

# An Interview

with

## Carol Cornelius



# A HISTORY IN INDIGENOUS VOICES

MENOMINEE, HO-CHUNK, ONEIDA,  
STOCKBRIDGE, AND BROTHERTOWN



WISCONSIN  
HISTORICAL  
SOCIETY



**WHS Press** Why did you decide to write *A History in Indigenous Voices*?

I wanted to hear the voices of our ancestors during this critical removal time period. I wanted to know what our ancestors said to

each other as they were negotiating treaties. So many authors quote a sentence or two from historical documents, but basically, Indigenous voices have been omitted. I wanted to hear the rest of the story from our ancestors' perspective.



**WHS Press** What do you hope readers learn about the writings and statements of Indigenous leaders during the removal era?

The Indigenous leaders, on a nation-to-nation basis, wrote strong letters, authored sophisticated petitions, and made elegant speeches

to the president and his commissioners to express their positions for or against treaties and removal.

I hope readers will be inspired to delve into historical documents because they contain so much of what we are not taught in school, which is very eye opening.



**WHS Press** Writing a book can be a deeply personal experience. Has writing *A History in Indigenous Voices* been a personal experience for you? If so, how?

Hearing our ancestors' voices was important to me because these voices have been left

out of books about our people or were just a footnote. There were many council meetings where eloquent speeches were made to inform the Indian agent or commissioners of their stance and perspectives on what was happening.





**WHS Press** What is the most surprising thing you learned while writing this book?

Most surprising was the extent to which the U.S. government went to manipulate treaties

and push the removal of all Indigenous nations to the west of the Mississippi.

This book provides information to blast away stereotypes and misinformation.



**WHS Press** *A History in Indigenous Voices* is filled with a tremendous amount of historical research. How do you approach the task of researching, and do you have any preferred research methods?

The challenge was to find the source documents that contained an account of what was said during council or treaty meetings with the Indian agents and/or U.S. commissioners. For some treaties,

no one documented the event. The bulk of the source documents I found were handwritten and have been preserved on microfilm. This meant hours and hours of trying to decipher the handwriting of the authors. The research expanded into senate documents that often included the petitions of Indigenous nations. My preferred research method was to keep looking and diving into historical documents and following the path of history.



**WHS Press** How can this book serve as a guide to Wisconsin history and the history of American Indians in the East and Midwest more broadly?

First, the map of Indigenous people before Europeans was not a topic of study in standard curriculum. It has only very recently

been included in a few classes. Students are quite surprised to realize there is a whole history of this area well before Europeans arrived. Second, this book provides documentation of crucial events in Wisconsin history and of the treaties during the removal era that explain how the loss of land resulted in the current reservations.

