

TAPE LOG COVER SHEET

Wisconsin Folk Museum/for
Cedarburg Cultural Center
Mount Horeb, Wisconsin 53572

Date(s): November 7, 1989

Interviewee: Joseph Wayne Ackley

Address: [REDACTED]
Lac du Flambeau, WI 54538

Phone: [REDACTED]

Equipment Used: Superscope C-202LP

Stereo: no Dolby: no

Tape Brand/Length: Sony HF-60

Amount Used: Side 1: all
Side 2: 1/3

General Subject: musical instrument
making

Fieldworker(s): James P. Leary,
Lewis Koch

Recording Location: Ackley home,
Lac du Flambeau Community Center

Other People Present: none (Ackley
home), members of TRAILS drum
(Community Center)

SUMMARY OF RECORDING CONTEXT AND TAPE CONTENTS

Lewis and I met Joe Ackley at his office in the Lac du Flambeau Community Center where he directs the TRAILS program (Testing Reality and Investigating Lifestyles), a program directed at youth with the intention of teaching them traditional culture and steering them away from drugs and alcohol. Joe suggested we follow him to his home, a mile or so distant, where his drums were kept and where we could conduct an interview and take pictures. We had just such a session for about an hour in Ackley's living room. Thereafter we were invited to a practice of the TRAILS drum, a group of young people Ackley is teaching to drum and sing, at the Community Center. We accepted and I set up the Nagra to record a fragment of a drum song and a second song in its entirety. I subsequently dubbed the Nagra recording onto the same cassette holding the Ackley interview.

TAPE INDEX

Tape 1, Side 1

1. Announcement.
2. Born in L'Anse, Michigan, mother there visiting. Returned to Bad River three days later, that's his home town. But father's from Mole Lake, follows his dad's clan and enrolled at Mole Lake, but lives on Lac Du Flambeau now. Born 4/14/40.
3. Raised at Bad River. Has been at Lac du Flambeau 4-5 years. Father, Charles Ackley, "a kind of culture teacher," helped run Historyland at Hayward with Tony Wise.
4. J learned much of his cultural knowledge from his father. Tanning hides, making drums. J finally started making them on his own. Has made eight or nine. Not traditional to make drums unless a drummaker in your family.
5. Charles Ackley (J gives his Indian name which I can't reproduce from hearing, but it means "Whispering Pines") was born in Crandon. His dad, Willard Ackley, was the last chief at Mole Lake. Charles was born February 29, 1902, died in 1973. His father had made drums too.
6. Family made small hand drums, including mocassin drums for mocassin games; midewewin drums for medicine lodges and water drums for the midewewin. The drums J makes are social drums, for powwows not religious ceremonies. Nonetheless the social drums must go through a ceremony and be give a feast. [Good for DHD.]
7. J hasn't made any sacred drums, but his dad and grandfather might have as they were in the medicine lodges.
8. J is a traditional person with regard to religion. Doesn't go to church, but also not involved with the religion surrounding the big drum.
9. About drum construction. The body is a barrel. Wood from hollowed out tree used years ago. Inside is reinforced, years ago with crossed cedar sticks, but now with bicycle hoops. So the drum doesn't pull out of shape. Two dance bells inside. Painted to keep from warping. Hole in the body for the sound to come out, relieve the pressure. Gets barrels anywhere he can. Got some in Minocqua where it was being sold as a planter. Hide is deer hide. Have to flesh and dehair the hide. Does this himself to get the rawhide. Used to use hardwood ashes made into a mush, then worked mush into the hair, then buried the hide for several days, then dug up and the hair came off. Then had to get the flesh off the hide. Hide is very hard, but softens up when wet, pliable for making the drum head. [Could be used with editing for DHD, maybe with drum song underneath.]
10. Cowhide durable, bear hide can be used by people in the bear clan, deer hide used because it's more available. J hunts for deer.
11. Uses two pieces of hide, one for top, one for bottom.
12. Decoration of drums. Has some studs to pretty up the drum. Painting is

done on the drum head to represent the group it belongs to. One drum is the TRAILS group, the other is for J's singing group, the Woodland Woodticks.

13. J's group chose the woodtick to be a little different and to honor the lowly woodtick. [a good quote] "They're abundant. If nothing else, they're here to annoy us . . . We originally thought of having the road kill drum."

14. J describes the TRAILS drum head with the birchbark torches used in spearing and the eagle, "one of the bird we hold in high respect because of its greatness."

15. When the drum is made, an elder speaks for the drum (i.e. the group as well as the drum itself), then they have a feast and invite everyone. Then they have songs, including honor songs and songs for the drum. Usually eat traditional food. Deer meat, venison, wild rice, fry bread, corn. [DHD?]

16. Care of the drum. When it leaves the house, always covered. Try not to leave it alone. During a dance, though, all their singers are dancers. When they dance, tie sweetgrass to the drum to show that it's being respected. When not in use, set up on its side. [DHD?]

17. Hides good for 15-20 years. When they wear out, put a new one on. Ditto for the laces.

18. Drumbeat is steady, akin to the beating of a heart. The old people say, "When the drum stops, then our race will be extinct." For a while the drumming was dying out, but now there is a return to traditionally oriented living and a resurgence of drumming.

19. J was taught that you must learn to dance traditional dances first. As you grow older, more difficult to do some of the dances, so you take up singing. Usually older people sing on the drum, but they are teaching younger people to sing today to keep the music alive.

20. Most of the drum songs are chants. Some have Ojibwa words. You just have to learn by listening and watching. Nothing written down. Younger children are quick to learn. [DHD]

21. Use Ojibwa words in some songs, and English words in other songs, especially the 49 songs. J tries to avoid the 49 songs, because they often go on in connection with drinking.

22. Most of the songs done are intertribal songs, known to many of the tribes. J reckons they use a traditional drum, some drums use band drums. J's drum sings in a traditional Ojibwa manner which is less high-pitched than the western way of singing.

23. In singing one person always sings lead. He maintains the tempo and others follow. Different signals are used to slow down, speed up, exchange leaders, go higher, go lower, repeat, stop, and so on. [J is a little reluctant to tell me his group's particular signals on tape, so we turn off the tape.]

24. J has been a lead singer and dancer for some 40 years. Knows lots of

songs, has no idea how many.

25. J's group admires some drums in the western style, but tries to bring down the pitch when doing their songs.

26. On the powwow circuit: lot of it depends on the travel time. All powwows start at 1 o'clock on Saturday and end at 6 PM on Sunday. Tries to go within Wisconsin, Michigan, Minnesota, sometimes Canada and Illinois. Often have to be back for work. Get to know everybody on the powwow circuit. Stay with friends and relations when he travels, does the same for people who come to Lac du Flambeau. Drums get "drum money" for guess. The traveling is tiring, however, "but I wouldn't give it up." [DHD]

26. Years ago sticks made with black ash, curved, with lacing on the handle. Nowadays uses plastic handles with stuffing and taping on the end. Try to keep them as long as your forearm and not too heavy. Generally keeps sticks in a drumstick bag. Some sticks will hurt the hide and J won't use them. Lots of kids tend to hit on the side of the drum and that wears out the hide too.

27. "Some of the drumbeats are a lot different"--male and female dances with slow tempos, fast powwow, honor song, steady social dance beat. [Great for DHD with talk over illustration of drumbeat.] Lots of singers raise and lower their tones, and change their beat accordingly, but "your arm's got to do different from your mouth . . . and that's one of the hard parts of the song, you've got to keep that steady beat . . . you can't change your beat, you've got to keep it the same all the way to the end." Kids are good at this, "they learn so fast."

End of Session at Ackley home, End of Side 1

Beginning of session at Community Building, Side 2

28. Announcement.

29. A drum song by the TRAILS drum, Joe Ackley and various kids on lead. [I come in late after the song has begun.]

30. A second drum song with, I think, reference to the Anishinabe [good for DHD.]

31. Singers introduce themselves: Steven, Tony, Hank, Lance, J.R., Joe.