The Nez Perce Music Archive

What is it? Where is it?
The Nez Perce Music Archive

WHAT is the Nez Perce Music Archive?

The Nez Perce Music Archive consists of recordings of songs, as well as some speeches and legends, in various audio formats. These were originally recorded between 1897 and 1974. Loran Olsen, Music Professor at Washington State University from 1965 to 1993, gathered these recordings together from a variety of different sources and called this project the Nez Perce Music Archive. In cooperation with the Nez Perce Tribe, he has released several collections of these recordings for educational purposes, beginning in 1972. Each one of these, with a total of over 600 recordings in all, is a part of the Archive project.

1. Audio on vinyl disc, 1972

The first collection, Nez Perce Songs of Historical Significance, as sung by “Sol” Webb, was issued in a now-obsolete vinyl disc format (“Eva-Tone soundsheet”) in 1972. The disc was issued with a printed guide describing the collection:


These recordings were re-formatted to audio tape and re-released as part of the 1989 collection described below.

2. The first audio tape collection, 1974

The second collection was issued in 1974 on reel-to-reel audio tape (a set of five tapes), with songs, plus speeches and legends. In order to encourage immediate access to the 1974 collection, reel-to-reel sets were distributed to University of Idaho, Moscow; Washington State University Music Department, Pullman; Idaho State Historical Society, Boise; Nez Perce Tribe of Idaho, Lapwai; and descendants of the Joseph Band at Nespelem, Washington.

These recordings were re-released as part of the 1989 collection.

3. The second audio tape collection, 1989

A much larger collection of 550 recordings was released in 1989. It included the recordings from the 1972 and 1974 collections, plus over 400 more. Seven full sets of audio tapes were placed, at the Nez Perce Tribal library and several other libraries and locations, so that they would be widely and publicly available for listening, study, and other appropriate educational use. Washington State University also produced some additional copies in the years following the initial release. "Samplers" with selections from the collection were released for educational uses, and some audiocassette copies of the collection were made in response to specific requests.

This collection was issued with a detailed companion guide including extensive information about the Nez Perce Music Archive project up to that time:

Free full-text of this guide is available online through the Washington State University Research Exchange website:

Go to: https://research.libraries.wsu.edu/xmlui/handle/2376/1023

-Select the "View/Open" link to download and view a PDF file of the guide.

-OR enter the title, Guide to the Nez Perce Music Archive, in an internet search engine and select the result from the WSU Research Exchange

4. Digital audio recordings on compact disc, 1995

The Sam Morris collection consists of recordings not previously released, issued as digital audio on compact disc.


There is a companion guide to this collection, A Legacy from Sam Morris by Loran Olsen. Seattle: Northwest Interpretive Association, 1999.

5. Digital audio recordings on compact disc, 2001

The Qillóowawya collection consists of songs in a specific genre selected from the previously released collections.


WHERE is the Nez Perce Music Archive?

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In spring 2014, Loran Olsen transferred his collection of recordings from Washington State University to the Nez Perce National Historical Park Research Center and Archives in Lapwai, Idaho. Between fall 2015 and summer 2016, Nez Perce National Historical Park worked with George Blood Audio of Philadelphia to digitize the recordings into access and preservation master files with embedded metadata for each recording. The recordings are publicly accessible by visiting the Nez Perce National Historical Park Research Center. Inquiries regarding the collection can be made by calling the park archivist at (208) 843-7042.
The audio tape collection

Seven sets of the 1989 audio tape collection were issued and placed at the following locations:

- University of Idaho Library, Moscow, ID
- Nez Perce Tribal Library, Lapwai, ID
- Idaho State Historical Society, Boise, ID
- Joseph Band descendants at Nespelem, WA
- Nez Perce National Historical Park, Spalding, ID
- Lewis-Clark State College, Lewiston, ID
- Kemble Stout Music Library, Washington State University, Pullman, WA (Note: as of March 2009, this library’s set of recordings is on audiocassette, pictured on the front of this information sheet)

Sets of audiocassettes may also be available at these or other locations. Part or all of the collection may also be available at:

- American Folklife Center, Library of Congress
- Archives of Traditional Music, Indiana University

Digital audio recordings on compact disc

The Sam Morris and Qillóowawya collections on compact disc were published and distributed by the Northwest Interpretive Association (now called Discover Your Northwest, http://www.discovernw.org). They may be available for purchase through Discover Northwest, or at the Nez Perce National Historical Park. Your local library should also be able to assist you with information about availability.

Digital audio recordings for download (MP3 format)

Two MP3 albums with selections of songs and stories from the Nez Perce Music Archive are available for purchase online through Wild Sanctuary. These are Music of the Nez Perce, with 14 selections, and Nez Perce Stories (as told by Elizabeth Wilson), with 7 selections. See the Wild Sanctuary website for more information: http://www.wildsanctuary.com.

Printed guides to the different releases

Please check with your local library (public or academic) for help in locating the various guides listed above.
Additional information: Research files and related materials at Washington State University

Loran Olsen Papers

The papers of Loran Olsen are available in Manuscripts, Archives, and Special Collections (MASC) at the WSU Libraries. This collection includes materials related to the Nez Perce Music Archive project; it is open and available for use in MASC, in the Terrell Library at the WSU Pullman campus.

Collection summary: From 1970 to 1993, Loran Olsen, then a member of the WSU Music faculty, conducted extensive research on the music of first peoples, chiefly of the American northwest. His varied activities included field trips to document traditions in Alaska, British Columbia, Washington, Oregon, Idaho and Montana; the production of educational media in close collaboration with Native tradition bearers; the scholarly examination of published and unpublished written materials; collecting, editing, organizing, and documenting his own and previously existing sound recordings; developing and teaching courses in Native music at Washington State University; and giving lectures and workshops in various public forums. In addition to producing a body of primary source material, he also collected a variety of secondary materials that more broadly document the culture and life of North America's native peoples. The collection also contains records of Olsen's scholarly activities.

(online guide available here: http://ntserver1.wsulibs.wsu.edu/masc/finders/cg658.htm)

Nez Perce Music Collection Fieldwork Materials

Collection summary: The Nez Perce Music fieldwork materials were primarily collected from 1990-1991, and constitute a record of the sources and records that Judy Jones used for her dissertation "Women Never Used to War Dance": Gender and Change in Nez Perce Music (1995). Judy Jones worked in collaboration with Dr. Loran Olsen of the Washington State University faculty, who also conducted some of the interviews with the Nez Perce that are contained in this collection. A fuller account of how the Nez Perce Music fieldwork materials came to be generated can be found in Judy Jones’s dissertation, which also provides a detailed contextual narrative of her project.

(online guide available here: http://ntserver1.wsulibs.wsu.edu/masc/finders/cg636.htm)

Source recordings

Extensive information about the original recordings on which the Nez Perce Music Archive is based is included in the published guides listed above. Some of the original recordings, and copies of some others, are held by Manuscripts, Archives, and Special Collections at the Washington State University Libraries in Pullman, where they are kept to insure their long-term preservation. The earliest source recordings, on wax cylinders, are on permanent loan to the American Folklife Center at the Library of Congress. Audiotape copies of these, and other source recordings for the Archive held by MASC, are in three unprocessed collections (MS1994-33, MS1994-34, MS1994-35).