The following is an interview with Abram Williams of Oneida Reserve. The interview is being conducted in the Skyline Hotel on June 8, 1983, by Alex Cywink. Mr. Williams is a councillor from Oneida, and now serves in the capacity of an elder. He turned eighty this year, and when he speaks of Indian tobacco a sample is available on request should you wish to view it.

Alex: Maybe you could start with your name.

Abram: Yeah, Abram Williams. Abram Williams from Oneida.

Alex: How did you come about to get your name?

Abram: Well, I was named after my grandfather. (laughs)

Alex: Was there any ceremony when you were named?

Abram: No, I don't think so, not that I know of.
Alex: Could you tell me a little of your childhood, what you remember of your grandfather?

Abram: Oh, well I didn't remember my grandfather, but I remembered my father and mother. And me, I had three sisters and two, another brother, they are all dead but one. I have a sister sixty-nine years old, not sixty-nine -- ninety-three years old. Yeah, just the two of us left in the family. My mother's been gone quite a while, and my father, my father was crippled with arthritis; nineteen years that he couldn't work. And we had some land and that's what we lived off. We used to rent it, and crops, always had a good garden. We had, we had a horse, and we raised cows. We had three cows, my mother had. And these did a lot of help. And when I got to be thirteen -- my dad died when I was, when I was eight years, I guess I must have been eight years old. And then I stayed with my mother until I was thirteen and then I, and I went to school in Mount Elgin. It used to be an old residential school down there. It's not there no more. And I went to school with quite a few people from Cape Croker and all over around there, Rama. I was there four years and I left. In them days we used to go to grade eight and then we thought we were through with school. (laughs)

Alex: What was it like at that school?

Abram: Huh?

Alex: What was it like at that school?

Abram: It was a good boarding, it was boarding school, you see, and they worked. They had a farm, and we used to work a half a day and go to school half a day. The students did, the men, the boys.

Alex: Who ran it?

Abram: McGriddy his name was, Reverend McGriddy, at that time. That was in 1913 to 1917, I guess, I was there. And I come home and -- home for a year or so -- and then I took a notion that I would go to Detroit and work. I was pretty young even then. I went there and I, I started iron working. Well, it wasn't even a year, about seven months and I got hurt, so I had to come home. And I stayed home ever since. I come back to my uncle -- he had a big farm and I worked there, and worked there for seventeen years. He says, when I come there, he says, "You can work here. I'll give you a share." And he give me half share there and I worked seventeen years for him. And then he passed away, and him and his wife passed away; and he willed it to me. And I'm still there. (laughs) And now I'm getting too old to work, but my sons work it. I've got a son here in Toronto, but he goes home to work at seeding time, and I got one at home.
And I got married, I forget the year now, I guess it's 1930. So we lived there ever since. And we lived there until 1959, and we had a fire and the house burned down and lost everything I had. And that's how come I got no, no papers about. I used to have all kinds of papers for that school I went to and I don't have that no more. And started building another house, I built another one, brick house I built. That's what we're living in now. I had two boys and two girls; I got ten grandchildren and three great-grandchildren.

And during that time the, the old... we had a hereditary chief, they used to call them, hereditary chiefs. And in 1930 they put up an elective system. That's when they first started, see, and I got in there in 1930. And I was in there till here a couple of years ago. That was forty-eight years I was in there. (laughs) I was councillor, never was a chief, I always was a councillor. Oh, forty-eight years and then I got, that's how I got going around to these AIАІ and different conferences they had. And then last year, no '81, went to Thunder Bay -- the AIАІ -- and that's when they told me I, they called me an elder then, so.... (laughs) I go around as an elder now, not a councillor. I'm supposed to go to all the meetings.

Alex: Did the, back in the '30s, did the Depression affect life on the reserve?

Abram: Yeah. That's when the Depression days, yeah.

Alex: How did it affect you?

Abram: Oh, it's pretty bad. Well, we managed all right, because we had, we grew our garden, and had some grain, and we had pigs, had cows milking, and made our own butter and everything. We didn't feel it too bad, but what we had to buy was, wasn't too much, but we managed to make it.

Alex: How did the War affect you?

Abram: Well, the First World War I was too young to go. That's when I was at the school I was telling you about. I went, we went there. Labor was scarce at the time -- that was in 1914, '15. The labor force was bad, because all the soldiers had gone away. So then two of us from this school and they send us down to Chatham to work. We got a dollar a day and board. (laughs) You worked down there during the summer holidays. You come back and started time at the school, time to go back to school. We tried to, while we was down there, we didn't like the school too bad, too good, so we thought we'd join the, join the army but we was too young. They caught us, so we couldn't do that. (laughs) And I was too young to go to the army, in the army in the First World War; and in the Second World War I was a little too old. (laughs) I didn't get to either one. (laughs)

And there's a lot of changes in my younger days, on our reserve we used to farm. My uncle had a threshing machine. We used to
go threshing around for, oh, for a month or more, just threshing around. The reserve, we got 5,400 acres. Oh, there must be about ten or twelve farms, pretty good farm land. They didn't have no tractors or nothing them days, all horses. We used to thresh around. And then on the, across the river from us was the Chippewas and the Munsees and they had farmers. We used to go threshing both sides of the river and really keep my uncle employed. And the old steam engine and... yeah. But them days have changed. We hardly got any, well, I can say that we, there's no farmers down there now. Some fellows try to farm and the machinery's so expensive that they lost and couldn't pay for it, so there's just two or three that tries to grow a little bit of corn, that's all. We grow, we put in sixty acres, although it was wet this year. Sixty acres of corn in. I own some on the flats, and that's why, that's the only reason we got it in. There's land down there, among the whites, even, off the reserve, that they can't even put no corn in. They can't even walk in the fields it's so muddy last week. And it's been that way all spring, and I don't thing there was too much crop going in, so I don't know. It looks to me as if it's going to be hard times ahead, just the same. Some big farmers are talking about quitting, and well, they can't do anything because they can't put no crops in. And that's all they depend on, grain farm. But I've got twenty head of cattle, cows, twenty cows and they get calves and I sell them in the fall. That's one way, as long as there's grass I guess I can get by all right. (laughs)

Alex: Do you know any history of your band? How your people came to be?

Abram: Well, the band come from the reserve, they come from New York state. I forgot how many there was now. (laughs) There wasn't too many, but they came and that's where they, they got that land. They bought that land -- it wasn't given by the government, they bought their own land, 5,400 acres. And they tell me that when they came it was all bush. So they started cutting the bush down and cleaned up, and it's... and that's how they got by then. They put in crops, lived like that ever since. It's in 1840 that they come. And you could, down where I am, on my flats, I used to go through there with the horses first. And I used to hit these -- plowing I would hit these stones, you know. And once I thought, "Gee, I'm going start digging these stones up." I dug one up and then it was all right. And I got, afterwards I got a tractor and it had steel wheels on it. Plowing through there and darn if I didn't get hung up on that same place. So then I dug down and dug around for about eight foot round circle, stones like that, and I had to dig all that out before I could... But then my uncle told me that's the place they used to live way back in there when they first landed there. And then it was like that all over in two or three places. That's where they used to cook. And when I dug this up and got stones, there's still ashes under there just like it was... (laughs) And since then I found another place right next field adjoining mine, and
there's stone circles there just sticking out about like that; and you drive a tractor over there and bounce over. (laughs) But nobody uses that land, but that circle of stones is there.

Alex: How big were they?

Abram: Oh, god, they were like that.

Alex: About two feet, would you say?

Abram: Yeah, about a foot and a half through, anyway. And, different ones have been asking me that, maybe you've heard of that Wilfred Jury(?).

Alex: No.

Abram: I heard when we was in London he's, what did they call him? Archeologist, or something. Well, he was... Different ones said, "Go and tell him, go and show him." He came down but I never did tell anybody. (laughs) Keeping it a secret. They might just dig up and take it all away, like. Remember that, that's where the people lived, and right on the, well, it's on the flat and there's another second hill, like, before you up to main hill. And that's where the buildings were and I worked that part and I found a lot of arrowheads, one thing or another in there, different things. That's what my uncle always said, that's where they lived, there. The first time they moved.

Alex: What did you usually do with all this stuff you found?

Abram: Oh, I just left it and I made some flower beds out of it. (laughs) I had the arrowheads, but I think I've lost them all. I lost them all in that fire that I had. I had quite a collection of them, too. Them days I, they must have been different places, because one place I own, about a mile from the back of my house right on the river bank -- it's a high river bank, and we found water there, good spring water -- and there's two or three of them not too far apart; so in 19--, after I got this house built in '60, or '62, I forget now. What the heck is the name of, Indian, native, I was telling him, I says, "I want to get this, there is a spring down there right on that hill. I want to get that harnessed up so I can get water from there." So he says, "Well, I'll help you," he says. "I'll help you get a loan." So I got a loan from the band, from the government, I guess, and we, two or three of us worked together and we dug a hole there, put a cement tank down there holds four thousand, eight thousand gallons. And we put a little building up there and we made a pump house there. And we'd run this plastic pipe from there right to the... It supplied for seven houses. It was right up... well, it was just a mile from where the spring is; seven houses, water runs
into all of them. And that, the only thing I'm good at is
(laughs) looking for water, I can find water where there's... Have you ever seen anybody do that?

Alex: No.

Abram: Didn't you?

Alex: No. How do you do that?

Abram: Well, I, I get, they used to be fellows older than me that was telling me that you get an apple crutch and you cut it, you know. They cut the edges and you hold that whenever you go anyplace over where there's water -- why this thing would turn down. So that's how I got practical in that. And finally I got it, and I can find water. I found all the wells that they dig down there, most of them, good wells, too. The only thing is that I can't tell how deep it is, how deep you got to dig it. Sometimes you dig not too deep, sometimes you dig quite a ways. And that's how I got these other springs that's running down into this tank I was telling you about. And then, and then, I found a lot of wells. I went across the river to look for water too, all over. And you got to come with me to look for water. (laughs) And since then I notice I can find the water pipe, water pipe undergrounds. Sometimes, you know, people don't know you've got a subdivision down there and when they built it they didn't run it right through, they just put an end to them. They thought they'd put them on sometime. And I went down and found that, where it was, it made it easier for them to dig. And then, (laughs) and then I was in Della Village, near Delaware there, I used to go down there and look for water, and then this old guy there told me, he says, "You know," he says. He says, "Can you find a grave?" I says, "No, I never tried." So here, I think it was last summer or last year, I was down in this spring and I thought of this idea looking for a grave. And right above the top of the hill, on the side of the, on the bank there going towards the river... And then they always seen flowers growing there just like a grave, you know, people put some kind of, I forget the kind of flower it is, it's like, like gladiola leaves. And they grow just like a mat, there's two of them. So I went down there and I tried to and sure enough, there's a grave there. And I always heard that there's graveyards here and there, little wee ones, you know. And I took this down there and it worked. And then kept going, worked, three places, three graves there, but the only way I could tell this, when they got on it and they got down to one end of it, hit this long grave and didn't hit nothing in the center and then a long one over there. So it must've been a little short grave, a little baby grave, or something. (laughs) I never did want a big one for it. It was there.

Alex: No!

Abram: Yeah, I could find, I can find water, and find pipes,
Alex: So you found most of the water for the reserve band?

Abram: Yeah.

Alex: What band are you?

Abram: Oneida.

Alex: Oneida.

Abram: Had good luck that way, with the water.

Alex: What did your, your father, all your family farmed?

Abram: Well, my father did, I guess, till he... and my uncle farmed all his life, and he never left the reserve.

Alex: So, where and when were you born?

Abram: Huh?

Alex: Where and when were you born?

Abram: I was born on the reserve in 1903, twentieth of May. I just celebrated my birthday here a couple of weeks ago, eighty years old.

Alex: In your early childhood, what was your home like?

Abram: Huh?

Alex: What was your home like?

Abram: Oh, we had, we had a good home. Little brick house that burnt there. Well, there's... I don't know how they used to, where they built it like that, but in all a big building for, for a farm house. It had a kitchen twenty-six feet long and, I forget, twelve feet. And then the front room was, I think it was seventeen by seventeen. And then the bedroom on the side of it (laughs) about ten by fourteen. And then the other, on the side of it again it was twenty-six by eighteen. And then they'd have stairs all over, the bedrooms upstairs, and the basement.

Alex: Did you all live together?

Abram: Well, no. The funniest part of it, that's my uncle's house. And he didn't have no children. Just him and his wife. Somebody knocking here?

Alex: Did your uncle ever tell you any stories when you used to go work with him?

Abram: Well, he used to.
Alex: Do you remember any ceremonies, or gatherings?

Abram: You mean them days?

Alex: Yeah.

Abram: Well, they got, got, what do you call it? They got a Longhouse. Have you ever heard of it?

Alex: I might have.

Abram: Well, anyways, we got one down on the reserve yet. There's some of them young guys are carrying it on. But I always went there -- I had an old friend, I'd follow him all over. That's where he belonged. That's how, that's how I got in. That's how I got to go in there. I went there when I was a little kid like, followed him around like...

Alex: What did they do there?

Abram: Oh, they have dances, meetings, they used to have council meetings there too, but the Department never listened to their... But they had their own reasons.

Alex: Could you maybe explain some of the ways they used to do things?

Abram: Well, then another thing they had was they had a, they had, well there were clans, like. There was the Bear Clan, and the Wolf Clan. Anytime I went there I was a, I was a Wolf. We had to sit on a certain side and they sat on the other side. And there used to be a good place, a good place to eat whenever... They had, they had corn soup there all the time, everytime they're meeting they had corn soup. (laughs) I used to like that; I guess the main thing I was going there for. And then they have Thanksgiving during the winter, during the winter they have Thanksgiving service -- I think it's February, midwinter ceremony.

Alex: Who brought all the food?

Abram: They all brought it, and boy you never go hungry there! They got lots to eat plus a big pot of corn soup everytime. And then they'd have dances, Indian dances. (laughs) They got that in Brantford, too. Yeah, and the way they select their chiefs, they call them hereditary chiefs, the women pick them out, the women of the Bear Clan, and the Wolf Clan. They just, one, the oldest one, they'll pick you out. If they think you'll make a good councillor, well, they'll put you up. And I used to have, I forget how many now, eight in a council, or something like, I forget. But that's the way they carried on their business. And one thing I liked about it they, you'd celebrate, well, in the spring when the berries come on -- you'd go down there and eat berries. (laughs) And then when the corn come on, the same thing. And in the fall they'd celebrate again, whatever they got. And then they don't
go by, go by the calendar, they go by the moon, that's what they go by, a certain time of the moon that the moon changes, well, that's when they have... And they have, they have that Thanksgiving in the fall after everything is all harvested there was Thanksgiving, what they got from the summer.

Alex: Was there any native religions?

Abram: Oh yeah, they, they have a, just Thanksgiving; sometimes the fellows from Brantford visit there and they come there to have... And they have old-fashioned chairs, I remember standing there, and they had that wampum hanging there.

Alex: What's a wampum?

Abram: Huh?

Alex: What's that?

Abram: Well, it's beads. Oh, they have them that long. And the fellow that I first seen, well, I don't think they have it now, but they used to have, it's full of... There's a blind, there's two blind brothers they used to go from Brantford down there, somebody took them down there and then he'd get this wampum, you know. He'd preach the whole day on one wampum, one wampum, just by the feel of it, because he was blind. And them wampums have different colored beads all through it, different lengths and that also, and that's what he'd preach on. Well, it's just like church, it's like commandments or something. And he'd talk all day. (laughs) And that's what the people, and they used to have that place just full, everybody wanted to listen to it.

Alex: So (inaudible)?

Abram: They don't have it anymore. I never seen anybody, they have them things going on, but they just talk they don't... Nobody can read that wampum, I guess. (laughs) I got a lot of friends in there that, I used to go down there, just to help. I used to get angry at myself...

Alex: Did the old fellows, the old men, did they talk about... What did they talk about?

Abram: Well, they'd just, well, just preach -- you should love one another, and help one another, and stuff like that. And the preacher would, how our Creator put us here. And it's a long, long service, I'm telling you! (laughs)

Alex: How did they last?

Abram: Well, they had that for a week. They had that Thanksgiving for a week, and end up the last night they'd have a big dance there.

Alex: How, how many people would be there?
Abram: God, I don't know. It must have been around a hundred and fifty anyways, yeah. Did you ever see them? Oh, old time, I don't suppose you ever did? (laughs) They have one guy playing, and his instrument is made out of mud turtle. You get a mud turtle, a certain kind of a mud turtle, about that big, and then they'd stretch the neck on it and let it dry right out. And then when they have everything cleaned out of him, dry out and then they... when it dries out they have to stretch that neck. And that's how it dries out and the neck goes like that. Then they put, I forget what they put in there now, whether it's little shots or beans, or something in that shell, and then they make this noise, boy it makes a lot of noise. You hit it on the floor, when the guys play it, and they dance. Well, they put it on the seat like that and -- long bench -- and the guy would sit there and, and some guys would sit on another bench and they'd have rattles, like, about that size, horns of cows cut off like that, and you got the handles made on both ends. And that's a rattle, too. They put beans in there and rattle. I never seen it in any of these things, that, going on like this. And then they have drums, you know, they have big drums, like. These guys they got, they have drums like that and about that deep, and covered with...

Alex: About how big would that be?

Abram: Well, it's only about six inches. But I don't know how they made them drums, they must have made them themselves, because it was about eight inches on the bottom and six on the top. And they have the, I forget what kind of leather they'd use, whether it's cow hide, or, it can be, something thinner than that, maybe muskrat hide, or something. Have that on there strung tight, they have water in it and then they, then a little stick like that and they'd beat it this way. Sounds pretty good, the drum.

Alex: And you dance?

Abram: Yeah, and dance to that in different ways. Women have, they have women dances and men dances, and then they have women and men dance together. And they still have that once in a while down there. You made me think of old memories. (laughs) We had some good times.

Alex: That's what I like. In fact I don't remember, I don't know anything about this.

Abram: You don't?

Alex: No.

Abram: Well, that's the way now.

Alex: How old were you when you used to go there?
Abram: Oh, I must have been about eight.

Alex: With your parents?

Abram: Seven, or eight. No, just the old guy. Well, he was our neighbor, he belonged there and he used to invite, went all over. (laughs) And then they, well, they used to be a fellow lived down there, him and his wife. They were telling, they were fortune tellers. And they'd tell you if there was something wrong with you. Like, like my arthritis now, I suppose they wouldn't tell me what to take, but in them days they wouldn't.

I'll tell you what happened once. That's the only time I guess that I... I got hurt on the neck when I was going to school, and I just went a little ways to school -- that school house right beside it -- and my mother didn't know what it was. And this darn neck started to swell out like this, and a darn lump come on there. So she went down and seen this old guy and he told her what to get. And he says, "There's an old lady down on the next road," he said. "You get her." And she was blind. So she went and got her and then brought her over to home. And he says, "You can take her down there and she knows where to get the medicine." So she had to meet her down there. I don't know how big I was then, must've been about five or six, seven or something. So I led this old lady down, right to where we got the springs now. She sat on top the hill and it was quite a steep hill. She says, "You go down and look along the creek, the bottom of the creek," she says, "and you get a plant." And they grew about that high, and leaves on, oh, I don't know, about the size of that I guess, and leaves on, kind of spread out. And she says, and I went down there, I went down there once and brought the wrong kind. So next time I went here I brought the right one. She says, "That's the one." She says, "You go back down and get a bunch of it." So I went down and got a bunch like that. And that darn thing used to bother me so much, you know, that I was hitting my head like this and it was kind of getting sore. So we come back in the afternoon, come back, and she come back and it was surprising... She was blind, and you'd give that stuff to her and then she, she'd cut it up and then, I forget what she had, she squashed it all up anyways and made it mushy. And then she put that on there and a rag around there, and next morning I woke up that thing was bust. (laughs) Brought that thing out. And I didn't know what it was that it took out of there, but she says it was something that shouldn't be in there. Never did see it, and never showed me nothing, but it healed up right after. And a blind woman like that! And that guy down there says, he knows what to get... (laughs) I guess they do, they used to have medicine, all kinds of medicine. It's too bad they're dying off. Well, there's not much now. I got a young guy that his father used to, his grandfather used to be an Indian doctor, but... he's got a book, and I don't know whether that's the same book his grandfather had, just a picture of different herbs he got in there and tells you how to use it.
Alex: What did you used to do as a child? Like any games that you used to play and that?

Abram: No, let me remember. We used to have them darn, I remember they have sticks and then they get two cobs or something tied together and get a stick and throw it at one another, and then they'd throw it back. (laughs) I forget what they call it.

Alex: Did you have any, any chores or duties you had to do?

Abram: Oh yeah, I used to get the cows and we only had two, or three cows, but I used to have to go after them. I could have told you, I should have told you about my, my grandmother was from Brantford Reserve, she married an Oneida. And that, they, my grandmother died, oh, she got to be pretty old, and so did my grandfather. But my grandmother's mother, she was a hundred and one years old when she died and that's why I keep telling them, I says, "I'm going to live to be a hundred and one years old too." (laughs) And I got a cousin that's ninety-six years old...

(END OF SIDE A)

(SIDE B)

Alex: Can you tell me about your reserve itself?

Abram: Yeah, I guess so. Well, we got 5,400 acres we got. And we got a fair ground, people have a fair here every fall. And there's a, we got a new school built, there, oh, about four, or five years there, I guess, a big school. And the rest of the high school goes off, I think the rest of them get to school, the big school. We got our own band office, and last summer they, they build a little factory there now, they're making tables and chairs, one thing and another. I guess they're doing all right.

Alex: What's the economy like?

Abram: There's nobody, as I say, there's nobody farms. A lot of them work out, there's quite a few that don't come back to the reserve. Well, we've had two or three come back to the reserve that have been off the reserve for forty, thirty, forty years. Come back and build on the reserve, build a house. But we've got more than that too, because there's two or three more come and build a house on the reserve, retired. But I can't seem to retire now and I've lived on the reserve all my life. (laughs) Well, I think I'll have to on account of my arthritis pretty soon, unless I find some guy that can cure it. (laughs)

Yeah, I've been in the hospital twice in my life, this spring. And this last winter, that's the first time I've ever had the flu in my life, and I had it bad, for seven weeks I had it. And I had to keep out of the weather. And I... The funny part
of it, I went to the clinic -- I wasn't feeling too good and I went to the clinic. And that was before, I think it was a couple of years ago, I went to the clinic and they checked me. They said, you got, "You got high blood pressure." And I didn't think it was that bad so there was another doctor come in, I guess from the Bahamas, I guess -- dark guy anyway. Just opened up his office in Lambeth. That's right off the reserve there. So I thought, "Gee, I'll go there." So I went there. He said... I come down here, I says, "They told me at the clinic I had, I had high blood pressure." And he checked me out, he says, "You got high blood pressure." And I didn't think it was that bad so there was another doctor come in, I guess from the Bahamas, I guess -- dark guy anyway. Just opened up his office in Lambeth. That's right off the reserve there. So I thought, "Gee, I'll go there." So I went there. He said... I come down here, I says, "They told me at the clinic I had, I had high blood pressure." And he checked me out, he says, "Yeah, you got a little touch of high blood," he says. "You got a weak heart, too." (laughs)

So then I was feeling all right, you know, and just that I thought, "That bugger can't be right." (laughs) And I was a great believer in getting my fortune told so I took off, went to Brantford, and, and got my fortune told. And he says, "You ain't got high blood pressure that bad," he says. "Not that bad and your heart is all right." Told my fortune right there, and he gave me a piece of a stick, about that big, and he had cut off about that wide. And he says, "You take that," he says, "you got high blood pressure, I'll help you." So I took that home. He says, "I'll even charge you ten dollars for that. But," he says, "if you get that stuff down there," he says, "you can sell it down there. You're going to make money on it. (laughs) You know what's it for," he says, "it's for high blood pressure." I took it and bought it and I used that. He says, "Just don't use too much of it, just scrape a little bit and steep it and drink it for two, or three days," he says. So I steeped it and drink it; and geez, it makes a really good... So then after I was better I went back to the doctor. Well, I didn't go back to him right away, because he gave me, hell, he gave me pills like that and, I don't know how many, three different kind of pills he gave me. He checked me, "Feeling better?" "Oh yeah," I says. He says, "Your blood pressure has gone down," he says, "where it's normal and your heart seems to be all right too." He said, "Did you eat all the tablets?" I said, "Yeah." And I started laughing, and he knew I was telling lies. (laughs) And then he says, "You," he said, "you used herbs didn't you?" I says, "Yeah." So that's how good that Indian doctor was... And the funniest part of it, them guys in Brantford... And that guy died that I got my medicine from. And there was another one and he just died last year, and there's one died this spring; and they're all good medicine. This fellow died a year ago -- he had a place like this, you know, just a little shanty built outside of his house. And he had a cast iron stove there, cook stove, and he had pots hanging all over here and he'd steep it right there, and the people would come from Tyendinaga, and all up the, go down there, some from the States to get medicine -- he knew his medicine. And I forget who he was married to, somebody from up north here someplace, Ojibway, and been living in there. It was quite a while ago, because hell, she can talk in Brantford language as good as anybody; and so carried on, she's carrying on the herbs. They say she's carrying on that medicine because
Alex: When you mentioned these books, is it their own books?

Abram: Yeah, they make their own, yeah. I think he even gave you the description there of the leaves and stuff that they make it out of, and you go out and get it.

Alex: Did... Sometimes you hear about vision quests. Did you ever hear about it?

Abram: Huh?

Alex: Sometimes I've heard about vision quests.

Abram: Vision quests?

Alex: Yeah, where Indians go out and try and get a vision of what they're supposed to do.

Abram: Oh. I've never, never heard of that, but... Well, that's pretty near what that is, you see, this guy's telling fortunes. Some guys look at your hand, palm of your hand and read the lines. But this woman -- that's the only one that's left down there now -- I think she uses cards. Tells you what your future is.

Alex: Do you bring her anything when you go there?

Abram: Well, just a little Indian tobacco. Is there, how is the people up north, have they got any Indian tobacco?

Alex: I don't know if they have it or not.

Abram: I wonder if I got any left in here or not. I brought some... (laughs) I brought it for... You know that guy, that woman was just telling me downstairs that you got kind of mad today. That guy that performs that ceremony in the morning.

Alex: No, I wasn't here then.

Abram: Did you see him in the morning?

Alex: No, I wasn't here in the morning.

Abram: They got a band there, and he performs ceremonies and he had these smoking... And all the time we went to Thunder Bay and Penticton he always goes out and buys tobacco, you know, just any ordinary smoking tobacco. Now there's the Indian tobacco there.

Alex: Is that grown on the reserve?

Abram: Oh yeah. I grew that last year, I had a lot of seed, but I give some seed to that guy we were just talking about, Earl Hill. Do you know Earl?
Alex: I'm not sure.

Abram: He's down there, Earl Hill, and this other guy. God, I can't think of his name, I can't remember his name. (laughs) He's around there -- long-haired, fair fellow.

Alex: What's the importance of...

Abram: Well, that's what the, that's what these Longhouse guys... there's Thanksgiving, they never have it without it. They burn, they have a fire going and they burn that in there. And then they talk at the same time, giving thanks to the, to their maker and then they burn a little bit of that tobacco. I smoke this stuff once in a while. I like smoking it. You want to roll one? (laughs) Yeah, last year I had a lot of seed and I planted some and a lot of people come around there and want plants, so I gave them plants and they had... When my seed got too old I had, I think, I had it must have been about a quart. I planted it this spring and it didn't come up so I had to get some from another guy, so I got some plants. And they have that tobacco every time they have these ceremonies where they use that Old Chum, or some darn thing like that. (laughs) I told that other guy last year, I think, "Not supposed to use that in a ceremony like that." He didn't like that. (laughs) Yeah, he got mad this morning because the woman was telling me just before I come up here. He says... He didn't like it, because somebody got talking about his religion. There's some people that got caught with this, they thought it was that marijuana. (laughs)

Alex: Is it still used in special ceremonies?

Abram: Yeah. They use it down at the Longhouse. They puff it. It won't hurt you, it's not that strong. Yeah, I had that full and I give it to that guy, and I don't think he used it. He still had that Old Chum. (laughs) Maybe he kept this for himself. I give him, last year I gave him seed and I said, "How did you make out?" He says, "I don't know. I didn't know what to do with it," he says. Well, hell, you just got to grow it! (laughs) I guess they, maybe they don't because this fellow from Tyendinaga, Earl Hill... And then I see them there last year early in the... what, August I guess. I said, "How did you get along with that Indian tobacco?" He says, "All right," he says, "it is a good plant." But he says, "When does you harvest them?" I says, "You take them off as soon as you see the leaves got big enough on the bottom, take them off. And when they turn brown color instead of green -- brown -- you pull them off just as they go until fall. Then you take the whole thing off, and then you dry it." (laughs) The Indians, they're losing their Indian, I guess.

Alex: Do you know of any stories of the tobacco itself?
Abram: No I don't. But I guess it must have been growing ever since, ever since we come to the, my tribe come to the reserve anyways. But that's what they do at the Longhouse, they use a lot of that, because the time they have a Thanksgiving, or any kind of ceremony, that's the first thing they do -- burn tobacco. And they talk while they're burning it, and then whatever they want.

Alex: Did you go through any ceremonies as you were growing up?

Abram: Well, when was it now? Oh, there's another thing too, eh. When I went to school, there, I was fooling around with some young guys and I broke my wrist and my right side. So then this principal, McGriddy, well, he says, "You might as well go home for a week," he says, "or two until your wrist gets better." I had a doctor put splints on it and a great big bunch of rags. So I come home and they had, they got me a medicine there on the reserve. But I don't know how long it been there, it must have been there for years too, because if one guy dies there's another old guy that takes it. When he dies there's nothing. That's the way it works, and it's something that I don't know, just that one medicine they got that I know of. When I hurt that I come home, and I told my mother, "I got a broken arm so I can't go to school." "Well," she says, and she went and got this guy and he gave, he gave me that medicine. And he shut me in for three days; when I come out that thing was all right. Went back there within the week, went back to school. He says, "How did you, how is your arm?" I says, "All right." And then this, this fellow is an Irishman that was principal. He says, "Well," he says, "you got medicine just like my great, my grandmother had," he says.

He's Irish (laughs) and he says they used to mend broken bones like that. I think he got that in Brantford too. And I don't think very much neither, just a little wee, a little wee package that they leave.

Alex: Any traditions that you follow, any old traditions?

Abram: Nope.

Alex: Was your family always together?

Abram: Yeah.

Alex: How big was your family, how many people all together?

Abram: Which, the...?

Alex: Your clan.

Abram: Oh, well I don't know how much, the whole reserve has got 2,500 now in the band. But there wasn't that many for a long time.
Alex: Is it all one clan?
Abram: Yeah.
Alex: What's Oneida mean?
Abram: God, I don't know. Well, they just, that's just the name of the place where they come from, (laughs) Oneida. Oneida, New York.
Alex: What's the AIAI?
Abram: Huh?
Alex: What's AIAI.
Abram: What the heck is it now? Allied Indian Association, I guess, but then we changed the name of that too, now. Allied Indian and Algonquian Association. Something like that.
Alex: Is it all... What exactly is it made up of?
Abram: Well, it used to be Oneidas, Six Nations, Walpoles, Raventown, Tyendinaga.
Alex: Are these all reserves?
Abram: Yeah.
Alex: What exactly does it do?
Abram: Huh?
Alex: What exactly do you do?
Abram: Well, it's... They just had these meeting here. We have meeting, different reserves every... Well, they used to have it every six months, I think. Most of them in different reserves, like the Brantfords, we used to go there, and the Walpoles. Have a meeting there whatever, whatever they want to bring in there, and then any trouble that the one band has, well, they take it in there and then they, to the AIAI maybe in Brantford, Ottawa and then they try and straighten things out.
Alex: Has there been any major changes in it?
Abram: No, I don't think so.
Alex: When did you first become involved in this?
Abram: Gee, I can't remember. (laughs) It was quite a while ago. I don't remember what year.
Alex: So being an elder you just... What do you do?
Abram: Well, when we went to Thunder Bay, that's when they went through a ceremony and asked how old I was and how many years I'd been in council and... Well, I'd become of age, I guess, (laughs) as they say.

Alex: So what's your job?

Abram: Well, I just stay at home now, I got cows (laughs) to look after.

Alex: Do you speak Oneida?

Abram: Yeah. I pretty near spoke Chippewa when I was at school. (laughs) I used to understand it kind of but now I've forgot it, because... There's all different reserves when you go down there. I used to know all the bad words in Chippewa.

Alex: Do a lot of the people still speak Oneida on the reserve?

Abram: No, just the older people do. But the young ones... But they're teaching them now, but I don't think they'll ever (laughs) talk like they used to. They keep trying to teach them how, how to talk, they still don't talk. When I went to school, you know, if you got caught talking Indian at school you got punished. (laughs) They won't let you talk. That's how a lot of them lost their language. And now they're trying to teach them. And they, we have one or two good leaders and, like, they can have a choir in Indian, singers. You got good, you got a band on the reserve, a brass band -- they're going to come to Toronto to open an exhibition. And they're going to Washington on the fourth of July, and they're going up, out west, what the heck is it now? They have it out there every year.

Alex: Do you travel much?

Abram: Used to, but I don't think I'll be able to travel much now. (laughs) I made two trips to Vancouver Island and all through there, and drove both times. And we went on a bus trip to California one fall, and I've been to Florida twice, and Prince Edward Island there a couple of years ago. Was it three years ago? Three years ago, I guess. And on our anniversary we went to Pennsylvania. I wanted to go up north quite a ways, but I never got there yet and I don't know whether I'll make it or not -- to see the Inuits. (laughs)

Alex: What's your main interest nowadays?

Abram: Oh, nothing too much. Trying to quit everything. (laughs) Well, I still put in, help him put crops in, you know, and I don't do too much work on account of my legs and arthritis. I think I'll have to cut work, cut out the work altogether pretty soon.
Alex: Do many young people come to you?

Abram: Huh?

Alex: Do many young people come to you and ask you questions?

Abram: Yes, quite a few, yeah.

Alex: Do your grandchildren?

Abram: Yeah.

Alex: Is there any programs on the reserve where they teach -- where the young teach, or the old teach the young?

Abram: Well, no there's not really any.

Alex: Any stories that you want to tell?

Abram: (laughs) No, I don't think so.

Alex: No. Anything really funny happen to you that you couldn't explain?

Abram: No, none. I don't think so.

Alex: How do you find life today?

Abram: Pretty good.

Alex: How?

Abram: I, I went to, I've been going to church every since I can remember -- (laughs) just a little, little guy. And I belong to a Freemason. That's off the reserve, that is. I've been in there fifteen years, I guess. I tried to go to all the meetings, but I don't know if I'll be going much more or not.

Alex: You belong to the church. Does that affect you greatly?

Abram: No. Just brought up that way. (laughs) My mother always sent us to church and I kept it up. Down there a lot of people, I don't think, belong to... Don't know where they belong, you know.

Alex: What do you mean by that?

Abram: They don't go to church, they don't go anywhere. Just... (laughs) Don't even know when somebody comes the rest. Quite a few of the younger people (inaudible) drive up and down the roads, that's about all.

Alex: What would you tell a person who was just starting
out in life?

Abram: Well, I suppose, I'd have to tell him what's it like, what I know about it.

Alex: What's that?

Abram: (laughs) Well, tell him that if you gets down to work, you're going to live, I guess. (laughs)

Alex: Any other principles that you would like to tell?

Abram: Huh?

Alex: Any other principles?

Abram: I don't think so. That's about all, about it.

(laughs)

Alex: That's worked for you?

Abram: Huh?

Alex: That's worked for you?

Abram: Yeah.

Alex: Any major events happen on your reserve?

Abram: No, not really that much.

Alex: What did the children usually do on the reserve? What was their role?

Abram: You mean when they were small?

Alex: Yeah.

Abram: (laughs) A lot of times you go to school. It used to be quite a thing to go to school years ago, because they used to have to walk. Now they got buses to pick them right up at the house. (laughs)

Alex: And what was the role of the elders when you were a child?

Abram: Work. (laughs) That you always worked.

Alex: What did the young people do?

Abram: Oh, they used to have hockey games, not hockey, yeah, hockey games. And lacrosse -- that's something else that goes on at the reserve. We used to have two lacrosse games when I was little. And then we'd go and play off the reserve, play with other reserves. They don't have that any more. The older guys took the game with them, I guess. It died.
Alex: Did a lot of people show up for them?

Abram: Huh?

Alex: Who showed for them?

Abram: Oh, there was a lot of people. They'd follow them around. I never did play lacrosse, I never even tried a lacrosse stick. (laughs)

Alex: Did you play hockey?

Abram: No. I never went for them games.

Alex: Do you have an Indian name?

Abram: Yeah.

Alex: Yeah, what would that be?

Abram: Well, in Indian it's, you say it in Indian -- but it means "small villages" in English.

Alex: How do you say it?

Abram: (Indian name), I don't know how you're going to write that down. (laughs) (Indian name) means "small villages". (Indian Name).

Alex: How did you get that name?

Abram: Well, my... I don't know. My grandparents, I guess, gave me that name when I was born. They usually give names like that. (laughs) That's another thing they are losing. A lot of people now don't have Indian names.

Alex: Did they just name you that, and that was it?

Abram: Well, it seemed that they, that name come down from the family, yeah.

Alex: Are the old ways important to you?

Abram: Huh?

Alex: Are the old ways important to you?

Abram: The what?

Alex: The old ways.

Abram: Oh yeah, I liked it. (laughs)

Alex: That's one of the reasons we're doing this, is to preserve it -- some of the old ways.
Abram: The only thing is I don't, I probably will have time now to make a lot of Indian things, you know, things I know how to make. And every year I, when I was real small that's one way my mother made money is, and... In the fall of the year when they get the corn, corn off. Well, there's no corn pickers or anything like that they days. You had to pull the corn off, but you'd pull it off in case the weather would get bad; they'd store it inside. And when at nights... they used to have a bee here and there. (laughs) Husk that corn, hash that corn and throw the husk in the pile, and the corn in a pile. And then they'd have boxes sitting there on, when the husk is off throw them in there. And they'd have all the corn and the husks the same way, you know, lay them down in the box like that; and when you get that full you tie a band around there and throw it out and put another one in. I went, attended quite a few, well, I was really small too. That, that old guy had to tell me what... He took me around. Used to go to husking bees. We made quite a few of them. And they'd have a big lunch, you know, midnight, and then you'd go home. Well, the husks they take off and by the time they, you finished the corn you had a big pile of it, and then you start braiding that. You ever seen a husk mat? Yeah, that's what they're made of. I still make that (laughs) every fall. I don't make that many, but I never have time. I'd like to make quite a bit, because there's a pretty sale for them now. My mother, when she was making them, be in the fall and they used to have, I don't know how many dozen she'd have, but all she got is a dollar and a quarter a dozen. (laughs) Now they're eight bucks apiece, four bucks apiece, yeah. That's what she used to do in the fall and you get through that, and then she'd take it to the store and sell them, and then get flour, and a whole lot of groceries.

Alex: Where was the store on?

Abram: Huh?

Alex: Where was the store?

Abram: Oh, it's out, off the reserve, on Number Two highway.

Alex: Was it run by Indians?

Abram: No, whites.

Alex: Was there any outstanding people on the reserve town, who played an important part?

Abram: No, I don't think so.

Alex: Who were the important people on the reservation?

Abram: Well, I don't know. (laughs) We got, now we, right now they got stock car races, two of them I think. (laughs) Fixing cars all week and go and run and smash it up on the
weekend. (laughs)

Alex: Do you know any tribal history?

Abram: Huh?

Alex: Do you have any knowledge of tribal history?

Abram: No, I don't.

Alex: Who carries that?

Abram: I don't know. I never, I never even had a chance to see the, the deed they have that's kept by the Longhouse people. Deed for that 5,400 acres, but they say it was made on some kind of a hide, that's what it's on. And when that's carried down too, the one fellow, I don't know who's got it now.

Alex: This Longhouse, who can join it?

Abram: Huh.

Alex: Who can join this Longhouse?

Abram: Anybody, anybody can join it.

Alex: And what do they teach you there?

Abram: Well, they just have these.... Well, it's just like, as I say, it is just like a church; you go there. Only thing is that they do different things.

Alex: When you say like a church you mean they sit there and they preach, or...?

Abram: Well, yeah, okay. When they opened it, the service, like, they give thanks to everyone.

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