewers). If this first option is selected, copies of the transcription and recording will also be provided for all participants. Levels of archival storage access include Public or With Restrictions. Another option is if these stories should be kept within your family, the THPO staff will be able to provide support in creating a copy of the recording and assisting the family with transcribing and storage options.

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## Considerations for an Oral History Interview

- What stories or memories would you like to hear or learn about?
- What are your goals for the interview/project?
- What is the historical or cultural event, idea, or value you want to learn about? Is the event, idea, or value linked to specific place, family, or community?
- Who should you interview? Would some people feel more comfortable interviewing with a group?
- What do you and the interviewee want done with the interview once completed?
- Do you need to conduct any background research to assist with developing interview questions? Or have a better understanding of the historical context of the event, idea, or value?

## Planning & Preparation

- Make sure to ask permission of the interviewee before continuing with planning and preparation of the interview.
- Interviews should be limited to 60-90 minutes. If you are trying to address different subjects, consider planning for multiple interviews instead of trying to complete in one. If the interview is going to last for a longer time and you are limited to that day, plan to take breaks every 30-45 minutes. During the interview, be alert to signs of fatigue, distraction or boredom.
- Pick a location that both you and the interviewee are comfortable being. Also, try to pick a location that is quiet and allows you to set up the equipment where the audio recorder can easily pick up your voices.

- Examples: Living Room, Community Center, Office

- Avoid Restaurants; Car or Bus; Places near highways, airports, or train tracks; etc.

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## Planning & Preparation (continued)

- Prepare an outline of questions before the interview and if possible provide the outline to interviewee. The question cards provided can be used as a brainstorming or reference tool, but you know your interviewees and subjects best.
- If the interview is going to be shared and/or stored with the Tribal Historic Preservation Office, contact THPO staff for copies of consent and release forms or other paperwork that might not have been included with the kit.
- Before the interview, make sure you become familiar with the recording equipment included with the kit. The audio recorder instructions are included in the inside pocket of the backpack. Test the audio recorder to know how close or far you will need to place the recorder during the interview. Headphones are also included in the inside pocket with the instructions.
- Look through all of the materials included in the Archivist in a Backpack kit. Think about which materials you might find helpful or beneficial before, during and after the interview. If you or the interviewee brings items such as pictures, letters, keepsakes, journals, etc., feel free to use the acid-free archival folders or sleeves to protect those items.
- Consider creating a biographical data sheet for the interviewee. An example is provided in the binder of the kit.
- Expect to dedicate some time before and after the interview to set up/take down equipment, go through the biographical information (either on the sheet or recorded before or after the interview) and answer any of the interviewee's questions.
- Please remember if you're asking people to give of their time and knowledge, keep in mind appropriate cultural protocols associated with requests and giving thanks.

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## Interviewing Reminders and Tips

- Silence your phone. Ask the interviewee to do the same if they are able.
- Remind yourself and the interviewee that you can always go off the record. Make sure you turn off the recorder, and ask/confirm with the interviewee before you turn it back on.
- For all interviews, include basic information regarding the interviewee's name, date of birth, birthplace, family name(s), Neshnabé(s) name and clan (if known), and Tribal affiliation (see Question Card #1). This helps establish a context for the interview and relaxes both the interviewer and interviewee to build a rapport for the interview.
- For all interviews, also state the date, time, and location.
- After collecting the basic information, make sure to play back your recording to see if there are any background noises or other problems with the recording.
- The kit's Question Cards are to be used as a reference and a template of questions you can ask. It is not recommended to use the Question Cards as a script to read from.
- When asking questions, make sure they are open-ended so they encourage the interviewee to provide further explanation and discussion.
- Avoid audible interjections, such as "uh-huhs," "yeahs," etc. Use non-verbal communication to show your interviewee you are listening.
- Allow your interviewee to guide the interview, but as the interviewer maintain a sense of the overall direction and goals of the interview. Do not interrupt the interviewee.
- Do not be afraid of silence, this allows the interviewee time to think.
- Do not be afraid to take notes while the interviewee talks. Before the interview, let the interviewee know you may take notes and give them an idea of what the notes might consist of.
  - Examples: follow up or clarification questions, timestamp of a particular story, etc.
- If you are asking questions about multiple subjects, organize your questions so each subject begins with a broad question and follow up with more narrow or detailed questions.

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## Difficult Subjects to Discuss

- Prepare yourself before the interview for those questions and remind yourself to be empathetic.
- The interview is not about you, it is about the interviewee.
- Do not be afraid to ask beforehand if there are any subjects the interviewee does not feel comfortable discussing.
- Be aware of your verbal and non-verbal communication. Also, be aware of the interviewee's verbal and non-verbal communication.
- If the interviewer seems unwilling or unable to provide certain information, remind he or she they do not need to talk about anything that they are not comfortable with. Also, determine if they are comfortable discussing the topic:
  - No, they are not. Ask if they are okay to move forward with other questions or if they need to take a small break.
  - Yes, they are. Try approaching the topic from another angle or you can also wait until later in the interview to see if talking about other items helps their memory.
  - If appropriate, remind the interviewee that the interview does not have to be shared or the parts of the interview can be restricted based on the interviewee's wishes.

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## End of the Interview

- End with a question, such as “What other things, if any, would you like to discuss or add before we finish the interview?”
- Always thank the interviewee.
- Walk them through the next steps of the project and/or any follow up actions they might be involved with.

## Processing the Interview

- Send a thank you note or card to the interviewee.
- If you agreed to a follow up interview or they requested a copy of the recording and/or transcription—repeat these agreements in your note or card.
- Identify who will transcribe, archive, and steward the recording
  - Questions to ask: Is the content too personal?
  - If both you and the interviewee agreed to sharing the recording with the MBPI Tribal Historic Preservation Office, THPO staff will be able to transcribe, archive, and store the oral history interview. The staff will also make sure to provide all parties copies of the audio recording, transcription, and signed forms.
- Identify who will archive and/or steward old photographs, cassette tapes, maps, letters, or other documents and items that you or the interviewee may have brought to the interview
  - Questions to ask: Can a copy or 3D scan be made? Is the family okay with sharing? Is the family concerned the items need additional protection or care?
- If you would prefer to transcribe, archive, and store the recording and any other associated documents or items in your personal or family archives refer to the “Transcription Guidelines” and “Archiving and Storage” sections.

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## **Equipment Overview**

1. Digital Audio Recorder (in a case)
2. Archival Sleeves and Folders
3. Question Cards
4. Micro SD (Memory) Card
5. Headphones
6. Archival Gloves
7. Notebooks & Pencils
8. Binder
9. Stamps and Thank You Cards
10. Tissues
11. Medicine/Care Bundle (Sema, Sage, Shell, Fabric and String for Sema Bundles, and Turkey Feather)
12. Video Recorder (provided upon request)

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## Equipment Instructions – Audio Recorder

When you receive the device, it will be off.



Please slide the power switch to the on position until the screen lights up.



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## Equipment Instructions – Audio Recorder (continued)

When the device is on, you can press the red record button to begin recording. You will notice the red recording light will turn on.



When you are finished recording, press the stop button. The red recording light will shut off.



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## Equipment Instructions – Video Recorder

Please make sure the microphone is turned on. The left switch should be at +20dB and the right switch should be on the straight line.



Power on the camera by holding the power button.



You will see the "Welcome" screen as the camera turns on.



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## Equipment Instructions – Video Recorder (continued)

Use the screen to help position your camera for where you will be sitting. The screen can spin outwards if you want to see yourself while you are recording.



To record, press the red record button.



When you see the red recording light in the view finder, the camera is recording. You have up to two hours to record. When the camera is full it will shut off.



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## Transcription Guidelines

- Use your best judgement when transcribing
  - Questions to ask: How would you want to sound or be portrayed in a transcription of a conversation you had? How would someone else want to sound or be portrayed?
  - Understanding the context and rhythm of the interview allow one to identify and edit habitual false starts, unnecessary or repetitive phrases, and run-on sentences.
- Content
  - Include intervals of every 5 minutes in the text, in case you need to refer back to the recording at any time.
  - Noticeable pauses or interruptions can be identified with brackets (e.g., [pause] or [laughter]).
- Formatting
  - Double space throughout the document.
  - Use a header—include the interviewee’s name on the top left side and page number on the top right side.
  - Indent each time a new speaker enters into the conversation (if necessary). Use the whole name the first time the speaker appears; then use initials each time after that.
  - Indicate when the interview is finished with “End of Interview.” The transcriber’s name and the date the interview was transcribed should appear at the end of the transcript.

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## Archiving and Storage

- Label everything! Create a simple organizational system that you and any involved family members understand.
- Always include dates, participants, locations, etc.
- Everything should be stored in a cool and dry location.
- Archive any collected items during the interview (e.g., pictures, letters, keepsakes, etc.) in approved protective coverings.
- If you are the family archivist or historian, develop finding aid(s) to assist family members in the future with any family research.
- The THPO staff can also provide guidance and assistance with archival procedures, including organizational systems, protects to protect and preserve family items, and developing finding aids.
- Digital recordings take up a lot of storage space and multiple copies should be stored in various places. THPO staff are working on options to best support citizens to ensure these digital files are protected and a copy could always be made in case anything should ever happen to the other copies.



# MIIGWECH!



## QUESTIONS?

If you have any questions about the THPO Archivist in a Backpack program, please contact Lakota Pochedley at 269.397.1780, ext. 1255, by cellphone at 269.525.8125 or by email at [lakota.pochedley@gltnsn.gov](mailto:lakota.pochedley@gltnsn.gov)