

YOUNGSTOWN STATE UNIVERSITY

ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

North American Indian Project

Indian Experience

O. H. 269

THOMAS PRINTUP

Interviewed

by

Jay Toth

on

October 20, 1979

YOUNGSTOWN STATE UNIVERSITY

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INTERVIEWEE: THOMAS PRINTUP  
INTERVIEWER: Jay Toth  
SUBJECT: North American Indian experiences, life on a reservation  
DATE: October 20, 1979

T: This is an interview with Thomas Printup for the Youngstown State University Oral History Program on the North American Indians by Jay Toth at the Alleghany Reservations, Salamanca, New York, on October 20, 1979, at 2:00 p.m.

Give some past background on your family, your parents, their names, where you were born.

P: My father, Floyd Printup, is originally from the Tonnawanda Reservation. My mother is Juanita Printup. She was adopted by William and Jenny Bonberry, and Jenny was her aunt. My grandmother on my mother's side was Minnie Snyder, and Clarence Snyder was her husband. Her mother was Suzanna Tulche.

I am a descendent of Peter Crouse, who was a Dutch captain, and I would probably be about eighth generation to Peter Crouse. Now when he was a young boy they captured him down around Pittsburgh. He lived among the Senecas. When he was matured, they felt he was mature enough to make his own decisions so they gave him the option to either go back to his own people or he could do whatever he wanted, and he chose to stay with the Senecas. He married an Onodaga woman and all of their children, I just can't remember how many they had. I have everything written down at home. In fact, I have the whole family tree from Peter Crouse.

There is not really too much on my father's side.  
That's about it.

T: You were born in Salamanca?

P: I was born in Salamance, in the Salamanca District Hospital. In fact, I was in the younger of five children, I'm the youngest. I have one brother. Do you want me to give their names?

T: Sure.

P: Walton, and then I have two sisters and I had another sister who passed away. Shirley was the oldest, and then there was Elizabeth and Ethyl. I was the only one born in the hospital, all the others were born at home.

T: Can you describe to me what the typical day was in the home?

P: Work! Any type of work that had to be done.

T: Let's say we'll start from the time you got up, what time did you get up?

P: Well, my typical day during school of course . . .

T: Let's say during the summer when you were off from school.

P: Okay. In the summer I was usually up early. My father worked on the railroad so he was always up early, I think 6:00 or 7:00 in the morning.

T: Where was your home at that time?

P: That was in Red House, which now the land is condemned because of the Kinzua Dam which took 10,000 acres of our land. So we had to move. Presently we live in the town of Salamanca. Jeffersontown was what the relocation area is called.

T: How did you feel about being forced to move?

P: Well, I don't think anybody really likes to move. I mean, especially since you've lived in a certain place for most of your life. My father was quite young when he was living in Red House. Of course, that was home and we didn't really want to move.

T: Was your home a farm or . . .

P: Well, my grandfather had a farm. As I mentioned, my father was working on the railroad and he had to start working at an early age because he had a family to support, I mean not our family, but his own, his brothers and sisters. Of course, he was the oldest of his family.

T: A typical day was not basically work, but . . .

P: Well, any kind of chores. We had a couple of good size gardens. All the head weeds had to be pulled, we had lawn that had to be mowed. My grandparents were quite elderly and they had to have work done for them. We had wood stoves so we had to cook with a wood stove even if it was hot in the summer, and so we had to cut wood.

T: What were some of the meals, what did meals consist of?

P: Any type of meal that anybody else would have eaten, nothing any different than anybody else would be having.

T: What was school for you? What were your experiences in school?

P: I went to the reservation schools. We had one-room schoolhouses that scattered throughout the reservation and I attended just about all of them because there were alternate grades up to the sixth grade. Then I went to the Maple Street School in Salamanca for junior high. I attended Salamanca High School.

T: So after graduation, where did you go from there?

P: I went to work. We had a furniture factory here in town so I went to work there for a summer. Well, I graduated in 1958 and I worked there until 1963 when I was drafted into the Army. I served two years in the Army.

T: Did you go to the Vietnam War?

P: No, they didn't want to take anyone that applied. They took those that didn't want to go. I didn't mind. In fact, the ones that didn't want to go are the ones that went.

T: What were your experiences in the service?

P: Typical of any other serviceman.

T: Any incidents that stick out in your mind?

P: Not really.

T: How long were you . . .

P: Two years.

T: Where did you go from there?

P: Well, I came back and then I worked with the National Forest in Pennsylvania. After that I worked for the Seneca Nation. I've worked for them ever since.

T: Did you go to a university or a college or anything?

P: No.

T: Just high school. What was your first contact with working with the National Forest job-wise?

P: They had a committee action program, and so I started off with that, working as a community aide. We did develop quite a few programs within the community action. A lot of what is going on now are some of the things that we either developed ourselves or else we found a need for it. The nation sort of added those on to their programs that they presently have.

T: Can you tell me what your position is as far as this place is concerned?

P: Well, I am the manager in this place.

T: Why don't you give me some background on the building itself?

P: We got an EDA grant for materials. The building was built by manpower, the manpower CETA program. They broke ground in 1976. The building was completed in 1977.

T: That was all built by CETA funds?

P: Well, the manpower itself was CETA.

T: Carson and Waterman designed the brickwork?

- P: Yes, the exterior designings that we have on our building are wampum designs and they were designed by Carson and Waterman.
- T: He has a lot of works in here, correct?
- P: He works at the museum, yes.
- T: How do you see the future of the museum itself, what do you expect the museum to do?
- P: Well, I think we have more or less proven ourselves as educating the general public. Of course, it will continue to do. There are a lot of things we don't really go into, otherwise you would be here all day. We sort of generalize what exhibits we do have, we're supposed to. We have one tour guide that goes into detail.
- T: Give some prospects of the reservation itself, some projects or anything. What are some of the future projects of the reservation?
- P: Well, I think I really can't say too much about that because I'm not really with politics. I'm nonpolitical. What I've always tried to do is work along with anybody and try to better our own people.
- T: Do you attend ceremonies at the Log House?
- P: I have.
- T: How do you feel that has an association with the people themselves?
- P: Well, I think that is mainly the culture. In order to retain your culture, it's getting kind of difficult now because a lot of people don't understand the language and this is what is spoken in the Log House.
- T: Do you know the language?
- P: Yes, I was brought up with the language. It was spoken in the house all the time, so I am familiar with the language.
- T: What do you see in the future of the Seneca nation?
- P: Well, within the last couple of years we have been progressing quite rapidly, so if we continue I think we just might be self-sustaining; economically we have, I should say.

- T: As far as economics, as far as tourism, or . . .
- P: Well, mainly tourism, yes. This area is more or less concentrated mainly on tourism.
- T: Let's get a little deeper, how do you feel about the lease in Salamanca?
- P: Well, I think they are working that out. The lease will be renewed, I'm quite sure. I see no problems. I think they are figuring out a way where we can get what we want and they would be able to provide it with the plan that they're working on right now, which I'm not sure about so I'm not going to mention it.
- T: You're not afraid that Salamanca won't outgrow the reservation?
- P: No.
- T: Because I see McDonalds is going across the street.
- P: This area that we're on right now, this area of Salamanca, the lease has been bought out by the Seneca nation, so we own that land, we are leasing that land to McDonalds, Fisher Big Wheel, which is next door, and of course you know we have our own bowling alley across the street from that. Next to there is going to be another restaurant; it's called Rusty's, that the Nation is putting up now. We intend to have motels. Of course, this expressway that goes by Route 17, Southern Church Expressway, there is an interchange right over here, and so you have access to all the fast food services right in this area.
- T: How would you comment on your tribal chairman and his performance to his job?
- P: I think he has done a very good job so far.
- T: What kind of work do you see in the future for yourself?
- P: For myself, I don't know.
- T: You take it day by day, right?
- P: Well, in a sense. I don't really mind it here that much. It's something that I've always done. I enjoy people, and of course we have all types of people. I hope somebody else can take over some day.

- T: Do you know if they are possibly going to do any mineral exploitation or anything?
- P: That I have no idea.
- T: Let's backtrack a little bit. Back to your home, were there any times that your parents got together and gave stories or anything as such?
- P: Not really. We really never had gatherings like some of the families did, where the older male member of the family would tell stories. That was usually after they got through eating the evening meal.
- T: You didn't have that?
- P: Not really. The stories I have heard I have heard from different people. Some of them had their grandfathers to sit down and tell them stories. Some of them remember because they were so interested in that then, being children a lot of them wanted to do other things so they didn't really pay that much attention to the stories and therefore, a lot of them have been Odyssey and the legends.
- T: Can you recall some others?
- P: Well, do you want me to go in to detail with some of them? I'm presently reading another book which has some of the myths and tales. Of course, some of the stories I have heard are in there. There are a lot of them that would go back to prehistoric times, which were just handed down from generations. They're really old legends.
- T: Why don't we try to go into a couple of those if you've got the time.
- P: Well, I think maybe one would probably do. At one time we had what are called little people, which are sort of like your leprechauns. They were in this area. They had been chased by this huge animal, which we now know as an elephant. As you know, we did have mammoths in this area at one time. So the "little people" were being chased by this mammoth. They were going toward Junio, which is Randolph, and this animal had been chasing them. They got to this cliff, and they decided they were going to split up. Half would go one way and half the other way to confuse this animal, and hopefully he would go over the cliff. That's what happened. In the 1930's they were building a fish factory in Ace Randolph. There was a hill there, which of course, could have had a cliff at one time.



When they were digging up to build this fish factory, they did find the remains of a mammoth in the place, which I think are in the state museum right now. That's a story that you can do some connecting with. It is possible that there was a place there, because they did find the bones.

T: So I take it you would back archaeology studies to back up some of the legends?

P: Yes.

T: A lot of people don't believe that.

P: Yes.

T: Are you planning on opening a section of say, archaeological artifacts, as far as the Senecas are concerned? The Senecas are originally from this particular area, they're more eastern.

P: From the Genesee River.

T: Anything from here wouldn't be basically . . .

P: Well, of course, you had Senecas here too. I mean we were all throughout the entire Western New York area. We went into Ohio.

T: I know you had some battles with the Wyandots.

P: Yes. The Erie

T: We have a lot of stories of the Senecas, the Wyandots would make fortifications on the Senecas up to the east.

P: We did have a reservation out there too one time, land that was given to the Senecas, around Sandusky.

T: Right. In fact, there is a Seneca County. Right now, those they would move to Oklahoma, if I'm not mistaken.

P: There are some Oklahoma. We were supposed to go to Kansas.

T: Whatever happened with that?

P: Well, we didn't go. I don't know whether you've ever heard of the different trail of tears which a lot of the eastern Indians, Cherokees have a trail of tears,

Choctaws have one that is similar to that. Still, you have Cherokees in North Carolina because there were a lot that hid out in the hills.

T: During the 1830's during Andrew Jackson, what happened to the Senecas?

P: Well, nothing really.

T: They seemed to escape all that?

P: Well, all the Iroquois tribes did except for maybe the Oneidas who did move up into Wisconsin.

T: What was the reason for it?

P: I'm not sure.

T: I don't have much more to ask, do you have anything? That's it then. Thank you.

END OF INTERVIEW