



THE VIRTUAL HALL > EDUCATION & PRESERVATION >

# Gladys Tantaquidgeon



## Induction Category:

Education &  
Preservation

**Born:** 1899

**Died:** 2005

**Inducted:** 1994

**Town:** Uncasville

Gladys Tantaquidgeon grew up steeped in the traditions of her Mohegan tribe. In a remarkable life that spanned three centuries, she was credited with the preservation of the Mohegan tribal language and customs in Connecticut. Nationally, she was known as an expert in the restoration of cultural practices and was sought after by western tribes to aid in preservation efforts.

Tantaquidgeon was born in 1899, a descendant of the first Sachem Uncas and niece of [Emma Fielding Baker](#), who became her mentor and educated her in tribal spirituality and herbal medicine. In 1919, she began studying anthropology with Dr. Frank Speck at the University of Pennsylvania, followed by field work among northwestern tribes. In 1934, she was hired by the United States government to work on the Yankton Sioux reservation in South Dakota. Later she worked to promote Indian art for the Federal Indian Arts and Crafts Board in the Dakotas, Montana and Wyoming. Her duties involved the organization of Indian cooperatives and research and preservation of ancient Indian artistic techniques.

After concluding her government service in 1947, she returned to Uncasville, Conn., where she joined her father, John, and brother, Harold, as the full-time curator of the Tantaquidgeon Indian Museum, which she had co-founded in 1931. The museum, which housed native artifacts, was dedicated to education, based on Tantaquidgeon's belief that "you can't hate someone you know a lot about." It is the oldest Native American owned and operated Indian museum in the U.S. Tantaquidgeon continued to work at the museum until 1998, and further served the Mohegans on their Tribal Council. In addition, she worked as the librarian at the Niantic Women's Prison during the 1940s, where she tapped into her previous work helping struggling women on reservations.

Drawing knowledge from multiple sources, Tantaquidgeon was also the author of several books on Indian medicine practices and folklore, including *Folk Medicine of the Delaware and Related Algonkian Indians*. Among her many honors are the University of Connecticut's "Tiffany Jewel" and the National Organization of Women's Harriet Tubman Award. In addition, Tantaquidgeon received honorary doctorates from the University of Connecticut and Yale University.

When Gladys Tantaquidgeon died at the age of 106, she was celebrated as the remarkable woman who had kept her heritage alive with her spirituality and fierce determination. At the time of her death, Connecticut Governor M. Jodi Rell remarked that "Tantaquidgeon shared 106 years with Connecticut and its people, and all of us are the richer for it."

## Related Links:

- > [The Mohegan Tribe](#)
- > [Gladys Tantaquidgeon Biography](#)
- > [New York Times Obituary](#)

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