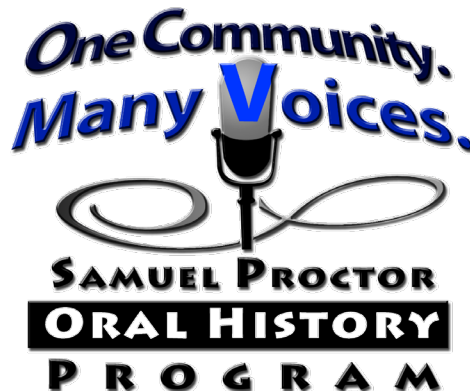


Noah McGhee and Ollie Mae McGhee

Poarch Creek Project
CRK-015

Interview by:

**Larry Haikey
August 7, 1972**



University of Florida • Samuel Proctor Oral History Program • Paul Ortiz, Director
P.O. Box 115215, 241 Pugh Hall, University of Florida, Gainesville, FL 32611-5215
(352) 392-7168 www.clas.ufl.edu/history/oral

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Samuel Proctor Oral History Program
College of Liberal Arts and Sciences
Program Director: Dr. Paul Ortiz

241 Pugh Hall
PO Box 115215
Gainesville, FL 32611
(352) 392-7168
<https://oral.history.ufl.edu>

CRK 015 Noah McGhee and Ollie Mae McGhee
Southeastern Indian Oral History Project
Interviewed by Larry Haikey on August 7, 1972
1 hour, 4 minutes | 51 pages

Abstract: Noah McGhee describes what life was like in Poarch Switch when he was a boy. He talks about dances held in the community and his church. He discusses the process of hunting game and smoking and cooking meat, as well as foraging. He recalls that his father used to be a medicine man and speaks about his work. Noah's wife Ollie Mae McGhee joins the interview and they discuss making *sofke*—a corn soup—and fever remedies. Noah then speaks about the jobs he's held over time and discusses his childhood. He speaks about the changes he has seen in the community over time.

Keywords: [Lands and Ecological Knowledge; Community and Family Life; Biography]

SAMUEL PROCTOR
ORAL HISTORY
P R O G R A M
University of Florida

CRK-015

Interviewee: Noah McGhee and Ollie Mae McGhee

Interviewer: Larry Haikey

Date: August 7, 1972

H: It's August 7, 1972, and I'm interviewing Mr. Noah McGhee in Poarch Switch in his home. Mr. McGhee, would you begin just by giving the date of your birth and where you were born and who your parents were?

NM: Well, I was born in Escambia County, you know. My father's named Frazier McGhee, mother's named **Jill** McGhee.

H: Could you just talk for a little while about what life was like around here for Indian people when you were a boy?

NM: That's a hard thing. I done forgot a lot of the stories they used to just . . . well, I mean, they had these frolics first one thing and another.

H: What's a frolic?

NM: That's dancing.

H: Could you just sort of describe one of those, what they were like?

NM: Well . . . you get out here on the floor, and then you have a square dance. That's what you call a square dance. You'd have to date and your partner, you'd get your partner, and she'd have to dance, too. Then next would be a swing.

H: Now were those held in peoples' houses?

NM: Yeah. They'd be in peoples' houses, go from a mile or two. People would come from a mile or two, maybe three or four miles. You have a frolic, you know, well, they'd go to it.

H: Who made the music for that?

NM: All different ones. Had different ones, you know, making music. A lot of times, I'd make music.

H: Well, what kind of instrument did you play?

NM: Banjo.

H: You played the banjo?

NM: Mm-hmm.

H: How'd you learn to play the banjo?

NM: I picked it up and learned it my own self, there.

H: Ah. Did you ever make a banjo yourself?

NM: No, I never did make a banjo. But I have seen them made.

H: You've seen—

NM: My uncle there make them.

H: Who was your uncle?

NM: Isaac McGhee.

H: He made banjos?

NM: Yeah. Take an old can, square tin about that wide.

H: A syrup can, or . . . ?

NM: Yeah, that's right. Used to have syrup cans, you know, with syrup in them. They'd have a neck on it, strings on it and let her go.

H: Was there a regular group of you that played together?

NM: Yeah, sometimes there would be.

H: Who were the other people you used to play with?

NM: Fred Rolin, Fred Rolin. He played the fiddle. Different one picked the guitar. With the group, you know.

H: How did somebody decide to put on a dance? What, they just decide one day to do it and tell people? How'd they do that?

NM: Well, yeah. Someone would, they'd give a date night. Everyone says okay. We went round and told them, there's gonna be a dance at so-and-so's house, you know, tonight. Go ahead and be there.

H: Did you bring food and stuff to eat?

NM: Nah.

H: How about whiskey? [Laughter]

NM: Whiskey. Instead of food.

H: Where'd the whiskey come from?

NM: Different places.

H: Homemade or bought kind?

NM: Well, sometimes it'd be homemade. And I didn't make no whiskey hardly like that. They'd buy it. If anybody made it, they'd buy it from them.

H: Did there ever get to be any fighting at any dances?

NM: Oh, yeah.

H: Tell me some stories about that.

NM: Oh . . . I ain't started something' like that. I remember my dad, you know, had a fight down to his house. They had a big frolic there, you know, that night. Fella named Slick Seals and Ben Seals—they're brothers, Ben Seals and Slick Seals. They was brothers. They come there one night and Old Man Fred Walker and my daddy, they was there, you know. They started to fight them boys, Slick Seals and Ben Seals and all them there. Every one of them; they a bully, you know.

H: Bully?

NM: Well, these Seals people wanted to be bullies, you know. One of them hit Old Man Fred Walker, knocked him down, and **got right straddle of him**. My daddy went up there told him to get up off him. He didn't get up off him. He went to work with him on that knife, my dad did. He cut him down, you know. Put him out on a cooling board . . . layed him out on the gallery.

H: A cooling board, did you say?

NM: On a board, well they had him out on a gallery laid and the blood

— H: Between the kitchen and the house, you mean? On the gallery?

NM: Yeah, on the gallery, it's like that out there. Of course, they was boards, you know. So the blood drained out from under and come up through the cracks on the planks. Laid down there, come on out. They taken a hundred and forty some-odd stitches on him.

H: Where'd they take him to the doctor?

NM: I think they took him to Atmore to the doctor. That's a long time ago, there wasn't many doctors then.

H: About what year was that, do you think?

NM: Oh, I couldn't tell you.

H: How old were you at the time?

NM: I'm seventy-eight.

H: How old was that when that happened?

NM: I was a baby.

H: You were a baby.

NM: Mm-hm.

H: Did the law ever come to those dances?

NM: Nah.

H: Why didn't the law ever come?

NM: Well, I don't know how come they don't never come. They weren't much law then.

H: There wasn't much law?

NM: No, not then. We had it like we wanted it. Well, they didn't have no fights or nothing like that till somebody come in and try to make himself a bully.

H: Did any white people ever come to those dances?

NM: Oh, yeah, yeah.

H: Where'd they come from?

NM: Different places.

H: How about colored folks, did any of them ever come?

NM: Nah. No colored folks.

H: What would have happened if one had come, do you think?

NM: I imagine there might have been a fight, sure enough.

H: When you were younger, how did Indians and white folks get along?

NM: They got along alright.

H: They did?

NM: Yeah, got along alright till they try to have an argument. What would you do now?

H: Did white folks and Indian folks ever call each other names when they got mad or anything?

NM: Well, sometimes they would, and sometimes they wouldn't.

H: Well, besides frolics, what else did people used to do back in those days to have a good time?

NM: First one thing and another.

H: Did the churches have suppers and things back in those days?

NM: Oh yeah, they have them now.

H: Did the preachers have anything to say about those frolics? Did they ever talk about those?

NM: No, the preacher don't never say nothing about that.

H: Did they ever come to them?

NM: Nah.

H: They never came to them. [Laughter]

NM: I remember, one of our preachers what used to come down here a long time ago. He says, fellas people are telling me no to come in here. I asked him why. He said, well, they said they'd kill you, the Indians would kill you. I told him, I said, I ain't never seen them kill nobody; they'll fight them. But I ain't seen them kill nobody, though. I said, they'll give him a good beating, but they ain't never killed nobody. I said, come on down and preach. If you want to preach in here, come on down and preach. I said, you better take that necktie off, though.

H: Why'd you tell him that?

NM: Preachers come in here don't wear neckties much. They got to where now they just generally didn't wear neckties.

H: What would have they thought if he had kept his necktie on?

NM: Well, I don't know what they thought. Told him they didn't have much religion. That's what they'd think of it, you know. Out yonder, I never did see an Indian out there with a necktie on.

H: Out in New Mexico, you're talking about?

NM: Yeah, yeah.

H: Uh-huh. But you folks around here didn't like neckties either.

NM: No, I don't never wear a necktie. I would get them every now and then, but I don't want to wear them.

H: Why do you say when somebody has on a necktie that means he doesn't have much religion? Is that part of your belief?

NM: Well, yes, it some of our belief. But the lot of them say that's part of your clothes. Our church don't believe in that, wearing a necktie.

H: Tell me a little bit about your church.

NM: Well, we got the Holiness church. We believe in the Holiness. That's our belief, you know, the holiness.

H: Do you go to the Church of God of Prophecy over here?

NM: Yeah. Mm-hm.

H: How long has that church been there?

NM: I reckon it's been there about a year now. Been about a year.

H: How'd that church get started?

NM: Well, a fellow come up here and wanted to get a little place in here for church.

H: He just came around?

NM: Yeah. Asked me about that little house out there, and I told him, yeah, go ahead and use it for the church if you want. So he started a church there.

H: About how many people do you have that go to church there now?

NM: A good deal.

H: A good deal of them. How is that church different from the other Holiness church?

NM: That's Free Holiness up there and this one here is the Church of the Prophecy. That's Free Holiness. He has his license to preach to us and that church don't have no license.

H: He doesn't have a license down there?

NM: Uh-huh. He's with Free Holiness, don't believe in it. Actually, take this church out there. There's about, you know, you got folks coming all out there, you know. **Drunk at church** come up there, you know?

H: To Free Holiness?

NM: Yeah, yeah Free Holiness. But don't hardly, nobody go up there drinking now. They used to.

H: Used to be people that'd been drinking would go to church there?

NM: Yeah.

H: For services, or for a sing, or anything?

NM: For singing.

H: For singing, uh-huh. But you wouldn't let somebody that's been drinking come anywhere near this church.

NM: Uh-huh, yeah.

H: Back to something you said earlier, you said that that one preacher said people told him not to come in here. Have you ever heard anybody say that before, that they were afraid of the Indians?

NM: No, that's the first time I heard him say anything like that. He's telling me about it, you know. Other people would tell him, said you better not go in there.

H: Which preacher was that?

NM: Tatum. Brother Tatum.

H: Brother Tatum?

NM: Mm-hm.

H: And was that quite a few years ago?

NM: Oh yeah, pretty good while ago now. He's dead now.

H: I wonder why he heard that. I wonder why people said that.

NM: I don't know. You know people tell him, you know. Long time ago, a nigger was dashing to come through here.

H: He was just what?

NM: He was just dashing to come through here.

H: Dashing to come through.

NM: Yeah. They'd beat the stuffing out of him and get him out of here. He didn't get out of this part down in here, they'd give him a good beating, but now they don't do that now.

H: Why was it they did back then?

NM: They don't like them.

H: Why didn't they like them?

NM: Well, they just don't like them.

H: Uh-huh. Anything in particular about niggers that they don't like?

NM: Well, no. The Indian don't like a nigger, you know. They don't like them. But they get along with them alright now.

H: Were there ever any strong feelings ever about whites like that?

NM: No. No. Now, you take niggers nowadays, they're as good to Indians as they can be, and the Indians is good to them.

H: Well, do you remember ever in your life being turned away from someplace because you were Indian?

NM: No, I don't believe I have. I don't believe I have.

H: You think anybody ever looked down on you because you were an Indian?

NM: No. Long time ago, you know, seemed like when you be an Indian, you go to some meeting where white people was, they'd look down on you. Because you're an Indian, you know. But now, they don't do that now.

H: All the years ago when they did that, what did they do when they looked down on you? I mean, how could they tell they were looking down on you?

NM: Well, you can tell how a person acts, you know. You can tell by how they act.

H: By the way they talk?

NM: Yeah, the way they talk, they don't associate with you much.

H: Well, back to long years ago when you were a boy, you started out talking about the frolics. How did people make their living years ago?

NM: Had farms. That's what I'm thinking of. Farming and getting meat out of the woods, mostly.

H: What kind of meat?

NM: Deer, turkey, plus one thing or another, you know.

H: Before refrigerators came in here, how did people save their meat? Before people had electricity and refrigerators?

NM: They'd put it out and smoke it. Smoke it, you know, and have a smokehouse. Put your salt down, smoke it. I've seen a lot of beef meat, dried beef.

H: Tell me how you do that dried beef meat.

NM: You put it out on something, you know, a little scaffolding, start you a smoke under it. Smoke it.

H: Outside?

NM: Yeah.

H: It's not in a smokehouse, like—

NM: No, you have it on the outside when you dry it.

H: Now when you put the beef out like that, you just put a whole side of beef, or what do you do to it?

NM: Well, no, you cut it up. You cut it up.

H: In chops?

NM: No, in little small pieces.

H: How long does it take to dry it?

NM: I couldn't say. It'd take a pretty good while.

H: And then once it's dry, what do you do with it?

NM: Stack it back.

H: Stack it back?

NM: Yeah, wrap it up in shucks and stack in back.

H: In corn shucks?

NM: Yeah.

H: And where would people stack it?

NM: Have them a little place in the smokehouse and put it in the smokehouse.

H: Now when you got ready to cook a piece of that beef, what'd you have to do?

NM: Well, you can fry it, just like you do bacon, you know.

H: Do you have to soak it in water or anything first?

NM: Yeah, you can.

H: Did people ever do that with deer meat, too?

NM: Oh yeah, yeah. Well, deer meat, you know, you can salt it down and put it in brine, just like you do a hog with hog meat. Just hang it up and get some brine.

H: After you've soaked it in brine, you just hang it up like hog meat?

NM: Yeah. Uh-huh.

H: Besides deer, were there any other wild animals people used to eat?

NM: Turkeys.

H: Turkeys? Did people ever save those anywhere, or just eat them when—

NM: Nah, just kill them and a big bunch come help you eat them.

H: How about squirrels?

NM: You'd kill about a good nest, and that's about all you could do.

H: And you eat them all at one time?

NM: Eat them all at one time. You kill a good nest, maybe about three or four, something like that. You'd know when you got a nest of them.

H: I've heard some people say that gophers are pretty good to eat.

NM: Oh boy, them's good.

H: Tell me how you get a gopher and how you fix it to eat it.

NM: You get you a hook, get you a piece of good steel wire, you crook that wire, go ahead and put it on your vine, and shove it down that gopher hole and push it around and catch him. Boy, that's good meat.

H: Once you get him out, what do you do with him to get him ready to eat him?

NM: What do you do with him? [Laughter]

H: Yeah, how do you fix it to eat it?

NM: Cut the hull off.

H: Cut the hull off?

NM: Yeah, split him right down on both sides, gonna get that hull off, then you get the meat out.

H: You fry it, or boil it, or how do you fix it?

NM: You get some hot water and you scrape the legs off, get all that scale off his legs, till it gets down to white, and you put it on in and boil it. When it gets tender, you cut up onions, put your onions up, make you some brown gravy and put in it. Boy, you got you something to eat.

H: When was the last time you had some?

NM: About—I reckon it's been about a month and a half or two months ago.

H: Sometime when you've got some fixed, save me some. I'd like to just taste it, see what it tastes like. I've never had it.

NM: It's really good.

H: Did people ever eat any plants and things they found out in the woods?

NM: No, not that I know of, not except mushrooms.

H: Mushrooms? What kind of mushrooms did people eat?

NM: Mushrooms, grow what you could eat. You get them and you eat them.

H: How do you tell the ones you can eat from the ones that are poison?

NM: That's different things to me. That's my old parents; old parents know what to eat.
They'd get them.

H: You never learned how to get those?

NM: I never did learn how to get them.

H: How did they fix them when they were going to eat them?

NM: Boil them.

H: Boil them?

NM: Mm-hm.

H: Would they eat them like a vegetable or put them with meat?

NM: Well, they can, yeah.

H: How many different kinds of berries are there out in the woods around here to eat?

NM: A good deal of them.

H: What are some of the berries that people used to eat?

NM: Blackberries, dewberries, and huckleberries.

H: How about bullaces, can you eat those?

NM: Yeah, you can eat bullaces. Bullaces, scuppernong. That bullace is nearly about like a scuppernong. You can eat the black ones and you can get the yellow ones.

H: Which is the bullace, black or yellow? Or does it come both colors?

NM: Well, different kinds, you know. Get your little, what call these, big ones, they're bullaces. They're big ones. And you get you those little bitty ones, they call them, little small kind—I forget the name of the kind them are. They're a little small kind.

H: Do you remember people around here ever eating hickory nuts?

NM: Oh yeah.

H: What do you do with hickory nuts, anything special?

NM: Well, you make cake out of them.

H: Tell me how you make a hickory nut cake.

NM: Pick that out. Pick all that stuff out of the hickory nut, then you cut it up and put it in the cake, you know. Put pecans and mixed stuff, all that kind of stuff, mix it up together, and put it in a cake.

H: Have you ever heard of anybody eating acorns?

NM: Acorns? Yeah, there's a lot of it, but you can't eat them. Too bitter.

H: Too bitter. You never heard of anybody trying to fix them so they wouldn't be bitter?

NM: Nah, I ain't never heard of telling nothing like that. But it's bitter. I've tried to eat them, but I can't.

H: They're too bitter, huh? [Laughter]

NM: Too bitter.

H: The hogs will eat them though, won't they?

NM: Oh, yeah. Hogs will eat them. Hogs will eat them right or wrong.

H: Any other nuts besides hickory nuts around here that people—

NM: Pecans.

H: Pecans? Did they ever grow wild?

NM: Well now, some of them do. They'll run out, you know. Pecan season, pecans and things will run out.

H: Ever been many wild persimmons around here?

NM: Mm-hm, we got wild persimmons.

H: Do you ever know of anybody trying to make wine out of persimmons?

NM: No.

H: Never have. Have people through here ever been much interested in making wine out of berries or anything? Just whiskey?

NM: Well, they don't make whiskey too much. They go down there and buy it now. They don't fool with making whiskey.

H: Have you ever heard of any kind of green plants that grow in the woods that people used to eat?

NM: No. I've heard them talk about this old stuff, the dope, now here of lately, I don't—

H: Marijuana stuff?

NM: That's what I heard them talking about. I don't know.

H: But you never heard of people getting something to make a salad or something like that out of the woods?

NM: No.

H: When you were a boy, do you remember ever hearing any of the old people talk in Indian language?

NM: No. You mean the English language just like you was across the water?

H: No, Indian. Talking in Indian talk.

NM: No, they don't talk it now. They don't talk it here.

H: Do you remember some of the old-timers used to be able to talk it?

NM: Some of them used to try to talk it, but you couldn't understand some of them.

H: Did you ever learn a word or two of it yourself?

NM: No, no.

H: Changing the subject, I know that years and years ago, they tried to get all the Indians from Alabama to go to Oklahoma.

NM: Yeah, they tried to do all that.

H: But some stayed here. Do you remember, even when you were a boy, anybody ever coming around trying to get people to move to Oklahoma?

NM: No.

H: You don't?

NM: There's a chief was down here, they was gonna pay him off.

H: Mm-hm, that was just recently here.

NM: Yeah. And they say they're gonna to pay him off now pretty soon, but I don't think they will. All this land belonged to the Indians, then you had the claims. White folks take it away from them. And they was going to pay them for the land. I don't know what they've ever done about it, 'cause we was helping. They'd come in and want to get some money, we was gonna have a meeting up here and we'd all to go in together up there. The chief would tell you, I've got to go to Washington, see about something.

H: This is Chief Calvin you're talking about.

NM: Yeah, you know him?

H: No, I never met him. I didn't get started on this work in time to meet him.

NM: Well, they was up there, you know. They had the dance up there, Indian dance. They put it on up there.

H: What do you think of that Indian dance?

NM: It's alright if children want to dance it. They want to dance it, alright with them. I never fooled around with that much. Sometime they have the big dance every now and then back up there.

H: Uh-huh. Before Calvin came along, did anybody ever, years and years ago, try to get money for the land?

NM: Oh yeah.

H: Who was somebody else that tried to get money for the land years and years ago?

NM: Well, I can hardly tell you that because that's been so long ago.

H: Uh-huh. But you remember it was a time before—

NM: I remember a meeting, a lot of them got in there and signed them up. My dad signed up me and my brother and all of them.

H: You were just a little boy at the time?

NM: I was just a little ol' bitty fella then. There come my wife now.

H: Do you know anything about plants that you can use for medicines that you can find in the woods?

NM: Yeah. Got your yellowroot.

H: Yellowroot? What's that a good medicine for?

NM: It's good for this here pellagra. My dad used to use that. My dad used to be a medicine man.

H: Did he?

NM: Yeah.

H: That'd be very interesting. Tell me what he did as a medicine man.

NM: I don't know now what he'd done with all that roots and things. He'd boil it and make medicine out of it. It's been years and years back. I don't know what all he did to it.

H: Did he travel any place to treat people?

NM: No.

H: I'll turn this off.

[Break in recording]

H: Did he ever talk to you about how he learned to be a medicine man?

NM: No, he never did. He never did tell me nothing about the medicine. He'd go in the woods. He'd go in the woods, and he'd get his medicine out of the woods. He'd never tell us what it was. He'd get a hold to this ginseng and yellowroot. He'd tell us about that.

H: What's ginseng good for?

NM: I don't know now what it's good for.

H: Did he treat people just in the community here?

NM: Just treat round down here. Pellagra. People who had that.

H: Did he ever treat white people or colored people at all?

NM: Yeah, sometimes. Sometimes. Some'd get medicine. He didn't never get around.

H: Would he give people medicine free?

NM: Well, sometimes he would.

H: But sometimes he'd charge for it?

NM: Yeah, sometimes he would. Sometimes he wouldn't, he'd give it to them free.

H: What was your daddy's name again?

NM: Frazier McGhee.

H: Frazier McGhee. He knew about the medicines in the woods, but he never taught it to you, which ones to use?

NM: No, no.

H: Did you ever watch him fix his medicines at home?

NM: No, none but yellowroot.

H: How did he fix that?

NM: Boil it.

H: Boil it?

NM: Uh-huh.

H: Did he ever do anything for people besides just giving them those herbs and things? Did he ever set bones or anything like that?

NM: No, I never did see him do nothing like that.

H: Did he ever pray for people when he would give them the medicine?

NM: Sometimes he would, yeah.

H: How would he do that? What did he do? Anything special?

NM: Get on his knees and pray for people.

H: Uh-huh. Would they be in the room when he'd do that?

NM: Sometimes they'd be in the bed. They'd be in the bed, they'd be sick. My daddy'd get him up. I remember one time, there's an old nigger. Old nigger, he swelled up and had to sit up in a chair to get his breath. He had to get his breath sitting up in the chair there. My daddy said, uncle, would you take some of my medicine if I fix you some? Yes sir, says, I'd take some of it if you'd fix me some. Well, he said, I'll fix you a quart jar full and I want you to take it twice a day. So he take that medicine, that old nigger taken it and that nigger got alright. He had what they called, you know of people to swell up, you know? Their legs all swelled up and all, I forget the name of what it was. He used these heart leaves. You ever seen heart leaves?

H: No, never have seen heart leaves.

NM: He'd go and get them heart leaves, and fix that medicine for that nigger. One morning I went out, I hauled hands to the fields.

H: You hauled hands to the fields?

NM: I did. I was picking butterbeans for a fellow back over here. One morning I went over there, picking butterbeans, and this old nigger was with me and he got off my truck. He

went to dancing that morning and said, I want to show you what a real doctor can do for you.

H: He was talking about your dad?

NM: Yeah. Said I've taken that medicine what he give me. I've taken about half a jar of it. Says, it's really done me good, I know it, 'cause I couldn't move my legs hardly. Now, he says, you see how I move them, don't you?

H: What did he do with the heart leaves?

NM: I don't know what he done with them, he fixed them with the medicine.

H: Did he have this man eat them or put them on his body or what?

NM: No, he had it in what looked like water. Had to drink that. That's good for you, drink that water. Good for your heart.

H: Have you ever made any yellowroot for yourself?

NM: No.

H: Never have?

NM: Nah. Where did you get that yellowroot?

OM: I have took some of that.

H: You've taken yellowroot?

OM: It's a bitter medicine, tastes like a **turnip**.

H: What did you take it for?

OM: For pellagra, I don't know what it was good for, but I know that the sun mostly done me this way. I'd crackle up and put it on. They said it was good for that.

NM: I know where I can get my truckload of that stuff.

H: What's your name again, ma'am?

OM: My name is Ollie Mae McGhee.

H: And your parents were who?

OM: Ollie Rolin and Luveda Rolin.

H: So your daddy really was able to fix people up then?

NM: Yeah, he was alright.

H: Did he ever tell you who he learned it from?

NM: Old Indians, old Indians. Them others were what was here long about them times, older heads.

H: What?

NM: Them older heads. When he was a boy, and learned it from them.

H: They knew about that, huh?

NM: Yeah, they knowed a little of everything.

H: I suppose they could talk in that Indian language.

NM: Oh yeah, them older heads could.

H: Did your daddy know a few words in the Indian language, do you think?

NM: Nah, he never did try to practice nothing' like that.

OM: We don't know the first word.

NM: We don't know none of that.

H: One thing I've heard about different people talk about, different people have different versions of it, and that's *sofke*. Do you know about *sofke*? Tell me about *sofke*.

NM: Well, you boil it, and you put some soda in it. Gotta get that husk off. Then you boil it and take it out and wash it.

OM: They used to beat it though first, didn't they?

NM: You can beat that, but regular *sofke*, what they get is whole corn.

OM: But I know they done mashed and beat it.

NM: You wash it, you put the soda it in, and get that husk off. Then you take it out and wash it and wash it. You can eat it alright. It's good.

OM: It's good.

H: Did you say, Mrs. McGhee, that some people used to beat it in something?

OM: Yeah.

H: What's that?

OM: They called it a **malaway**. They'd have a round thing, I don't know what they called it, but they used to put it in and beat it. A **malaway**, they'd beat this corn up.

H: That's before you put it in with soda, is that right? Then you just mix it with water to eat it, or how do you eat it?

OM: You cook it. Put a little soda in it, like my momma would.

H: And that's *sofke*, huh?

OM: Used to be good, my grandma and my momma did it that way.

H: Have you ever heard of a food called lazy jack?

OM: No, I don't believe I have, have you?

NM: No.

H: Never heard of that? You've always just called it *sofke*.

OM: Mm-hm.

H: How is *sofke* different from hominy?

NM: It's no different, I guess.

OM: They way they cooked it, I guess. Hominy is a little like grits. It'd be pretty dry, but with *sofke*, they would cook it and it would be kind of soupy-like, what I have had.

H: So your hominy is dry, but *sofke*, you cook it kind of like a soup. Do you season it with anything? Do you put any seasoning of any kind in it?

OM: Soda and salt, wasn't it?

NM: Salt. Put a little salt, a little whole grain corn, put you a little black pepper on it, and fry it.

H: You fried that? I've heard some say that *sofke* was real good for people that were sick.
Is that right?

NM: It is. *Sofke* is. Take a person that was sick, it was good for him.

OM: Kind of like a soup.

NM: Good for him to eat. Sometimes, I tell my wife, when I know I get to be sick and ain't got no appetite for nothing else to eat, I'll say, go out in the kitchen and put on me some meal. Make me a meal soup.

OM: Meal soup, I made meal soup.

H: Meal soup?

NM: Yeah, uh-huh.

OM: You just put you a little meal in some water.

NM: Make me a meal, put it in the water.

H: It's good, just plain old corn meal?

NM: Yeah, just plain old cornmeal.

OM: And you stirred it up good and you put you a pinch of salt in it. It's real good.

H: Ordinary baking soda you put in it?

NM: Just a little pinch in it.

H: And that's what you call meal soup.

OM: Right.

H: But *sofke* is when you got bigger kernels of grain cooked the same way?

OM: Yeah, you beat it up like that and then put it in. Used to call *sofke*, but the meal's finer, see. This makes a soup and you put plenty of black pepper—we love black pepper—and it makes it good.

H: I'd like to try some of that.

OM: It's good.

H: Getting back to sick people, do you ever remember your daddy or anybody ever, when somebody had a fever or something, trying to get them to sweat?

NM: Yeah. There's a little weed out there, boy, I can get you. It's really good for the fever.

H: What's it called?

NM: Fever grass.

H: Fever grass. Is there any growing around here anyplace?

NM: I don't know. I ain't never looked for none.

OM: Out in the woods, I imagine there is.

H: But what do you do with that fever grass?

NM: Fever grass . . .

H: I mean, how do you fix it? You make that into a tea, too?

NM: Yeah, make that out like a tea. Give them that tea.

H: Do you remember anybody ever trying to make people sweat out a fever any other way than giving them that? Like wrapping them up in blankets or anything?

NM: No. I've heard them tell about getting quinine, going to the drugstore, get some quinine. You can grease him good around on his head and all down about his shoulders. Then wrap him up and he'll sweat. I have done that one with my children. Go get you some, fix this quinine, but they won't sell it to you now.

H: They won't?

NM: No.

H: Do you ever remember hearing the old folks talk about to get people to sweat, building like a little tent and putting people in there and pouring something over rocks or anything, hot rocks?

NM: Yeah, I've seen them put these here irons. You know them smoothing irons? You heat them up, you know, wrap them up and put them in the bed with you.

OM: In the bed with you? I heard about that, but I didn't hardly know what to . . .

NM: I imagine they would put these old rocks in there, you'd get them hot. But I put a smoothing iron in the bed with them, make them sweat. It'll sure make them sweat, too.

H: Changing subjects again, you mentioned that you used to haul hands to the field. Could you talk a little bit about how you got started in that work, of hauling hands?

NM: Well, I just go and get me a job, you know. Hauling up these hands.

H: Uh-huh. How did you get your first job doing that?

NM: I go where the man looked like he got a lot of weeds out there in the field. I go and see him. I'll get me a job, bringing some hands to you, pull these weeds out.

H: And where would you go to get your hands?

NM: Different places. I wouldn't have to go, they'd come to me.

H: They'd come to you, huh? Did you ever haul hands a long ways away from here? Do you ever go out of Escambia County, for example?

NM: No, I never did go out of Escambia County. I just stayed round down in here.

OM: We've been to Monroe County.

H: Monroe County?

OM: Picking up—

NM: Well I been picking at the same, but that's not the same. Not Escambia County.

OM: Monroe County is different, after you come to a river—

H: Is hauling hands and farming, is that the only kind of work you've done in your life—

NM: Yeah.

H: —or have you done other things, too?

OM: No, you have worked shipyards, too.

NM: I've worked shipyards, shipping.

H: Shipyards where?

NM: In Mobile.

H: What kind of work did you do in the shipyards?

NM: First one little thing and then the other, I didn't have no particular job. I could do most any of it around, small jobs, you know, ship. One thing or the other.

H: Did you get much education yourself?

NM: No, no.

H: How much education did you get?

NM: I got on, I got on to the chalk and stayed there.

H: Got what?

NM: I got on the chalk, what they call them, the chalk. Where you done your ABCs. And I just stayed there. I never did get no higher.

H: How long were you in school?

NM: Wasn't long. I just quit.

H: Where did you go?

NM: Spent at home, stayed home.

H: You stayed at home and learned on that?

NM: I couldn't learn nothing, there wasn't no use to go.

H: [Laughter]

OM: You could if you wanted to.

NM: Well, what I do—my daddy and mother'd send me to school. Then I'd go about a mile down the road like I was going to school, you know. I'd go up a ditch and stay hid out up there. [Laughter] One morning, my dad followed me. I didn't know he was behind me. He followed me. Some of the rest of the children told on me, I wasn't going to school. The teacher, he had done told him I wasn't never there. He ain't coming to school, and he had told him that, I send him every day. Says, I send him every morning. Well, he ain't coming. So I reckon he decided he'd watch me one morning. I went on like I was going to school, and when I got to my place, I just switched off and went up the ditch. I lay out up there 'til it was time for them, I could hear them coming in. I'd get with them and go on to the house just like I had been to school. [laughter]

H: But he caught you, huh?

NM: Yeah, he walked up on me, you know. I was up in there laying down up in there. I had a place there wallowed out, plumb clean up in there. Cold up in there, though, but I stood it, make me up a little fire. I'd carry me a box of matches with me, make me a fire. Stay around that fire up in there.

H: I guess he got after you, didn't he?

NM: He didn't only get after me, he put a switch on me.

H: He did.

[break in recording]

H: Where was he sending you to school at that time?

NM: Up there at Keego.

H: Keego? Where is that?

NM: That's up there close to Brewton.

H: It's close to Brewton.

OM: Between Brewton and Atmore.

H: Were you living out here at the time?

NM: Unh-uh. I was living up there close to Brewton, way on up towards Brewton up there.

H: So when you were a boy, you didn't always live around here?

NM: No, I was just a boy. This is my old home, I was born here.

H: Did your daddy have a farm over there or what?

NM: Yeah, he farmed over there some.

H: Did he own a place over there?

NM: Yeah. He married up in there. My mother died, and he married another woman up there.

H: Back to one other thing that I've heard some other people mention, I wonder if you've ever seen it. Way back years ago, instead of cooking in the fireplace, people building like a table out of logs outside and cooking on that. Did you ever see that?

NM: Mostly cooked on fireplaces.

H: Did they?

NM: Most of them cooked on fireplaces, yeah. Stick and dirt chimney.

H: Did you ever remember seeing people cook on like a table thing outside?

NM: No, got to have maybe a fire outside there.

OM: I have a long time ago. The older ones had a big round thing like a skillet with it, it was on little legs and they'd bake biscuits outside. They'd put a top, they'd have a—we call it a oven now or something, and they'd put a fire on top of that outside.

NM: Bake biscuits out there.

OM: They could cook anything . . . they'd put it in there and put the top on it, put fire coals on top of it, and it'd bake through. I saw them do that long years ago, but I can't remember too much about it. But I have seen them do that.

H: Well, what do you think has been, since you were growing up, what do you think has been the biggest change that's taken place in your lifetime in the life of Indian people out here in this area?

NM: Well, I couldn't hardly say that. Mostly in my life now, is going to church. That's the reason we've quieted down, more quieter than they was long when I was growing up. They're more quieter, 'cause they go to church mostly.

H: Now, you're talking about?

NM: Yeah. When I was growing up, they was mean.

H: They were, huh? [laughter]

OM: Fighting.

NM: They'd bite, scratch, and do every other thing. But now, you see, they've sort of fizzled down, and church commenced round about. They've sort of quieted down, realized the preacher tell them about heaven and hell, you know, and different places. You go to that bad place, if you don't do good. So they've sort of quieted down.

H: What did people used to fight over when you were a boy?

NM: Different things, you know. They get mad about the girls. [Laughter] Get whiskey in them, and they'd fight you right now. They didn't care about what's coming.

OM: But things sure have been changed since then. One thing, we've improved is electric lights and all of that. Then electric lights and the water. We used to have to tote water a long ways when we'd get water.

NM: Oh yeah.

OM: And all of that's improved. Now we have most anything we want, able to buy it.

H: Is there anything that you think was better in the old days than it is now?

NM: No. I don't never think about something like that, old days. No. It's these times.

OM: Seems like everybody got along good.

NM: They got along; getting along pretty good now.

OM: And seemed like to me, I believe, that the people lived longer.

H: You think people lived longer?

OM: I believe that they do. Used to be years and years, it seemed like there weren't people that passed away.

NM: Older heads lived long. They didn't go down here to these doctors like they do now. No, they didn't go to these doctors like they did then. Never heard of no appendicitis, or run out for a doctor for every little thing. Those older heads get medicine out of the woods, and give medicine out of the woods. They'd get alright.

H: They didn't have to go to the doctor?

OM: I've got a brother down there now. I went down there this morning, he's in hospital. Well, the doctor don't seem like—they don't know his trouble. I know what's the matter, he had a stroke way on back, but they seem like they don't know his condition now yet. They said they about done what they could for him, but I went in this morning, he's doing pretty good. Sat up and talked, sat up on the bed. But the doctors, I don't think they knows too much about what's the matter 'cause he's said he's about done what he

could for him. But he said he felt pretty good this morning, but I think . . . they thought maybe he could have had TB, but it don't show up, no symptom of the TB.

H: He's in Atmore hospital?

OM: Yes. And he said he was doing pretty good, he rested good last night.

H: Talking about doctors and things, I never met him, but I heard there was a medicine man by the name of Norman.

NM: Norman? My brother.

H: That's your brother?

NM: My brother.

H: And he used to go places with Calvin and things?

OM: Yes.

H: Now he must have learned it from your dad, or what?

NM: Yeah.

H: Tell me about him and his practice of medicine. [Laughter] What did he do?

OM: Oh.

NM: Him and my dad, go into the woods and get medicine. They'd fix it up. I never paid no attention to them; I wasn't interested in nothing like that. Well I wouldn't never be around like much like that. Now, my sister could tell you more about it than I could, but she's in New Mexico. Me and her were talking about it the other day, about how—

OM: You was working while they were doing that thing.

NM: Yeah I was working. And while all that was going on, they was fixing medicine.

H: Where were you working?

NM: I was working around different places. I don't pay no attention to them and what they was doing. In fact, I didn't know what they was getting.

H: Was Norman older or younger?

NM: Oh yeah, he was older. Way older than I was.

H: But he kept up the medicine later on in his life?

NM: Oh yeah, yeah. Uh-huh.

OM: They'd call him the medicine man.

NM: Call him the medicine man. Give me that book and let me show him that medicine man over yonder.

H: Let me just say, Mr. McGhee has on his wall here a picture of his dad and his sister with feathers on and something around their shoulders, looking like Indians. Could you tell me when that picture was taken?

NM: No, I couldn't.

H: Was that sister older than you?

NM: No. She's younger than I am.

H: What was the occasion for them putting the feathers on like that?

NM: Well, you know, that was—they just wanted to have that picture for knowing they was an Indian. Had it taken, knowing they was Indian people. They just put it on.

H: And where was that picture taken?

NM: Where was the picture?

OM: It might have been in Baton Rouge. She lived in Baton Rouge, Louisiana for a while and now she lives in Slidell. But I think that might have been taken in Baton Rouge, I don't know for sure, but I think it is.

H: She was a grown woman in that picture there?

OM: Yes, yeah.

H: She looks quite young.

NM: [Laughter]

OM: Yeah, she was.

H: So they decided to just put some feathers on and get a picture taken because they knew they were Indian?

NM: Uh-huh.

H: When did your daddy die?

NM: Do you know when he died?

OM: It's been a long time, I can hardly put it—

NM: In [19]24, wasn't it?

H: It could've been.

NM: It was [19]24, I believe it was.

H: Looks like he wore a moustache, is that right?

NM: Did, uh-huh, had a mustache.

OM: I got a better picture of it, and you can see.

H: He had that moustache all his life?

NM: Yeah, ever since he was big enough to let it grow out.

OM: Here's a better picture.

H: Do you remember when you were a boy if there were any other Indian men who wore moustaches like your daddy?

NM: No, I don't.

OM: My daddy had one.

H: He wore it all the time? Mm-hmm.

OM: Had it all the time.

NM: Some of them was older than my dad, but they was clean. Old Man Ellick Rolin, Old Man Sam Rolin, all of them didn't have no moustache.

H: Did any of, like, Ellick Rolin and Sam Rolin, did they know how to talk Indian language, do you think?

NM: They could talk a little of it.

H: They could talk a little of it.

NM: Not much, but they could talk a little of it.

H: Why do you think people being Indian and having a picture taken with feathers on and so forth, why do you think it was that the Indian language disappeared? People didn't keep them—

NM: Well, see, white people was in here and taught school. They was teaching their language, and they just got in with it and taught it.

OM: We never was taught the Indian . . .

NM: I know they taught them things.

H: At home, your parents would all talk English only?

OM: Yes. Always.

NM: We was out yonder the other day, I was going to New Mexico back out in there. They could talk out there and we didn't know what they was saying.

OM: We couldn't understand them.

NM: You couldn't understand them. We know our language, but we couldn't understand that.

H: Did you talk to quite a few Indians when you were in New Mexico?

NM: No.

H: You didn't?

NM: No. We couldn't understand them.

H: 'Cause they were talking their language.

NM: They was talking their language. You couldn't understand what they're saying. I'd like to know what it is, but we couldn't understand them.

H: One other thing that I'm trying to get—

NM: Only thing what we could understand was they'd come by here and throw up their hand, say ah.

H: You could understand that. [laughter] One thing that I've heard a lot of times, and each person seems to be able to add a little bit more to it—could you tell me what you know of the story of Lynn McGhee and how he got his land here?

NM: No—

H: What you'd heard from your parents, and so forth?

NM: I...I couldn't tell you a thing about that. Only you can go down to Calvin's wife and she could give you the history of it, 'cause she's got the books and things.

H: Do you remember whether, when you were a boy, did the old people talk about Lynn McGhee back then at all?

NM: Well, yeah, they'd talk about Lynn McGhee and all that. Yeah. See that picture up there? That's my great, great gran-daddy.

H: It is? What was his name?

NM: Jack Moniac.

OM: I think that's Sam Moniac.

NM: Jack Moniac.

OM: Sam.

NM: That's Sam Moniac.

H: That's Sam Moniac, he's your great-great-granddaddy?

NM: Yeah. Yeah.

H: His daughter married—

NM: They got him in there somehow or another, I don't know. I never did see him, but that's his picture.

OM: That there's his picture, says his daddy.

H: He was quite a handsome man. You know, you kind of favor him a little bit, too.

[Laughter]

NM: See that there thing, read over there, tells you what that is.

H: The picture of Sam Moniac, he's got on a medal that says George Washington, President 1792. How did you come by that picture?

NM: Calvin had got all of that there, you know. So I had a picture made from it. So he had a picture and I had one drawn from it.

OM: And his sister and his daughter had one.

NM: My daughter had one made from it.

OM: His daughter had a bigger one than that one. All of them had one made. His sister got a picture from Calvin McGhee, they made one from it.

NM: They had one made.

H: Seeing that picture reminds me of another question. When you were a very small boy, do you remember ever seeing any of the old, old people—men—that wore their hair long?

NM: No, they didn't wear it long.

H: Never did?

NM: None of our folks down here. They didn't wear no hair long.

H: Did people do their own hair-cutting back in those days?

NM: Yeah.

H: Uh-huh. Just scissors and comb, or did they have clippers?

NM: They had scissors—

OM: He used to cut hair himself.

NM: —I used to cut hair myself.

OM: Cut lots of it.

H: Did you cut hair for money? Did you make money?

NM: No. Cut it just for couple of them.

OM: His daughter, now, she do's her own cutting.

NM: My daughter round here, she comes down and cuts my hair now.

H: Does she? That's a good haircut you've got there.

NM: I ain't had a haircut in a good while.

OM: She does her husband's, her sons', both daughters, granddaughters. She cuts quite a bit.

NM: Don't get no money for it. [Laughter] Go down there and get her to cut it off.

H: Well, let me ask you one last question sort of thing to think about. You say things have gotten—electricity and all those kind of things—have gotten better for the Indian people. What do you think lies in the future for the Indians of Alabama? What's to come in the years ahead, do you think?

NM: Well . . . the Indian, what's best coming to them—the lights, the water.

OM: He said coming in ahead for the Indian people.

H: What do you think is in the future for the Indian people?

NM: Oh, I don't know.

H: You don't know?

NM: No.

OM: I hope it will be something good. [Laughter]

NM: I hope it'd be something good. But I couldn't tell you. I been fooled too much about this money proposition. I'm scared to say.

H: They still haven't come through yet?

NM: They haven't come through yet, I ain't seen it.

H: Now did you get your papers back?

OM: Yeah.

H: You did get your papers back.

NM: Yeah.

H: I guess that's something you been hearing about all your life.

NM: Oh yeah. We ain't heard nothing. How we gonna get paid off, but you never know when.

H: You haven't seen the money yet.

NM: I haven't seen no money, no. I'd love to get my money back while I'm out here. If they ain't gonna pay me, I'd love to get my money back.

H: How much money did you have to put into it?

NM: Well, we put a lot of money in.

H: What'd you put the money in for?

NM: Why, we had to help Calvin. Wanted to go to Washington so much, first one thing and another like that. He had to be helped, you know he's a poor man just like we was. We had to help him. We'd have meetings back up in here. He'd have to go to Washington every now and then to meet other lawyers and things. He'd have to go up there.

H: That reminds me of another question. Before Calvin came along, do you remember whether, back before he became the chief, was there ever anybody in the community who was kind of a leader? Who directed things or not?

NM: No. There wasn't nobody else around here tried to lead them. There was people come in here and try to say they'd get that money for them.

H: But you don't remember anybody from the community who was a leader, any Indian who was a leader?

OM: They didn't act like no chief that I know of.

NM: They didn't act like no chief, only this Calvin. We appointed him for the chief.

[End of Interview]

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