



## AMERICA 250: TELLING TROY'S STORIES

### Oral History Project for Students – Grades 8<sup>th</sup> – 12<sup>th</sup>

In addition to telling stories of historic people, buildings, and objects, Troy Historic Village also wants to tell the stories of people who live in Troy today. We are collecting oral histories from people in Troy – and that includes students like you! Oral histories are a way of collecting real stories from people and so for the future. Oral histories can help us understand the way that people lived in different times and places.

One of the ways people learn about the past is by reading things people left behind like journals and letters. Troy Historic Village is going to display the poster you make and then keep it in our archive (the place museums store their important stuff) so that people in the future can learn about what life was like in Troy in 2026.

### Directions

Oral histories are a method of gathering, preserving, and interpreting the voices and memories of people, communities, and participants in past events. Oral histories are usually recorded interviews with people who have been a part of a historic event, community, line of work, etc. Interviewers encourage the storyteller to share the details of their life by asking them questions about their experiences similar to an interview on television or a podcast. The interview might try to capture someone's whole life story or a specific piece of it.

Troy Historic Village is collecting stories of people who live in Troy today. We want to know why people choose to live here, what are their memories here, what do they remember about Troy long ago, or – for recent migrants – what are some memories or impressions from when they first moved here? We are spending 2026 interviewing Troy residents seeking answers to those types of questions, and you have the opportunity to be a part of it, and contribute to our exhibit this summer.

Take on the role of an oral history interviewer and interview someone in your household, or daily life, about their life in Troy. Try to come up with your own questions and ask follow-up questions. Here are a few questions to get you started:

- *What brought you to Troy?*
- *Why did you choose to live in Troy?*
- *Did you know anyone here before you moved?*
- *What are some of your earliest memories here?*
- *Tell me about going to school in Troy.*
- *When you were young, did you have a favorite hangout in Troy?*
- *How has Troy changed since you moved here?*



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Once you have completed your interview, take the information you gathered and write up their story (use the included example of Julia Niles as a guide). It can be as long or as short as you like, but it needs to fit on the page provided. You may include drawings or photographs of people, places, or items of significance. Be creative! If you prefer, you may interview several people in your house and create the story of your family or household in Troy.

### Tips for Your Oral History

Some residents of Troy have families that have lived here for generations, and some have only been here for a short time. Make sure to create your questions specific to the person you are talking with.

The best interview questions are "Open-Ended Questions," meaning they don't have a one- or two-word answer. Consider the difference between "Where did you go to school?" and "Tell me about going to school in Troy".

Write down the questions you want to ask before you begin the interview, but don't be afraid to ask them in a different order or add or subtract questions as the interview goes on.

Recording the interview can help you focus on the interview, instead of worrying about writing down their answers. You can probably use a cell to record the interview. Always make sure it's okay with the person you are interviewing before recording. If you are going to record the interview, make sure you are in a relatively quiet space.

### Example Student History

*Julia Niles was a real person here in Troy. The house at the end currently sits at Troy Historic Village. We have taken what we know about her from records and journals to create her coming to Troy story. Use this as a rough guide for writing the story for someone who lives in Troy today.*

# Julia Niles

Julia Niles was born in Painted Post, New York in 1816. Her younger brothers, Orange and George, were also born in New York. Julia's father was a farmer and businessman, and her grandfather fought in the Revolutionary War. Julia's mother managed the house and taught Julia how to do everything from cooking and cleaning to mending and sewing. In 1821, when she was just 5 years old, her father traveled from New York to the Michigan Territory in search of a new place for her family to live with new opportunities. After more than a month of travel, he returned home to pack up the entire family and move them to Michigan.

It took the family two weeks to travel in a wagon to Dunkirk, where they boarded a schooner (a large boat with sails) to get to Detroit. The boat ride from New York to Detroit took two more weeks, it was a long trip for 5-year-old Julia! The entire family, Julia, Orange, George, and their mother and father, packed all their belongings in just a few trunks. Julia may have had only a doll to keep her company and pass the time.

When they arrived in the Michigan Territory, there were very few houses outside of Detroit. Julia, Orange, and George may have stayed with their mother in a boarding house in Detroit while their father traveled to Troy to clear the land and build a log cabin with the help of another settler. He even built the furniture the family needed in their new home. When the entire family moved into the log cabin, Julia had only her brothers to play with for several years before other families cleared land and built farms.



By the time she was 9 years old, enough families lived nearby that Mr. Morse taught school in a nearby log cabin. Just a few years later when Julia was 11, her father built a bigger house with a mercantile store and tavern. The whole family would have worked together to keep house, run the store, work and manage the farm. Julia might have helped with taking care of the animals, cooking, or cleaning. Julia's father purchased more land and expanded his businesses and soon many travelers would stop or even stay overnight in the rooms her family rented out. Julia watched as their quiet corner in Troy added churches, shops, and even a hotel!



