



## Oral History Questions

These questions are beginning questions—they can vary from elder to elder, and can be modified to fit the situation and information coming from the interviewee.

### *Basic Information Questions*

1. **Please state your full name. What was your maiden name? (if female)**
2. **Where were you born?** Try to obtain the name of not just the town, but the county and if the community had a local nickname, record that as well.
3. **What was the name of your father? Where was he born?**
4. **What was your mother's name? Where was she born?**
5. **What was your mother's maiden name?**
6. **Where were your parent's from? What city/town/county?** Because basic genealogy records are kept on the county level this question is useful. It will save you some time by going to the right community to document the family history.

### *Questions about Native American connections*

7. **Who was the specific ancestor that is said to have been of Native American ancestry?**
8. **Did you know him or her?** This question is important because you can learn more about the particular ancestor. If the interviewee knew the ancestor, get the interviewee to describe their relationship.
9. **Why was he said to have been of Native American ancestry?** This is asked because you the genealogist, are trying to get information beyond a physical description. Sometimes physical features are the only reason that are given to refer to Native Ancestry of an ancestor. Remember genealogy is based on documentation, and is not based on physical features.
10. **What nation or tribe was he/she a part of?** It should be pointed out that your job as you conduct your oral history is to engage in dialogue and let the elder speak, even if something does not appear logical to you. For example if an a family line that was always based in North Carolina and is known to have always been from there, and the elder claims

family ties to a tribe that never lived in that region, your task is not to refute or argue with the elder or be judgmental.

**11. Was there a community of Indians from that tribe living in the same area as your family?** Even if the elder does not know the answer to that question, your task at some time will be to learn the local history and to determine who the indigenous people were in that region.

**12. Did he/she visit that community? Did some from that community visit him/her?** This question will give you more insight into the ancestral relationship.

**13. Was the ancestor “part Indian” or was the ancestor part of an Indian community?**

**14. Did our ancestor speak a language besides English?**

**15. What kind of religion did she/he practice?**

**16. Did she/he ever speak about their own elders?**

In many cases the “full blood” Indian ancestor might be farther back in the family line. This kind of question might be useful in determining the relationship that the Indian ancestor had with the culture of the Indian community from which they came.

Note—in many cases the reference to a person with Indian ancestry can be incorrect, though strongly believed. Sometimes this is based on an ancestor who had racial features (hair or complexion) that was distinct from other families in the area, and no other reason. These questions should not be used to refute or dispute an elder, for they may simply be repeating what they heard as children. They are presented as a guideline for discussion when interviewing an elder. The responses given in the interview represent data that will become the framework for you when you begin your research, and begin to search for documentation

### **After the Interview**

After the interview is completed, it should be transcribed. That transcription becomes is a critical part of the interview and can be used as the launching pad to begin your research, for it will be from the names that are mentioned in the interview that you will use to obtain essential documents on your family history.