

**REPORT ON
THE LABOR FORCE AND THE EMPLOYMENT CONDITIONS
OF THE ONEIDA INDIANS**

**By
Douglas Thorson
Research Assistant**

**Under the Supervision of Professor Harold M. Groves,
Professor Donald W. Knight and Rebecca C. Barton**

**Madison, Wisconsin
October, 1958**

LIST OF TABLES

Table

- I. Education and Age Composition
 - I-A. Views on Education
- II. Present Employment- Males
- III. Present Employment- Females
- IV. Main Location of Present Employment
- V. Length of Time with Present Firm (Permanent Work)
- VI. Length of Time with Present Firm (Temporary Work)
- VII. Rate of Pay on Present Employment
- VIII. Past Employment Experience- Males
- IX. Past Employment Experience- Females
- X. Stated Reasons for Terminating Jobs
- XI. Different types of Work Done (per person)
- XII. Response to Question: "Have you ever had any difficulty getting a job?"
- XIII. Average Length of Time Employed on Jobs Listed (Permanent Work)
- XIV. Average Length of Time Employed on Jobs Listed (Temporary Work)
- XV. Marital Status
- XVI. Number of Persons per Living Unit
- XVII. Number of Rooms per Living Unit
- XVIII. Rent per Month in Rented Living Units
- XIX. Ownership of Automobiles
- XX. Yearly Income
- XXI. Response to the Question: "What is your opinion of trying to get an industrial firm to the Oneida area?"
- XXII. Other skills
- XXIII. Response to the Question: "What has been your experience with employing Oneida men?"
- XXIV. Response to the Question: "What has been your experience with employing Oneida women?"
- XXV. Response to the Question: "Would it be possible to employ more Oneida men in your firm in the future?"

- XXVI. Response to the Question: "Would it possible to employ more Oneida women in your firm in the future?"
- XXVII. Response to the Question: "Do you think that an industrial firm located in the Oneida area would tend to improve social and economic conditions for the Oneidas?"
- XXVIII. Response to the Question: "Do you notice any distinct differences in the performance or character of the Oneida school children?"

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Section

I. INTRODUCTION

II. THE ONEIDA LABOR FORCE

Type of employment: males and females

Location of employment and rate of pay

The competence and reliability of the Oneida Labor force

Non-resident Oneidas

III. OTHER ASPECTS OF THE ONEIDA COMMUNITY

Educational attainment

The general economic condition of the Oneidas

Community utilities and transportation

IV. INTERVIEWS WITH EMPLOYERS AND PUBLIC OFFICIALS

The views of employees

High school representatives

Union leaders

Town and county officials

The industrial firm at Lac du Flambeau

A summary and an evaluation

V. CONCLUSION

VI. RECOMMENDATIONS

APPENDIX A: TABLES

Part I: Interviews with Oneida Indians

Part II: Interviews with Employers and Public Officials

APPENDIX B: RESEARCH PROCEDURE OF ONEIDA INDIAN PROJECT

REPORT ON
THE LABOR FORCE AND THE EMPLOYEMENT CONDITIONS
OF THE ONEIDA INDIANS

I. INTRODUCTION

The main purpose and objective of this report is to describe certain aspects of the Oneida Community which is hoped will provide a better understanding of the skills, abilities and reliability of the Oneida Indian labor force. (1) After a description of relevant subjects has been completed, recommendations will be made it is hoped will be useful to the Oneida tribe.

The material for this report is based upon a survey which was conducted in the Oneida area. The initial suggestion for this project originated among the Oneida Indians themselves. The Oneida Executive Board and other members of the community with a particular interest in taking a positive step to improve conditions in the community with a particular interest in an industrial development program. A request was placed at the Governor's Commission on Human Rights for a survey which would furnish interested parties with information on the Oneida Indian labor force. The Governor's Commission on Human Rights contacted the Economics Department of the University of Wisconsin under whose auspices the research for this report was done.

The primary sources of information have been the Oneidas themselves and the principal employers of the Oneidas. Others were consulted such as high school superintendents, welfare workers, clergymen and town chairmen. Approximately six hundred Oneida Indians and about thirty employers were interviewed. (2)

The cooperation of all persons contacted on this project has been appreciated. All of the Oneidas were pleasant and anxious to be of help. The employers and others were very generous with their time.

II. THE ONEIDA LABOR FORCE

Since the main emphasis of this report is in this report is the Oneida Indian labor force, several facets of this subject be dealt with directly in this section.

Type of employment: males and females. In discussing the types of Oneida employment the distinction must first be made between seasonal work (or temporary) work and permanent work. With the men 23.1 percent are engaged in seasonal work and 40.1 percent are engaged in permanent work. Stevedoring and canning factory are the two most important single types of seasonal work; however, the usual case is where several types of seasonal work are done in one year.

Construction work, paper mills and farms are the main sources of permanent work. (3)

With the women 10.2 percent are employed in seasonal work and 20.4 percent are employed in permanent work. Of those employed in seasonal work over one half work in the cherry orchards or in the canning factories. Domestic work and factory work are the main types of permanent employment. (4)

Location of employment and rate of pay. Although Oneidas are employed in most of the cities and villages in the surrounding area, Green Bay employs the largest number of both men and women. The Oneida area itself is the second largest location of employment for Oneidas. (5)

Concerning hourly wage rate, the median rate for men is \$1.95. For women the median rate is \$1.00. (6)

The competence and reliability of the Oneida labor force. In order to make an accurate appraisal of the competence and reliability of the Oneida labor force it is necessary to analyze both information collected from the Oneidas and information gathered from the employers of the Oneidas.

Most of the employers who hired Oneida men on a permanent basis spoke favorably concerning their work performance. Their usual comment was that they are hard workers. They also almost unanimously agreed that there was no special problem of absenteeism with their present Oneida labor force. They qualified this, however, by this adding that they had screened out the less reliable Oneida men. (7)

Those employers who hired Oneida men for seasonal work gave a different account of their experience. They reported almost unanimously that absenteeism has been a serious problem with the Oneida men whom they had employed. Some were also critical of the quality of their work. Three of the seasonal workers stated that the quality of their work was satisfactory but the Oneidas tended to be somewhat slow. (8)

The employers of Oneida women (both employers hiring permanent workers and those hiring seasonal workers) spoke very favorably of their work performance and of their reliability. Only one employer said that he had any problem of absenteeism with Oneida women and he qualified this by saying that it was significantly less than Oneida men. Another employer said that Oneida women catch on to operating machines faster than other women. (9)

The data obtained from the personal interviews with the Oneida Indians tends to substantiate the above observations of the employers.

First, the personal interviews show that a large percentage of the Oneida men engaged in permanent work have been with the same firm for a long while. (10) We can infer that this group must be quite competent and reliable or the employers would not have kept them for this length of time.

Second, the data lends some to the observation that a certain proportion of the Oneidas are not reliable workers. For example, there is a good deal of shifting between different types of work by a portion of the Oneidas. (11) In addition, some of the reasons given for terminating jobs appear to suggest a failure to meet the requirements of the employer or a whimsical lack of motivation to with the job. (12) Furthermore, about 15 percent of the Oneida males have averaged less than one year or one season per job and about 24 percent have averaged less than two years or two seasons. (13) It seems that an average of less than two years per job for a work record at least suggests some suspicion of the worker's responsibility. (14) Many of the Oneidas who reported that they have with an unfavorable record in the respects discussed above. (15)

Third, the observation that Oneida women (both those in seasonal work and those engaged in permanent work) tend to be good reliable workers receives some support from the data gathered from the Indian interviews. In the first place, a significant portion of the reasons given by the women for terminating jobs stems out of duties connected with the home. (16) In the second place, there has been less shifting between types of work among women and among men. (17) Of course, there does not appear to be a significant difference between men and women in the average length of time spent with the same firm. This may be due in part to the fact that the very nature of some of the women's jobs (such as domestic work) is such as to be short durations. Also duties and demands surrounding the home may be such that the length of time a woman can spend on one job is limited.

In summary, it appears that over half of the male labor force can be described as stable, reliable and hard workers. The remaining portion of the Oneida male labor force, however, does not have as good a record. Of this minority group many do not report to work regularly and most shift frequently between different firms, either because they get fired or because they quit for no particular reason. This minority group can be found largely in various types of seasonal employment. On the other hand, most indicators suggest that the Oneida women are in large part a stable and reliable work force.

Non-resident Oneidas. (18) It was not within the

Non-resident Oneidas. (18) It was not within the scope of this project to make a complete and extensive survey of non-resident Oneidas. Several generalizations seem to follow, however, from the limited the

First, the Oneidas are widely scattered and are located in many of the forty-eight states as well as Canada. There are heavy concentrations of this group, however, in Milwaukee and in the cities in close proximity to Oneida such as Green Bay, De Pere and Appleton. Large cities which have a mild concentration of Oneidas within their limits are Chicago, Detroit and Minneapolis.

Second, among the the males of the Tribe, a larger percentage of those, living outside the Oneida area, have trades or professions. The largest percentage of these, however, work at various types of factory work.

Third, the educational level of this group is higher than that of the resident Oneidas. This is especially true of education behind high school. A larger percentage of cases were reported of non-resident Oneidas who had gone to college or were going at the present time. One young man who was interviewed had completed college and was hoping to obtain a teaching position at a Government Indian School.

Some of the non-resident members of the Tribe, especially those living in Milwaukee, come back quite frequently to Oneida for weekend visits. A few of these people indicated that they might establish a permanent residence in the Oneida area if suitable work was available. Indications are, however, that many non-resident Oneidas have strong property and employment ties at their present localions. (20)

III. OTHER ASPECTS OF THE ONEIDA COMMUNITY

In addition to the factors directly connected with the employment of Oneidas, there are other aspects of the community which are pertinent to an understanding of the Oneida labor force. A brief description of educational attainment and the standard of living in the community will be presented in this section.

Educational attainment. As can be observed from Table I, (21) the median education of the Oneidas as a group is completion of the eighth grade. This observation, however, conceals the fact that there has been a progression in educational attainment with the younger generations. For the age group sixty-five and over the median education is the sixth grade whereas for the age group sixteen to twenty-five the median education is the tenth grade. In all age groups the median educational attainment of females is greater than that of males.

For all the Oneidas, 2.6 percent have gone to college. Of those who have had contact with college, however, only .2 percent have earned a B.A. Degree. Concerning vocational school 9.4 percent of the Oneidas have been exposed to some type of vocational training. (22)

Table I-A (23) suggests a growing awareness among the younger Oneida generations of the need for education beyond high school. In the age group sixty-five and over, 15.1 percent said that children should go on to college or vocational school while in the age group eighteen to twenty-five, 54.5 percent indicated that there was need to go beyond high school

The general economic condition of the Oneidas. An important indicator of a personal economic condition of the Oneidas is their family income. Table XX (24) indicates that median income of married couples or heads of household is about \$2800. This figure is quite low considering that the median number of persons per living unit is four. (25) Most of the low income accrue to families where the male is employed in seasonal work. However even where the husband is employed in construction work (where the hourly wage rate is over \$2.00 per hour), the yearly income (in a number of cases tends to be low due to the periodic unemployment.)

Families depending on seasonal work and construction work for a livelihood usually have to rely on unemployment compensation or direct relief during the winter months.

In Table XX (26) single males and single females are narrowly defined to include only persons living at the home or with their relations. The median income of single persons is very low. For both single males and single females it is below \$1000. This is due to a situation where single persons either hold no job or obtain only occasional seasonal work.

Concerning the living conditions, the median number of rooms per living unit is four. About one-third of the homes are in fair condition with some over-crowding and building deterioration. The remaining portion of the homes have adequate room space and area quite well kept. Most of all the homes have electricity but running water and indoor toilets are a rarity.

About 76 percent of the married couples own automobiles whereas approximately 17 percent of single males and ten percent of single females own automobiles. The median year of the automobiles is 1951.

Community social problems. Social aspects of the Oneida community are pertinent to this study in so far as they relate to the labor force and to general economic conditions.

A number of the members of the Tribe stated that alcoholism in the community is a problem in itself and gives rise to others. Other persons having contact with the community made similar statements. It appears, however the existence and the seriousness of this problem vary considerably among individuals and families.

For example, habitual heavy drinking seems to be concentrated among Oneida men who pursue only seasonal or temporary work. In this group it causes both social and economic problems. Socially, it disrupts family life and breeds disorderliness. Economically, it depresses conditions directly as well as indirectly. Directly, it consumes the funds which are needed to support the wife and the children. Indirectly, it damages the workers ability and desire to held a steady job. It should be added, however, that not all seasonal workers are of that type described in this paragraph.

Among the Oneidas holding permanent jobs, it appears that drinking, where it exists, does not in the usual case interfere with the workers reliability. The length of time many of these men have been with same firm (27) along with the favorable testimony of the employers of these workers form the basis of this judgment.

Another social problem of the community is the aimlessness and indifference which is evident in the character of portion of the Oneida young people. (28) Frequently, these are the people who have withdrawn from high school but yet never have had a job or else they obtain only occasional temporary or seasonal work. It seems that this condition is caused by a lack of parental guidance and supervision. It is aggravated by the lack of community recreation. In contrast to this group, some of the Oneida young are alert, enterprising and resolute.

Community utilities and transportation. The village of Oneida is not incorporated. There are no community water, heat or sewage disposal systems. Telephone service is provided by a local company in Oneida, however, a number of people complained of poor service.

The Green Bay and Western Railroad passes through the village of Oneida, but the depot has been discontinued. There is also a bus line which operates both east and west on Highway #54.

IV. INTERVIEWS WITH EMPLOYERS AND PUBLIC OFFICIALS

Besides interviewed the Oneida Indians themselves, interviews were held with other

persons having varying relationships and contacts with the community. The findings from this aspect of the research will be summarized in this section.

The employers who employed Oneida men on a permanent basis spoke favorably concerning the work performance and the reliability of their present Oneida work force. In regard to their policy on hiring, most of these employers indicated that a first requirement is that the man be willing and able to learn and he also have a desire for continued steady job. (30) They stated that it is the quality of the men in which they are interested and that race and nationality don't enter into this consideration. Some of the employers qualified this statement by adding that the work records of the Indians are more carefully examined because of the higher rate of absenteeism they have experienced in the group in the past. The fact that these same employers had Oneida men working for them who had been there for a long while would seem to be circumstantial evidence to their assertion that Oneidas have the same opportunity to obtain a job with them as others. (31)

Employers engaged in seasonal work were almost unanimous in relating that they had experienced a high rate of absenteeism and high labor turnover with Oneida males. (32) A portion of these employers were also critical of the Oneida employees' work performance. Over one-half of them stated, however, that the Oneida men were good workers when they were on the job.

The seasonal employers indicated that the scrutiny they are able to exercise in hiring is largely governed by the available labor force in a particular year. In years when laborers are scarce that they are very careful in regard to the quality of the workers hired. Preference is given to persons who have worked for them previously. Even though employers have not found the average Oneida seasonal male worker to be very steady, nevertheless, approximately 23 percent of the Oneida males are employed in various types of seasonal work in the region. Three probable explanations for this are: First, some employers hire their worker. Second, due to the limits of the unskilled labor markets a seasonal employees are steady and hard workers.

All the employers of the Oneida women spoke well concerning their experience with them. Only one employer said that he had any problem of absenteeism, but added that it was considerably less than with the Oneida men. Another employer stated that the Oneida women are usually fast in learning how operate machines.

High school representatives. Four high school representatives were contacted. Similar observations were made by the superintents of the two high schools where most of the Oneida Indian youths are enrolled. They stated that the Oneida young people seem to fall into one of two distinct groups: the conscientious students or the disinterested students. One of these superintendents indicated that usually all children of the Oneida family come uniformly under one of these groups.

Two other high schools were also visited. The superintendent of one of these high schools said that he noticed no unique characteristics among the Oneida students. He qualified this by saying that very few Oneida youths were enrolled at his school and that therefore he didn't have much basis for an opinion. The representative from the remaining high school also had only a small portion of Oneidas in their student body. They said, however, that the Oneidas appeared on the whole to have less ambition and aspiration than the other students. However, they added that a few of the Oneidas are good students.

Union Leaders. Representatives from two construction unions were contacted. Both reported that they experienced a higher rate of absenteeism among the Oneidas than among the Oneidas than among other employees, but that the workers they now have on the rolls are good workers and are reliable. One of the union representatives said that unsteady workers seem to run by families.

Both said that there was very very little if any discrimination by employers in hiring

Indians.

Town and county officials. In general the observations of the various town and county officials were similar. Most were of the opinion that the economic and social problems of the Oneida Indians were concentrated in the families where the males pursued only seasonal work. They indicated that these families usually account for the largest portion of the general relief expenditure in the community. One official stated that he was impressed by the progressiveness among some families where the male has a permanent job.

The industrial firm at Lac du Flambeau. Simpson Electric Company is an electric meter assembly plant located at the Lac du Flambeau Indian Reservation. An interview was arranged with a representative of this company because of the interest in this private firm's experience.

The personnel director indicated that this plant had been very successful and had a higher level of efficiency than the home plant in Chicago. The company is expanding. It now owns a molding plant in Lac du Flambeau and has started a subsidiary plant in the nearby village of Mercer. In the Lac du Flambeau plant approximately one hundred and eighty-five persons are employed. At the present time about fifty-five of these are Indian men and women.

The representative from the plant said that there are advantages of employing Indians and advantages of being located in a rural area. He stated that the advantages of hiring Indians are: first, their finger dexterity, second, their patience, and third, their setting of a steady work pace which they maintain throughout the day. Concerning the advantages of locating in a rural area he stated that electricity costs and taxes are lower; they had an abundant labor force to choose from, and has a very low labor turnover due largely to the absence of other forms of employment in the area.

The personnel director stated that the advantages of their location considerably outweighed the disadvantages. About the only disadvantage which he mentioned was that transportation costs were somewhat higher. He also said that in the past they had had some trouble with absenteeism but that at the present time the rate was quite low.

A summary and an evaluation. The interviews with employers and public officials suggest that the progressiveness of the Oneidas varies considerably among individuals and families. These findings tend to corroborate those derived from interviews with the Oneidas themselves.

In summary, males who are engaged in permanent work are usually well thought of by their employers. There is also some evidence to support the hypothesis that the families of these males are economically, have few serious social problems and furthermore, are setting encouraging example for their children.

In contrast, seasonal male workers in general have not established a very favorable record with employers with others having contact with the community. Unfortunately, in a few cases they set examples which tend to cast an unfavorable light upon the whole Tribe. The families of these males are beset with economic and social problems and the children tend to follow the aimless way life which is displayed by their parents.

Of course the above generalizations do not hold true in all cases. In particular, there are a few quite enterprising seasonal workers. (33) However, in a large percentage of cases the above general distinction between permanent and seasonal male workers and their families is an accurate representation of the facts. Among women it appears that the employers are quite satisfied both with permanent and seasonal workers.

The interview with the representative from the Simpson Electric Company, located on the reservation of another Tribe of Indians, revealed a situation where there has been a reciprocal

benefit created between a firm and a community. The firm evidently has been quite successful and at the same time it has elevated economic conditions in the community.

V. CONCLUSION

The main cause of economic problems in the Oneida area in normal times is not a lack of employment opportunities. The abundance of industry in Green Bay, DePere, Kaukauna, Appleton and Neenah-Menasha testifies to this statement. The State Employment Offices in Green Bay, Appleton, and Neenah indicated that under average business conditions they can place all Indians. The large number of Oneidas employed in good steady jobs, however, suggests that it is no problem in normal times for an Oneida with ambition and good intentions to get work.

The findings of this survey indicate that most of the problems of the Oneidas arise out of the behavior pattern of particular segment of the members of the Tribe. Hence, we feel that way improvement in the economic conditions of the Oneida community must grow out of an elevation in the character and intentions of those individuals and families who, themselves, are experiencing economic and social problems. The men who have been drifting frequently between jobs and making a practice of being both tardy or absent must in the future prove themselves stable and dependable employees, as the larger proportion of the Oneidas have already done. Also the parents of young people must through example and counseling guide and encourage them to develop their skills and to formulate definite goals which will fit their interests and abilities.

While the problem is mainly an individual or matter, the leaders of the Tribe need to do their part to facilitate the adjustment of the persons in the community who are experiencing problems. Both social and economic elements must be embraced in any community program if it is to be effective.

On the social side, moer recreation is needed for the young people. The almost complete absence of any community program at the present time both aggravates and causes social problems.

Benefits could also result if it were possible to increase economic opportunities in the Oneida area, even though it is felt that the main cause of these problems runs deeper than a mere lack of employment opportunities. That is, if more permanent were available in the immediate area, it is likely that this would tend to have a stimulating effect on the community. For example, a number of young men and married young women indicated a desire to hold a permanent job, but they stated that transportation to neighboring cities posed a problem. If these spersons had jobs their wages would serve to supplement the family income. Furthermore, some men who had permanent jobs stated that they would prefer to work at Oneida because of the convenience involved. It seems that there would be a significant number of competent and reliable Oneidas seeking jobs in the area. This would provide a challenging example and standard for the lesser reliable members of the Tribe to meet.

There are several aspects to the Oneida community which may be of interest to a potential employer. First, the survey showed that a large percentage of the Oneidas would be interested in local employment if it were very receptive to the idea of industrial development. Third, there are certian costs and an absence of traffic and building congestion. Finally, there are a highway and railroad passing through Oneida along with water and air transportation within a radius of eight miles.

VI. RECOMMENDATIONS

In our opinion the social and economic problems that are being experienced by a portion of the Oneida individuals and families are in most cases inter-related. Hence, in meeting the

needs of these people and in serving the whole community both social and economic considerations must be observed. With this thought in mind we have two specific recommendations to make to the Executive Board of the Oneida Indian Tribe.

First, it is suggested that a committee of both Indians and whites be set up to discuss and to take some positive measures in providing more community recreation for the young people. Possible steps which should be considered are to increase the opportunities and to encourage young people to participate in the Boy Scouts and 4-H, to start an ice skating rink, to organize a recreation center. The committee may also wish to consider other functions such as consultation of delinquent parents.

Second, the Executive Board should designate itself or other Oneida individual(s) to be in charge of an industrial development program. The function of the committee would be to work at establishing contacts with interested parties as they are contacted. This committee could work in cooperation with state and federal officials as well as following out any leads of its own.

APPENDIX A

TABLES

PART I

INTERVIEWS WITH ONEIDA INDIANS

(See Next Page For Table)