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**NAPT shares Native  
stories with the world.**



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# NEWS RELEASE

For Immediate Release

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## NEW DOCUMENTARY SHARES DAILY LIFE AND STORIES OF WISCONSIN ONEIDA ELDERS WRITTEN 1930-40s

LINCOLN, Neb.—Jan. 22, 2008—In 1935, while the country was deep in the depression, a group of Oneidas in Wisconsin took advantage of a federal writing program designed to employ Americans and offer economic relief. Many, who wrote in their own language, recorded their daily life on the farm to a federal infiltrator sent to drive people off the land to a devastating small pox epidemic.

Their stories, which were discovered in storage at the University of Wisconsin in the late 1990s, are now being told in a documentary, *The Oneida Speak*, produced by **Michelle Danforth** (Oneida).

The hour-long film being distributed by the **National Educational Television Association (NETA)** starting in **February** explores the discovery of more than 800 steno books and ledgers handwritten in Oneida, the result of participation in the Works Progress Administration. The FDR program, which included jobs in the arts in addition to public works projects, allowed Oneidas to record their history in a time of great change not only in America but reservation life.

“You could say we lived in heaven, up until the time a devil came to the Oneidas,” wrote Levi Baird in 1939. “He was well paid, too. A government agent worked with him. He got \$2,000 for inducing and urging the Oneidas to become taxpayers ... About five years after this, some of the Oneidas got behind on their taxes, and some began to lose what they had because they were not accustomed to paying taxes. It has always been so that if anything comes up, it always ends in a loss for the Oneidas.”

**Producer Michelle Danforth** expanded the original 12-minute, Emmy-nominated film produced by Wisconsin Public Television to give authentic voice to her ancestors, whose stories are often mis-told or distorted in history books.

“Though these writings we see the vitality of the culture before assimilation, introducing the audience to the culture before learning of their resilience,” Danforth said.

A teachers’ guide has been created with the film to aid educators in Oneida history from the migration from their homeland in New York to Wisconsin in 1822 to discussions on cultural revitalization and identity.

**-MORE-**

Although the Oneida lost thousands of acres after passing of the Dawes Act and fell victim to small pox, in addition to nearly loosing their language, revitalization now takes place. Gaming has provided economic security and means to aiding in cultural preservation. The Oneida today often look to these writings as a reference.

“The journals covered everything,” Tribal Historian Loretta Metoxen said. They “...told about people who were born, people who died, epidemics, even the emigration from New York state because the people that were being interviewed in 1939, ‘40 and ‘41 were people who remembered the emigration or ... were told their parents about what it was like to emigrate from mid-New York state through the Great Lakes and then to come to Green Bay and make a settlement. They talked about all of these things. It's very detailed. It's their life and times as they saw it.”

And their ancestors also knew how valuable their stories would be.

“In closing, my history about the Oneidas,” wrote Oscar Archiquette in his journal in 1941, “I wish to thank those who were so kind and interested about us Oneidas to give us a chance to tell about ourselves and to get a true picture of Oneidas as a whole. I trust us Oneidas will benefit from our true Oneida Indian history sometime in the future.”

*The Oneida Speak* is presented by *Native American Public Telecommunications (NAPT)*, one of five national consortia chartered by the *Corporation for Public Broadcasting* to provide minority programming to the public broadcasting system.

*NAPT* shares Native stories with the world through support of the creation, promotion and distribution of Native media. *NAPT* support makes it possible for public television audiences to view such quality programs as *A Native American Night Before Christmas*, *Way of the Warrior* and the upcoming series *Unnatural Causes*, an in-depth look at health inequities in America that premieres *March 27* on *PBS*. Other *NAPT* products include *AIROS.org* and *VisionMaker Video*, distributor of *The Oneida Speak* and other documentaries by and about Native Americans.

Program information and teachers' guide on *The Oneida Speak* is available at [www.nativetelecom.org](http://www.nativetelecom.org). Check with your local PBS station for broadcast dates and times.

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