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Oneida History
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ABSTRACT
"THE ONEIDA LANGUAGE: PAST & PRESENT"
THE BEGINNING OF THE PRESENT
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The Oneida Language Program had a long history before I became involved in it in 1972. That history stretched all the way back to the original Language Project sponsored by the WPA in the 1930's. Our efforts to teach the Oneida Language at the university were more nearly an attempt to revive and continue those earlier projects, a sort of "beginning of the present." What I would like to do is to give a brief overview of our attempts to make that second beginning:

It was approximately the of summer of 1973, that Professor Jack Campisi was invited as a special guest lecturer to the campus of the University of Wisconsin-Green Bay. This was our first meeting. I had been heavily involved in writing a proposal for a Native American Studies Program at UWGB. That proposal included a language retrieval component for the three major tribes n Northeastern Wisconsin: the Oneida, Menominee and Stockbridge-Munsee. However, that proposal was not funded and in talking about it with Prof. Campisi, he suggested that we might first develop a course in Oneida language here at the University as a way of ensuring funding later. With his expert help we worked up the outline for a course in conversational Oneida and submitted it to my department. It was approved and I served as a kind of impromptu instructor and liaison person between the students and Prof. Campisi in New York. He prepared and sent weekly lesson plans along with language tapes recorded with a native speaker to interpret and help us to pronounce Oneida works. The next semester we then moved the classes out to Oneida and met at Mrs. Sarah Skenandore's home. We set up a long table and chairs out in her garage with no heat except a single space heater—this was in mid-winter, plugged in some recording equipment to listen to the language tapes, and went to work.

The course was more successful that semester, especially with the use of Sarah as a Native speaker. But, even at that, it was all too clear that if we were to learn or teach the Oneida language we were going to have to have a program and have professionally trained speakers to teach the students. I spoke to Prof. Campisi and he agreed. I then managed to convince the Dean of my college to fly me out to New York at the University's expense to consult with Prof. Campisi and to write a proposal for an Oneida Language Program. After three days and nights at his kitchen table, I returned to Green Bay with the rough draft of the proposal in hand. We polished it up and submitted it that Spring 1973 to Title IV of the Indian Education Act. It was approved and we received a small grant of approximately \$70,000 in the summer of 1974.

We then met with some of the Tribal members and formed the Oneida Language Committee composed of myself, Norbert Hill, Jr., L. Gordon McLester, and others. The committee recruited Native American Speakers, selected the first Language Teacher Trainees, and hired Mr. William Gollnick as Director of the Oneida Language Program. That same year, summer 1974, working closely with the university, the committee also appointed Dr. Clifford Abbott as a part-time language specialist.

The Oneida Language Program was launched—again. Language classes were instituted and taught at the elementary levels in the local schools in Freedom, Pulaski, West De Pere and Seymour. Later, it was incorporated into the Oneida Community School where it is still being taught. The Oneida Language program was re-funded each successive year and continued for the next eleven years until 1985.

That was the beginning of the present. But it did not begin yesterday and, hopefully, it will not end tomorrow. The Oneida Language is still alive and viable today. It is up to others now to make a new beginning for the future.