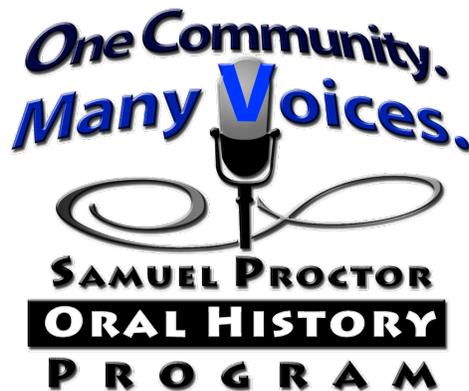


Robert Benn

**Southeastern Indian Oral History Project
MISS CHOC-034**

Interview by:

**Staff of Nanih Waiya
September 2, 1976**



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

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>

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Abstract: Robert Benn, Superintendent of the Choctaw Tribe and full-blooded Choctaw, reflects on the current state of the school system today. Benn discusses the duties of the superintendent, his professional background, and his family relations. He also goes on to talk about his students, covering both the Choctaw and South Louisiana Chitimacha Tribes, and the various schools under his jurisdiction. He talks about the funding source of the education system, major programs, and potential areas of improvement. The interview wraps with Benn's comments on the future of the Indian students improving with a better education system.

Keywords: [Mississippi Band of Choctaw Indians; Mississippi; Education; Community and Family Life]

SAMUEL PROCTOR
ORAL HISTORY
PROGRAM
University of Florida

MISS CHOC 034

Interviewee: Robert Benn

Interviewer: Staff of Nanih Waiya

Date of Interview: September 2, 1976

U: Interview Mr. Robert Benn, Superintendent of Choctaw Tribe.

[Break in recording]

U: What are your duties as superintendent?

B: The duties of superintendent here is basically supervisory. It's to make sure that all the programs here connected with the Bureau of Indian Affairs are running correctly and to make sure that we've been doing the job that we're supposed to be doing. And that includes several areas of operation that we do have. So, it's mainly supervisory.

U: Could you tell us a little about your background?

B: Well, I'm a full-blooded Choctaw to begin with [Laughter] and a native of this part of the country, I guess. Some people call it yokel, yokel, you know, that kind of stuff. And I grew up in Standing Pine as most of you know. Spent a few years in school, finished college in Mississippi College in Clinton, Mississippi in 1956—it's longer than I want to think about, twenty years ago. And then I spent seven years with the United States Navy on the Pacific Ocean mainly. Did service there and about two years down in the naval station at New Orleans. Resigned my commission and came back to this part of the country, worked for a while with the Carthaginian newspaper in Carthage, and I came to the bureau ten years ago as a housing officer. It was almost four years ago is when I became superintendent. October tenth, I believe.

U: Who appointed you?

B: I was appointed by the Area Director, Eastern Area, in Washington.

U: Were you a disc jockey at Forest?

B: No, I never was.

U: How long **would you say** your term was?

B: As a superintendent? There is no set years or set month that you have to serve. There's no term like—

U: You're appointed?

B: Appointed, and then as long as you give bosses satisfaction with your work and as long as the Tribe is satisfied with my work, then here we are. And then again, you know, it also depends on me as a person, too. As long as I feel like I'm doing the job, then I'm here.

U: You're the first Choctaw superintendent, aren't you?

B: Mississippi Choctaw. I think there was a superintendent back in the early fifties, I believe, he was part Choctaw from Oklahoma. Mr. **Harland**. I don't know whether many of you remember him or not. He was part Choctaw.

U: What programs are—

B: Under the jurisdiction here?

U: Uh-huh.

B: Well, the Choctaw Agency serves two Tribes. Of course, the big Tribe here is the Choctaw. The small Tribe is South Louisiana Chitimacha Tribe. The services we do provide is—the biggest one, of course, is the education system. The biggest in employees, and the biggest in budget, and I think also the biggest in the region of Indian people who work with the budget. And, of course, we are also responsible for the operation of the criminal justice system: the police officers,

the police system, and also we provide technical service to court of written offenses for Choctaw Tribe. And another responsibility we do have is the operation of the social services program, which includes the general assistance program to people in need and providing child welfare services to Indian children who are in need and are neglected or abused and don't have a proper home, those type of Indian children. And then we're also responsible for the operation of the facilities—the government facilities like the schools. We take care of the maintenance, we take care of the repairs, we pay the light bills and the gas bills, and various other things that takes care of the facility—that's the plant management section. We are also responsible for the construction of new roads and maintenance of the existing roads, putting the gravel on and the paving. If there's a need for new roads, then we do design those and have 'em constructed. And then several other programs—we do have one that is revolving credit. For those couple Indian people who can't get credit for their needs elsewhere, then revolving credit is available to borrow money for various purposes like going to college, building a house, or setting up a business, things of that nature. Then also within that we do have a leasing section of having the Tribe on—running their leases on the tribal land. Families want to lease land to build a house, lease land to farm, or to have a pasture, or to set up a business, most, I think, can take care of that. Of course, another section we have here is forestry. Takes care of family trees and maintaining the correct procedures for forestry matters. We also take care of lumber, timber cutting, and peripheral cutting. We also take care of pest control. We have these bugs that get in the

trees and stuff like that, and also fire protection, forest fires. Another section we have here is the main administrative section. These are the people who takes care of all the personnel matters: finding the food, the supplies, the material that is needed to help the operation. Also, they are responsible for the proper care of the property, the government property, that we use here. We also take care of the records. We also take care of the tribal enrollment, maintain the enrollment of the Choctaw Tribe. So, I believe that's about the extent of it. We have several things that we don't have a particular section being taken care of, several areas of operation, but we try to handle it from here. So, for instance, planning—long-range planning by the operation agency—and also the assistance in the Tribe and various other things. Also, we try to—if the Tribe asks us provide some sort of assistance administratively or some sort of technical areas that they want assistance, then we are obligated to do that.

U: What is your salary?

B: My salary is—let me see. [Laughter] Okay. My salary is 25,651 dollars a year. I don't know how's that break down monthly. I hope to get a raise next month. [Laughter] Government people supposed to get a raise next month.

[Break in recording]

U: How many students have enrolled into the school?

B: This year?

U: Uh-huh.

B: As of August thirty, we've got 1,193. That's all the seven elementary school and the high school. So, I'm sure we'll have some more. This here is just the first two

weeks of school. I've had a working school in the middle of August, so I imagine that we'll have some people coming in another month or so.

U: Including other Indians?

B: Yeah. We do have millions of other Indians going to school here. Of course, Chitimacha is considered, you know, part of our system, so they come in. Sometimes we have members of other Tribes coming in, only one or two. Of course, I think most of you pretty well know what school system we operate on. Because I think we operate in every community except Bogue Homa, giving us six elementary schools here and then one down in Chitimacha. Of course, Choctaw Central is also a high school section now. And this year we're going into eventually changing into an elementary school, a middle school, and then the high school. This is the expression of going into the middle school concept. So, we used to call it junior high, now we're going to call it middle school.

U: How come you're not operating in Bogue Homa?

B: Well, the school used to be operated down in Bogue Homa since—when was it ... 1966 and [19]67 years is the last time it was operated, about ten years ago. It was finally decided that back then, that it might be best for the Indian students to go to public school down there, mainly because we just had one teacher down there and I think the enrollment was about twenty—eighteen to twenty, something like that. We felt like money could be very well spent within public school, which the community agreed, and so the students down there go to public school. 'Cause we do provide a little bit of assistance. On average, about ten thousand dollars a year on the funds from the Johnson-O'Malley Act, which is

to take care of some of the expenses that parents have to spend for the children. Like workbooks, if they have to have workbooks, and band equipment, insurance for their playing on the athletics, you know, those types of things. Of course, we have some—paid half-time salary, I think, for a teacher last year, and also, we paid for a person to be leaned on between the community and school system, and we had money and it falled down under that. But all in all, they're all in public school.

U: What are the qualifications for being superintendent?

B: Basically is, of course, experience in management and running an organization and dealing with the people of human relationship there and experience in handling the money, budgeting. And, also, I think it's helpful also that the person knows something about the Indian Tribe with whom he's working. There's a lot of things that you make decisions from this desk here that you should know what the people are thinking about, what will most benefit to most people. I've had to work out programs that might be needed, and I think that is a big factor. You pretty well have a pretty good idea of what the Tribe wants. And of course, always have to of getting some, you know, higher education, college degrees. Of course, that is not required as such, but, you know, some of the superintendent around the country here are not college graduates. But they do though have experience that make up for that time. Maybe some of you people might be interested in being one. There's no requirements that it has to be a man.

[Laughter]

U: Can a woman be a superintendent?

B: Yeah, a woman can be a superintendent, and I believe within the bureau there's one lady superintendent. I believe in Turtle Mountain Agency. So, it's wide open.

U: Tell us about your family.

B: Well, I'm married to a local Choctaw here and we've got two children, two girls. One of 'em is in the first grade now at Choctaw Central. One, I don't know what she'll become, she's still at home. [Laughter] And, of course, my family, I come from a family of four. We all grew up down in Standing Pine and are pretty well scattered out now.

U: Where does your wife work?

B: She's not working. Housewife, I guess, as you call it. [Laughter]

U: What was the school budget this past year?

B: This past year? This'll be based on fiscal years, which is, you know, a government way of keeping the money. It was 2,172,000.

U: You make the plans for the school, too, don't you?

B: Yes, we do. Really going into curriculum and what classes are going to be taught, what courses are going to be taught, those type of thing. I pretty well leave it up to the education people, our education program administrative.

U: Any new programs added?

B: But I'm still responsible for the, you know, operation as superintendent. Of course, in next fiscal year beginning October one, we'll have 2,351,900 dollars for the school budget. Out of this school budget what we do is we pay for the salaries of the teachers and the aides, and we pay the salaries of the bus drivers and the custodian people. We pay for the salaries of some of the aides who are

in the classroom, and also, we pay for the dormitory people and we also pay for the food service people, cooks in the kitchen. And also from that we buy the supplies and materials that's needed in the school, and we buy the food, and we also pay for the long-distance telephone calls and you know, what it needs to run the school system. Bus rental and some of the car rental that we have to have our guys to visit the schools, and also we do pay the travel for people who travel. And in some cases, student travel, too, we pay—football games, the Indian Chorus going somewhere, various places.

U: What kinds of plans do you have for the future of the school system?

B: Well, right now, as far as extracurricular activity, I think we're pretty well up to par. I think that many of the high schools now are—special ed program is coming along pretty good, and I believe the music department is coming along pretty good. And, of course, the main emphasis right now is improving the curriculum. 'Cause, to me, that's the basis of our existence here, is to teach the Indian children and—classrooms that's where, you know, the children are being taught, and I think the main emphasis should be put there. I'm not entirely satisfied with the curriculum that we do offer now and certainly we want to improve that so that the Indian children going through school now will have the skills and the education they'll be needing in the future years. And of course, the dormitory programs, I think we can improve quite a bit there. When I first came here as a superintendent, one of the things I was not happy about was the dormitory operations, mainly because it appeared that it was just a place to keep children and that's it, and I think dormitory should be more than that. I think learning can

be going on in the dormitories after school hours, and I also think the dormitory should be a little bit like home. It'll never be home, I know, but I think we can do something that the students would like to do, who stay there. And we've kind of started the program of this career awareness thing last year, and we hope to continue that. I think the big thing there was that most of the students may not or do not want to go on to college. I think that we can come to a point, and we can at least make the student aware that there are professions available to them that maybe they want to pursue it later in life. That is the main thing we started up and I think we need to continue that. And of course, we've talked about there's other things that I've been planning about the school system, and we've talked about making a vocational school. Maybe we ought to start that. Eventually, I think even the Tribal Council passed a resolution of having a possibility of a community college here on the reservation. Of course, those are some things that we're kicking around. We don't know if it'll come about, but, of course, if you don't have dreams, you know, you can't get anywhere, because they're still dreams. But I think with a lot of hard work and a lot of cooperation and everybody working together, we want a lot of these dreams to come true. Certainly, I think one of the aims that we've had is the developing of the skills of the right teachers. When we get our teachers, they all have college degrees, and they are certified to teach within the state of Mississippi, and that kind of stuff. But then again, I think that, as human beings, there's a lot of things that we can do that they can improve ourselves and certainly I think that's the thing that I think we should

have, too, to improve the capability of the teachers, to polish up their abilities, so they can provide the best service that they can.

U: Do you enjoy working as a superintendent?

B: Yeah, I certainly do. A superintendent, like I say, you know, a superintendent is responsible for all the operations here. Day-to-day affairs, day-to-day duties, you know, it's different almost from day to day, from week to week. There's always something new comes up. Of course, as a superintendent, I think the main thing is the people with whom he works. Certainly, the Choctaw Tribe, I think, is one of the more progressive Tribes in the country, and I think there's a lot of things that's going on in the reservation here. There's good things. You see something new coming up, and the atmosphere here I think is good, and I enjoy it, and it's exciting. We start planning some things and a few months later—maybe, seven years later—you see something come up that we talked about two or three years ago, and it makes you feel good. And I've always said that the—if this position becomes a job for me, then that's the day I'll quit. I hope it never gets to that point. [Laughter] But I still enjoy, you know, working here and I like it. If it just becomes a mere job for me, then it's time for me to move along.

U: What did you major in college?

B: I majored in speech. Emphasis on television and radio, announcing, programming, doing a lot of commercials. [Laughter] So, I'm not so sure, that's a good prerequisite for being superintendent. But I think that, you know, as far as the human relationship part of it and dealing with people, I think that is a help. 'Cause the whole idea was communications, getting your point across to the

people and vice versa, that way I expected. The only thing now in we're selling progress and improving the reservation instead of selling something. Something like that, tires and cars, stuff like that. Of course, there are problems here, and I think there's a lot of things going on here that we're quite proud of, I think. Some of the progress that's been made on the reservation, some of the problems that may be solved eventually. Of course, we still do have problems here, and I think some of the basic problems that we as Choctaws face—well, number one is education. Of course, the last few years I think the educational level of the Tribe has grown quite a bit. But, as a group, I don't think that we are up to the level that we're capable of doing. I believe quite strongly in the Choctaw people and their abilities, and I think there's a long ways to go for all of us to come to a point, and we can use all of our capabilities to do things. Certainly, gratifying to me, I believe. More people, I think, nowadays, are involved in the educational process not only the little children—the preschoolers and the school-age children—but also the adults. Of course, there's a lot of adults involved in this adult education program, so I think in the last couple of years we've had more Choctaw students attending universities and colleges, and I think that's going to help their attitude. I think the momentum is there if we keep going. Eventually the education level of the Tribe will up to par with the national level, even surpass that. One of the main problems we have—another problem we have, of course, is jurisdictional question. There's a court case we've had recently that's going against us and says that we're not an Indian Tribe and the Choctaw Reservation is not considered Indian country because jurisdictional questioning is concerned. I think

that's the main problem we do have. It creates a whole lot more problems than we normally would have in our criminal justice system, and the court system, and even some of the areas that we have to work at. Hopefully, we can solve that to our advantage and, then again, I think it'll be a big help to us. And another problem, I think that we have to solve is the economic situation of the reservation. I think it's pretty well evident that there are quite a bit of money coming in and even the Bureau itself is throwing a lot of money in here because of the Indian Tribe here. If you think of other federal agencies—and there's a lot of money coming into the Choctaw Reservation and a lot of people have jobs. But, then again, there's a lot of appropriated money, and we never know when the Congress is going to stop this flow of money coming in. I think the economic situation, you know, we'll have to improve having more stable jobs available, because if the federal money cuts off today, then most of us will be unemployed see, probably be looking for jobs. But I think we can develop some industries or commercial enterprises on the reservation that will give good jobs to people that we can feel like we've been here for a long time. And I think that would be a big help so we can have a more variety of jobs for the Indian people.

U: Do you think we should have bilingual education course in high school?

B: In what?

U: Bilingual course in high school.

B: Yes, I think that's needed, a bilingual course. Not only—you know, I think the bilingual education program came into being to assist the people who normally don't speak English or using English as a second language type, you know, like

most of us here at Choctaw. In order for them to understand and to learn to speak English quicker and better.

[Break in recording]

B: We are gradually losing out Choctaw language here. I think that's a good thing that should be done to maintain the Choctaw language and preserve the Choctaw language. And I'm hoping everything could be worked out so we can preserve pretty well the way they spoke a long time ago. Even now, I think a lot of us have forgotten a lot of Choctaw and pronunciation is not that good and that kind of stuff. I feel like that's a good program.

U: Where do the funds for the hospital come from?

B: It came from the appropriation to the United States Congress, but I think they fund the money through the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare to the Indian Health Services.

U: Who hires the employees for the hospital?

B: I think basically the Choctaw Health Board has a big say so in who gets hired at the hospital. This is a group of Indian people who are appointed by the Tribal Council to run the health program. A program on the reservation, and they're responsible for all the hospital's employees, and of course, it's my understanding that there are several people who are hired through the Civil Service regulation. They are Civil Services employees, and others are tribal employees. But all in all, I think the Choctaw Health Board is pretty well satisfactory.

U: So far, what's the budget of the hospital?

B: I don't know on that. I'm not quite involved that much in hospital operations now.

U: Where does the co-op store get its money to be in operation?

B: The co-op store? Really, originally, the money was set up by Office of Economic Opportunities, when OEO was still in existence. I think they're changing all that now, and some of the programs around here are also many American programs are from HEW. I think originally the money came from the Office of Economic Opportunities to build a better need and also to stock it. I think that's where it got started.

U: What about the Chata Construction?

B: Chata Construction Company is part of the Chata Development Company. It's an organization set up by the Tribal Council with their full support and everything like that then they got a—it's a state-chartered organization, chartered to the state of Mississippi. And then the industrial park, which was developed—the money came from the Economic Development Administration Department of Congress. They built the park and then they did the grading and then the sewer system and the water system was developed by them. The Chata Construction Company, I think, who always on the lookout for a construction contract they can get from anybody. That's the whole thing that's keeping them from going down, it's a construction contract that they got; theirs—the federal agency and then the Tribe.

U: Do you think the school system should be improved from what it is today?

B: Yes, I think so, 'cause we—well one thing and I think in the school system we could do a whole lot more to make a good school system. I can see no reason why we can't be the top system in Mississippi and even in the Southeast. I think the facilities are there, and I think the Choctaw students are smart enough to

beat anybody in the school system. And I think if we work on the staff and the students and the curriculum and several other areas—I think they need to improve a lot more in my first looking at it. Also, it's my nature also to be dissatisfied with the status quo, you know. I feel like I'm never satisfied with anything we got. I think we can always improve, and I think that's the way we should go and that's my feeling, that we can improve the school system. And, of course, certainly, I think a lot of this, we should be working with the parents, with the people of the community to see the school system they desire for their children. After all, they are gathering to working. With that, with cooperation, we could develop and help each other attitude. And I think we can develop a school system that's second to none out here, and that's what I hope we do.

U: Are you planning—are there plans to add more courses in the school?

B: I haven't talked to the education people recently or anything, but certainly if there's a need there, then we can do that. Of course, some of things that we, looked at—you know, maybe more mathematics courses, those type of things. People who want to go into technical fields later will need a lot of mathematics—algebra, geometry—and I think some high schools even offer general requirements on physics. And those types of things we don't have. For the Choctaw students who wants to go in higher technical fields, engineering, or the medical field and other various things, we need that type of technical knowledge in mathematics. I think we're looking into the possibility of offering a business course this year.

U: Do you think we should have more courses taught in school?

B: Well, there again, it depends on the—oh shucks— [Laughter] then again, is it needed badly?

U: Uh-huh.

B: Oh, there again, I just feel like that the course is what's needed for Indian children, then I'm willing to go ahead and set up more courses. What is needed. I'm not so sure whether I'd just go ahead and set up courses just to be setting up courses. It do cost money for the teachers we have to hire, setting up the classrooms, and buying the materials and equipment that they're going to need. And then again, there's so many hours, too, that the students spend in high school. I'm not so sure— sometimes long hours might get the students tired, and they may not have too much interest in it, may not learn as much. What do you think? Do you think we should teach more courses? You guys are going to **the same**, right? Why?

U: Well, they wanted a bilingual course.

B: Well, eventually it's coming up. I think, this bilingual thing—I think the development is now, you know, with the primary grades coming up and eventually picking up rate in time and go through the whole thing. Hopefully, you know, it'll get to the twelfth grade one of these days and also, and I think the, one of the problems the bilingual people had that there are just no more materials available anywhere to teach Choctaw. They've got to develop themselves and, you know, that takes time too. They're developing for the little children now, I think, which is quite elementary, I guess. And that's going to be a different way of developing for high school students. You know, you talk to them differently than

you do to a small kid. It'll just takes time to develop that material, I think. The problem of that. 'Cause I would like to see it in high school nowadays too. There's just no material, you know, that would be good material for these students.

U: When is the nursing home expected to be completed?

B: I believe they're talking about the middle of October. Within the next six weeks, I guess, eight weeks. Well, I'll say that I heard that they were probably turning the building over about the middle of October, final inspection of the building, make sure the building was built right, and from that I don't know when they are going to go into operation.

U: What is the estimate cost for building it?

B: Well, gee, that I don't know.

U: How come they're building a log cabin? For what reason?

B: Let's see, the log cabin—you're talking about at Choctaw Central and that the trees out there, right? I believe that money came from the bicentennial money that was made available. Of course, I don't know how much it cost or anything like that, because it's run by the Tribe. You know, I don't get involved in that kind of detail. I think it was originally designed, so that they can show how the people how the Choctaws lived way back yonder, hundreds of years ago or so, they existed. Well, that's still in the tradition. As time went by, some of the traditions vanished. And I think there was an idea behind it too. It was also to use that as the arts and crafts sale outlet.

U: Can you tell us about the fire department?

B: The fire department? Let's see, I know very little about it. But I believe Neshoba County has gone to, you know, the program of providing fire protection to residents in the rural areas. Of course, the city of Philadelphia has its own a fire department, too, but the people out in the rural areas do have problems. So, I think a couple of Indians, they went and **formed** a volunteer fire department type thing, and out of Choctaw Central we do have a volunteer fire department out there. People in the community who are interested in this type of thing, so they didn't mind that the people who wanted to help out. So, they got together and organized a volunteer fire department. And, of course, we did have a fire house there at the school and a fire engine sitting there so you know, we sort of cooperatively, went together and saidm "yeah, it'd be a good idea" and also that gives us protection, too. So, if you happen to have a fire on campus, and the volunteer fire department will be right there with the truck, they quickly respond. Rather than, you know, fire trucks in town to get out there—it'll take several minutes to get out there. So, it's also, our protection, too. And I understand that, you know, this volunteer fire department is serving around the campus or something.

U: When they put up that water tank? What year was it?

B: Oh, that went up about the same time as the high school's. So, I say, it's around 1963 to 1964. You know the one located on campus? So, it was within the same project. It'll be the same year or similar.

U: Who pays for the cost of lunch? In the cafeteria?

B: Lunch? The education money. You know, the budget I gave you. That's where we get the money, throughout. Breakfast, dinner, too, you know, for the people living in the dorm.

U: What about those musical instruments?

B: It comes out of that same chunk. It's supposed to be a little bit different from the public schools, I believe though. Public school, I think parents come up with that money, or rent it, some of it. Everything that we use, all the equipment in the school system, coming out the fund I was talking about. Now, of course, the repairs and maintenance and the taking care of the water tank, taking care of the water and electric bill and gas bill, it comes out of another fund. It comes out of plant management. And also, the basic cost of telephone. Then, the education people pay long-distance calls when they got the time.

U: Where does the money come from to build all these new houses?

B: That still is the money appropriated by the United States Congress, concerning the Department of Housing and Urban Development—HUD, they call it. HUD. They always going this initial type thing, you know, dealing with the government, you know, that's where it's coming from—through them. Then Choctaw Housing Authority is set up by the Tribal Council to do nothing but construct housing and operate housing. So that's where they got the money. All right, let me ask you a question. [Laughter] Do you have any kind of recommendation on what should we do to improve the school system? All of you are students out there, right? I'll be interested in your ideas. How to improve the system.

U: [Laughter]

[Break in recording]

U: What changes do you expect to see in the school system?

B: Well, first thing I think, the trend right now, of course, is the getting more Indian teachers in the system. And I think the trend is there, you know, vacancies has come up—we're very fortunate I think in finding Indian teachers to fill this. This Indian preference laws that we have to operate under has been helpful to us in that way. Personally, I've always felt like that Indians [inaudible 49:00] Anything happening now, of course, all the vacancies that has come up, let's say in the principal position, in the school system, so far we have been able to fill those positions with Indian principals. I've got two principal jobs open right now and, of course, I don't know who I'll get. The job closed last Friday. But we've been fortunate to have the top administrators being Indian people, which I think we can understand the needs of them as students better. Then again, I think if we go more and more into hiring more Indian teachers in the school system, then maybe that will be helpful to us. One of the changes—like I said in the beginning—was improving the curriculum. What courses are taught, that's the main thing, and also getting staff that can teach those courses. 'Cause I think the potential is there that the Indian students can go under that type of atmosphere and under those type of conditions and can perform. Another thing I think we should emphasize to improve the system is to expect more from our teachers, which in turn will expect more from our students. It's been my experience that I find out if you expect more from the people, then the people will produce. They will respond. I think that's the way we should approach it. I think if we expect

more from our Indian students, and then those out-seeing it will respond real good. They'll come up to your expectations more sometimes.

U: The school books, are they state-owned?

B: Yeah. We do use the state textbook system.

U: How do you feel about contracting?

B: Contracting? As far as the school system, I'm into anything, I guess. I think that's one way of ensuring that the local people controls—say we were talking about the school system—I think that's one way of ensuring that the local people control the school system. Everything being equal, I think that type of setup, the school system might be more responsible to the community people. That's the way it is everywhere else—all the public school system, the local people run it. I think the Choctaws can do the same.

U: Well, are you for or against contracting?

B: For or against? Looking at the point of the local control, I'm for it. 'Cause I think that that's the—like I said in the beginning, I believe in the Choctaw people. I think that they can do things, and this is one area that they can make their feeling known and also make the school system more responsive to their needs and to their wishes.

U: What pays for the athletic supplies?

B: It comes out of that same money, **the education fund**.

U: Is there anything else you'd like to say?

B: Well, maybe I talked too much. [Laughter] Well, I think we're one of the nicer **charters** out here. I'm a Choctaw myself, and I've been here quite a while, you

know, as far as age. [Laughter] I'm not gonna tell you my age, but I've been here quite a while. [Laughter] But I think the biggest thrill to me is the way the Indian students are coming up. They're more interested in what's going on and willing to, you know, put out the work. Sometimes, it takes hard work to do things, and they're more willing to do that. They're more open to new things and try to do better and try to improve themselves. I think that's one of the big gratifications we have. Like I say, I expect quite a bit from the Indian students, maybe I'm prejudiced that way. But I think Indian students are top notch to me. That's why I keep saying, if we have a better school system, then the generation coming up behind us can do more things than we can do. They will know more. **They can probably do it in here, which I think is good to come down to progress, I guess.** But looking at the whole thing, I've talked to several people around the country who have seen our students and That's one thing that's always been pointed out to me, bad attitude about students and the discipline of my students. I have good students, and they don't get in trouble, and they're just a nice group of kids. So, I'm just proud. Anything else?

U: Not today.

B: Well, I hope I gave you what you wanted!

[End of interview]

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