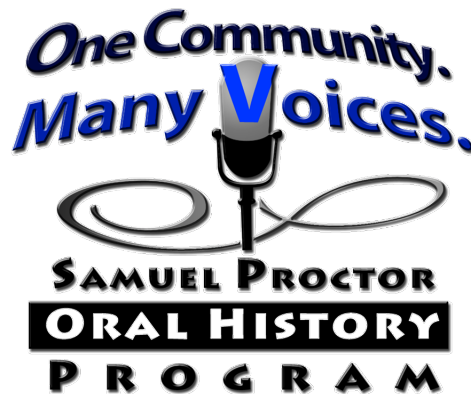


Baxter York

**Southeastern Indian Oral History Project
MISS CHOC-016**

Interview by:

**Annie Williams and Danny Chicaway
July 5, 1973**



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MISS CHOC 016 Baxter York
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16 minutes | 7 pages

Abstract: Baxter York speaks about his time as a member of the Choctaw Tribal council. He tells about the first Tribal council and why it came to be. He also explains that anyone that is at least half-Choctaw by blood can be welcomed into the Mississippi Band of Choctaw Indians, regardless of where they were born. He ends by answering questions about holding Tribal office.

Keywords: [Mississippi Band of Choctaw Indians; Mississippi--Choctaw; Tribal history; Politics and government]

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

MISS CHOC 016

Interviewee: Baxter York

Interviewer: Annie Williams and Danny Chicaway

Date of Interview: July 5, 1973

C: July 5. We're interviewing Baxter York on Tribal government, interviewing Annie Williams and Danny Chicaway. Baxter, did you hold an office in our Tribal government as kind of a chairman of something?

Y: No, I was a member of the temporary Tribal council back in the [19]30s and [19]40s until [19]45. That was on a temporary Tribal council, then [19]40, [19]45 I helped organize this Tribal organization by sitting in and suggest some of the items would benefit the Choctaws, I thought. And they wrote it down where they call it constitution and bylaws. Reason why we organized at that time was that we didn't have no kind of organization. Everybody were considered individuals. So, on little money involved, which was about forty thousand dollars, that Shell Oil Company put out to lease the land for oil. Then they want to know who was going to receive this money. So, we decide to organize and start putting the money in the Tribal treasury. A man came down from the Washington office, Judge Reeves. He is the man that came down, so we sat down and put in some suggestions and so on while he wrote up the constitution and bylaws. Then thirty percent have to vote to accept this organization, so they went ahead and issued out election whether they accept the organization. That's when it first began to operate as a Tribal government.

C: When was this beginning?

Y: That was back between [19]40 and [19]45—I'm pretty sure it was there. I don't know the exact date, I have to look it up, but then that was ... So, this organization was set up to help the Choctaws come out of their poverty. They

were deep in poverty the time in 1918 when the agency established an agency here. The Choctaws didn't have nothing—no land, no nothing. All they had to do was look up to the landlord and the white people, and the white people used them for cheap labor and maybe just bread and butter, and they use you for labor. So, they come in to help you get out of the poverty. The agency was established here to get out of the poverty. Then you're supposed to help yourself to get out of the poverty, and that's the reason why Tribe is supposed to set up a good concrete program, realize the income from all direction in order to pile up the money—what they call a Tribal treasury. Then, if we have that kind of money today, we could draw out so much, lay it aside here, and ask the government to match it. The government is supposed to match it, double the amount so you'll have some to operate with, whatever improvement you want to make. And that's the way it's supposed to operate. They let us have the timber, grass, dirt, rocks, sand, and mud and whatever we can find in the land—oil and so on. That's what they give us, and the government is supposed to take care of the school, health, and the welfare. Those three things that the government is supposed to take care of, and the rest of it we are supposed to come up and bring up, set up a concrete program, as I say, and begin to pile up the money in what we call a Tribal treasury. Then we have to look at our treasury in order to make any kind of improvements that we want for the benefit of the Choctaws.

C: Do you know how large was the first council?

Y: First established council—which, it was temporary—and that was: Bird Isaac, he's living today; old man Simpson Tubby, he's dead; and my mother, Niecy

York. That's Bird Isaac, Simpson Tubby, and Niecy York. They were the first temporary Tribal council that was elected in this country here, in Mississippi.

C: How many communities were there at that time, do you know?

Y: Recognized community was—I think there was all of seven.

C: This government, was it different from today?

Y: No, it's no different.

W: No changes?

Y: No changing. They're trying to improve some of the—they're trying to put amendment on the constitution and bylaws that we wrote at that time. They're trying to change it, but this last time they were voted down not to change. They change one of the item not too long ago—it was several years ago that they changed one item—was that any child was born outside of the state of Mississippi, they open their door for him. That's one changes that they made, the open door for these child that could come in and enroll with us in the Choctaw roll here, Mississippi Band of Choctaw Indians.

C: Do you know when the Indians in general was considered United States citizens? At that time?

Y: Yeah. Right. In detail, I'll go back and say that during World War I, our Choctaw people didn't have nothing, so our older ones said, "We haven't got nothing. We haven't got land, we haven't got nothing. So, our boys shouldn't go to war." So, the report went in to the Washington office. That's how come they established agency here, to help the Choctaws out of the poverty. Well, then some of our boys went anyway, so that qualified bring an agency here in order to help the

Choctaws. Well, then after World War I was won by United States, why then the Congress of the United States decided that they'll recognize all Indians in United States, so they made them citizens of the United States in 1924.

[Break in recording]

C: Baxter, is our bylaws formed in the same pattern as the United States Constitution?

Y: Yes. When the Anglo race of people came across the water and set up their form of government here in past, back in 1776 or [177]7, that's what they call the constitution—the United States constitution and bylaws. All right, we took one chip of the United States constitution and bylaws in order to organize the organization that we have today.

C: Do you know why the United States government banned Chiefs, you know, for our leaders?

Y: Well, we have to go back during the treaties on one, that particular question you ask. In the treaty, they were one Nation. It was one big Nation, covers all Mississippi and part of Alabama, part of Louisiana, part of Arkansas where the Choctaws expand and occupy those places. They were called one big Choctaw Nation at that time. Then the government came along and made the treaty with the Choctaws, and the Choctaws went ahead and made the deal with them. Most all of the Choctaws supposed to go to Oklahoma when the deal went through. But some of the Choctaws that didn't want to go, didn't want to leave their original home, which is Mississippi. Why, then, they stayed. They wasn't gonna move. So, what we call remnant of the main Nation stayed—that's how come we're here

today. So, when that treaty was made back in 1830, and they started moving 1832, [18]34, back in that area, the state of Mississippi began to come in and form what we call statehood. So, statehood was formed, and then they had their own constitution and bylaws and the state here began to cut it up for counties and the communities and so on. The state legislature are the ones that made this law saying that we couldn't have a head man. So, they abolished that Chief—we can't have no Chief, and they put a fine on of maybe a thousand dollars and so many years in jail or penitentiary, whatever you want to call it. So, that's how come the Chieftain was abolished by state legislature back in the—right after the treaty.

C: Is our bylaws now different from any Tribe or is it the same?

Y: Not too much. It's only blood. We have to go by the blood to be recognized Choctaw, so we put down one-half or more Indian blood, could be recognized as Choctaw blood, could be on the roll. That's where we said that the child born outside of Mississippi could enroll here if he or she would have one-half or more Indian blood.

W: Choctaw blood or Indian?

Y: Choctaw blood, and if I were a spouse—we call it spouse if you're married to a White man or a White woman. White woman would be called spouse, and if you are married to a White woman we call it spouse. So, if she's a White and you're a Choctaw, pure-blood Choctaw, full-blood Choctaw, why then that would make him one-half Choctaw, see. So, you recognize one-half to go to school here, receive benefits here, go in school, live in dormitories, go into free hospital and

so on. That's what they're talking about when we say one-half or more Choctaw blood would be recognized on the roll and that's why this setup was set up like that.

C: Baxter, we're going to the first part now. How long did you hold your position in office?

Y: I was member of the Tribal council five years temporary. Then I went a whole five years or six years, maybe, two years at a time after we organized. So that's how long I hold the Tribal office. I mighta hold some more far as that goes, but they put me in the government job—engineering crew with BIA. And ever since I got in that organization, why then, they said I couldn't participate in the Tribal affairs, because I was considered a government man. So that knocked me out from participating in Tribal affairs up till this time.

C: How long was a term in office back then?

Y: Two years.

C: Two years in office. Do you have any questions?

W: How old do you have to be in a Tribal office?

Y: There is no age limit. Twenty-one on up can hold office.

C: How about sex? Does it have to be a man or a woman to hold an office?

Y: Both.

C: That's it, I guess.

[End interview]

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