

Floyd Lounsbury
Yale University
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Interview
conducted
by
Lawrence M.
Hauptman with
assistance of
Jack Campisi

Met Dr. Lounsbury at
his office in the Anthropology
House on the campus. Dr. Lounsbury was a
25-year old ^{senior} undergraduate math student at the
University of Wisconsin when he met Morris
Swadesh. Lounsbury was a farm boy from
Waukesha & had taken a course in Irish
folklore at Madison. Swadesh invited him up
to Oaxaca when Swadesh was preparing the
WPA Oaxaca Language & Folklore Project.
At approximately the same time ~~Swadesh~~

Swadesh was not being renewed at (2)
the University of Wisconsin (perhaps
because of his left-of-center politics?),
Swadesh was offered a job by the Mexican
Government Educational Ministry. As
a result, Lounsbury "accidentally" becomes
~~head~~ the project director of the
WPA Oaxaca Language & Folklore Project.
Swadesh arranged for Oaxacas to come
to Madison to meet with Lounsbury &
lay the groundwork for the project.
Lounsbury read everything he could find
on Izoquoian languages, including

(3)
two "groundbreaking" articles by Franz Boas & Marius Barbeau. Lounsbery had taken courses in structural linguistics previously from Freeman Twadell, courses in philology & had audited ~~some~~ Swadesh's courses in Indian languages & field methods.

The project began in January, 1939 & continued for 19 months. The Oreidas participating were told that their primary aim "was to write texts in their native language." Participants

(4)
met 8 hours every week day & received ~~the~~ \$1.50/hour, about \$45 a month, the same rate paid on other so-called WPA "white-collar" projects.

Lounsbery insists that the project would have failed if it wasn't for Oscar Archiguette, the younger Oreida on the project & the "most enthusiastic" participant. Archiguette was a fluent speaker, skilled craftsman, shrewd politician. He, according to Lounsbery, was the

only Oneida on the project able to (5)
grasp the arbitrariness of the
linguistic system & to understand
the rules & apply them.

Lounsbury developed a 19-character
orthography & the Oneidas practiced
writing it. The training sessions were
in the parish hall of the Methodist
Church in De Pere ^{because of heating problems} but eventually were
shifted to the north wing of the
Episcopal Church. At these initial
training sessions, Swadesh was in attendance.

Eight students remained on the project (6)
for 19 months, although Lounsbury had
reduced the class after the initial
training period to 13.

The project had its enemies —
critics of the WPA challenged its
existence, including Alexander Wiley,
a Republican from Chippewa Falls, who
saw it as a waste of taxpayers' money.
The WPA in Wisconsin sent promotional
articles & photos to newspapers to

counter Wileys' attacks. Eventually funding dried out, but not as a result of Wileys' criticisms. By 1940, the economy was beginning to turn around as a result of military defense spending, ~~leading~~ leading to less need for interest in work-relief projects.

Lounsbery then turned away from talking about the project. He became uncomfortable when I asked about Swadesh & why he was "fired" from the University of Wisconsin. Swadesh was active in 30s radical politics, union organizing & socialist-communist activism. I did not pursue this. I then asked him about Minnie Kellogg. Lounsbery peeked up when I mentioned her name. He said that one of his greatest

regrets was that he never met her. (9)
She was known as one of the great
Ojibwa speakers of her generation &
Lounsberry said he would have liked to
work with her.

Lounsberry then turned back to
talk about the Ojibwa language &
Folklore project. One accomplishment
of the project was bringing together
more than 100 hymns. It became an
overnight success & led ~~to~~ participants

to copy the hymns by hand for other (10)
community members from a blank
notebook obtained from a 5 & 10 ¢
store in Green Bay. Later, I revised
it, typed it on mimeographed
stencils, ran it off at the
University of Wisconsin & then sent
it to the WPA bookbinders at
Waypaca where it remained because
of the sudden end of the project
in 1940. OSCAR Archigrette retrieved

the manuscript in 1941. Archiquette was (11)
largely responsible for the transcription
of the hymnal into the new
orthography. The Oaxidas then put on
one-act plays to raise money & the
Northern Paper Mills Company of
Green Bay donated the paper so
that the Oaxida Hymnal could be
printed & distributed. This hymnal
is still used by the Oaxida
Singers today.

Lounsbury later changed the Oaxida (12)
orthography. Yet Lounsbury's project,
research & teaching basically founded
the contemporary field of Iroquoian
linguistics. The published hymnal &
morphology are worthy monuments to
~~the~~ Lounsbury, Archiquette & the
Oaxida participants. ~~Lounsbury's~~ Lounsbury's
student Cliff Abbott continues his work
among the Oaxidas!