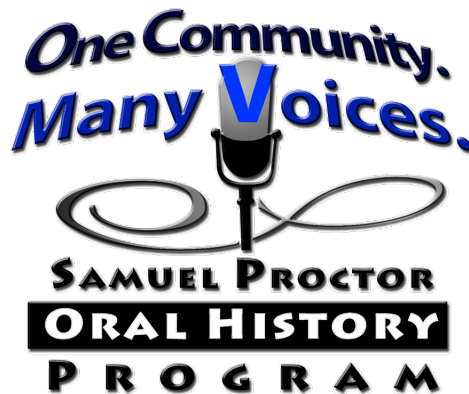


John Glenn Wallace

**Southeastern Indian Oral History Project
MISS CHOC-036**

Interview by:

**Unknown
March 7, 1977**



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>

MISS CHOC 036 John Glenn Wallis
Southeastern Indian Oral History Project (SIOHP)
Interviewed on February 7, 1977
44 minutes | 13 pages

Abstract: John Glenn Wallis, a Baptist minister at nineteen years old, describes how he was called to preach. He remembers hearing a voice urging him to follow this path until he stood up in church. He describes his parents' past work as sharecroppers, and how he travels locally to preach primarily to youth. He discusses how he connects his sermons to the youth, and the procedures for confession and baptism. He recalls details of his childhood education and a few Choctaw dances he remembers taking part in.

Keywords: [Mississippi Band of Choctaw Indians; Mississippi; Religion; Religious Gatherings]

SAMUEL PROCTOR
ORAL HISTORY
PROGRAM
University of Florida

MISS CHOC 036

Interviewee: John Glenn Wallace

Interviewer: Unknown

Date of Interview: February 7, 1977

U: 1977. This is an interview with John Glenn Wallace, a Baptist minister. How did you become minister? [Laughter]

[Break in recording]

W: [Laughter] Well, I tell you it's been a long time since I've been a minister. I think it's been—my age was about seventeen years old when I started ministering. I'm nineteen now. It's not three years or anything, it's just only year and a half. That's how long it's been. The first thing I started was at that time while I was living at the youth center. I used to live with a minister. A man that is a minister, I used to live with him. And he used to talk about Christ and stuff, about things to me and I got interested in going to church and everything. And the first thing they started me off with, putting me on Sunday school director as my first work. And I started that. And a few years later, in that next year some time and somewhere, in the house, some kind of whistle or a blowhorn or something. Some kind of sound that made in the house, something, that somebody's gonna become a minister. I didn't believe it. I said, I didn't believe it. I think it was three of us in the house at that time. I just said, "Who's going to be a minister? Who's going to be somebody?" Something that was going to be better. They all laughed and said, "Well, that's something else." We just keep on talking. And then the second time, it horned again. We realized that something was wrong, we start searching around the house, but we didn't see anything, a car or anything of that sort. So, the next few weeks later, I went home to Jackson. I was up there riding around in a car, and I was talking to this man about this, about this thing that's going on

and I was laughing about it. I was saying, "When somebody going to become a preacher I'm going to graduate them." You know, shake their hand or something? That's what I was going to do. And I started laughing. And somehow, I really didn't know how it really came about, but when my first minister came sometime in 1974, that year we had a revival—you know, a crusade going on at Conehatta. Some evangelist was there but I really don't know his real name. But on the first night, I know that somebody was talking to me. Somebody was telling me to become a minister. It was not a man or anything, something just reading my mind, and I heard something that said, "Get up, get up." I just didn't want to get up, just go out in front of the congregation and say something that I wanted to say, but I couldn't. I just sitting in my chair all that night. It was Sunday to Sunday that revival was going to last. I just sit there that Sunday to the other Sunday. I was fixing to get up, you know, when I was going to get up. It said, "Go, go," something said, it just kept bugging me, it said "Go, go." But I couldn't go. But somehow I just had—I didn't know, I just didn't want to get up, but something just made me get up. And I just walked down the aisle and I didn't know what to say when I got up there. And the minister said—he just came and took my hand, and you know, Baptists use confessional minister confessing their sins, holding their hand, and shaking their hand. And I started telling them about these things that had happened. And they said, "Well, it's going to have to be your decision whether you want to be a minister or not." I said, "I think it's time for me to be a minister. I think I've been called to preach." From that time, that minister turned, when the invitation was over and the man went to the microphone and said,

“Brother John walked up here tonight and he was going to surrender to preaching,” and everybody was looking around. See—I was small—I was only seventeen years old at that time. And everybody was looking at me. I don't know—I just started crying and stuff. I just sit down and watched him talk. Well, then everybody got stand up and said that, “You can become a minister.” And they got me to be a minister. Finally, from there, the first time that I went up there, I wanted to run out that door. [Laughter] But I couldn't, people was watching and I couldn't. [Laughter] And that crusade was over and I went home. I thought I was gonna preach that Sunday, the first time in my ministry I was going to preach, but I couldn't. 'Cause I didn't know the Bible or anything. What to say and what to do and all those things. But the time passes and I started learning how to do it. [Laughter] It's been about a year and a half.

U: Tell us about your family and where you live.

W: I really don't know where my father and mother came from. [Laughter] I mean what family they came from, but I don't know about them, but—[Laughter]

U: [Laughter] You don't know who your parents are?

W: I know who my parents are but [Laughter] Well.

U: [Laughter] You don't know where they were living?

W: Yeah, they're living, though. Well, that's kind of a long story. [Laughter] Well, anyway, but I will start where I remember it. At that time we were living in Noxubee County somewhere. We used to live on a farm—sharecrop or something—they used to call it sharecropper, but we used to live up there. That was when I was about seven or eight. At that time, they had an RCA up here.

However, they used to have RCA up here. My parents moved up here and I came with them. I went to school up here about two years and I went to Jackson in 1967, it was at that time that I went up. And I stayed up there about three or four years. [Laughter]

U: [Laughter] And?

W: And I went to school and stuff.

U: Public school?

W: Yeah, public school.

U: And?

W: Well, it was only a usual life, I mean, same life that everybody people live that we had. It wasn't nothing special.

U: How many brothers and sisters do you have?

W: Including me, we're six in the family.

U: You just preach at one church?

W: No, no. I go around preaching the word of God to other communities. I think the most opportunity I have is at Tucker or at Bogue Homa, that's where I used to have—I try to go out there. [Break in recording] Most of the time I go to youth revival and teach the gospel to the young people instead of the older people, 'cause I think most older people want the younger preacher to preach to a younger people to understand the words of what they're saying and what life is like after being a Christian person. So, my membership is at Bethany Baptist Church up here in Philadelphia. I've been around here since—I think it's three

months I think, around here. Now, I really don't do much but we used to have revivals and stuff going on, so I just go around and preaching the word so, and ...

U: You don't get paid for this? Do you get paid?

W: No, no.

U: Or you just do it 'cause you're—

W: No, sometimes they pay you, but not really, because somehow they just think it's love offerings or something and they just give it to you just as love offerings. Most of them they just give it to me and sometime I don't. I mean, it doesn't matter what they do or not because most people need money in other places, so, I just go around free sometime. Around here we have about fifteen or sixteen ministers. Most of them just sticks around in their churches, about two or three of them in their churches. So, I don't know why people don't go around and speak the word, but they usually pick out somebody that can preach the word that they can understand.

U: Do many young people attend church?

W: Oh yes, lots of them, few of them attend church. Probably about, the last time I was up there was about, I think, fifty-nine youths. I had a good time up there. I think the church is different from Catholic or from other denomination churches cause sometime, I think that it doesn't matter what kind of denomination you come from as long as you hear the words of God speak, 'cause that's more important, 'cause it doesn't matter whose church you come from that you hear. But it's open to everybody and any other places you come and hear the word.

U: Did you come to the ones they had, over at the Baptist church?

W: Oh yes, I did. They said I was the guest speaker up there, but I don't know. They just think I was somebody else, like a regular student or somebody that's going to stand up and say some words sit down or something, but I didn't. Most of the young people didn't know that I was a minister up here. 'Cause they think that most ministers are older and some are young, so they just stared at me, and I looked at 'em and I said, "I want to sing, y'all want to sing?" And they just started laughing. [Laughter] And, I don't know. There was about thirty or twenty-six persons up there...

U: You don't have any special uniforms to wear, do you?

W: Oh, no, I don't go around wearing no uniform or anything. [Laughter] I mean that's what we call "out of God's Society" or something, that's what we call it 'cause we just wear our regular jeans and shirt or something. Sometime we wear something that we want to instead of things that somebody wears—coats or suits or something they wear, why we don't—we just wear some kind of checkered shirt or blue jean pants or black pants or whatever you want to wear. They really against us doing like this 'cause they just look at the person, what they think they are or something. They think they are a different person. [Break in recording] Well, in Choctaw churches we speak—instead of English, we speak Choctaw words to the people. Most young people can understand English better than Choctaw, so we speak English. Myself, I use English better than Choctaw words because I get more attention to the young people and the old people that's sitting there, they might not understand what I'm saying, but the young people might get understand. I think that's the way they think that the young people can give reach

to the young people, teach others. By using words that they can understand.

Well, our Baptist church is based on a Bible, on the things that we do on Lord's suffering, things that we do—they just based on the Bible. They read out from a Bible like most other churches do. Maybe it will be different from a English—I mean a White man's church or something, it will be different from them, 'cause they use a Choctaw way or something they do it, 'cause it's hard to other people to understand the way we do. We take more time and less time, 'cause most Choctaw might get on time on churches but most of them can't, 'cause if they said on that time that they're going to be there, but some people don't, and sometimes it's confusing, but you got to understand the things that they says and what they're saying. If you don't keep up the words what they're saying you might get lost over it.

U: How do you go to the confession?

W: Oh, the confession that we go through it is some kind of a—we open an invitation hymn or something. And if the pastor's there, we ask the pastor to stand in front so the people that are in the congregation will come and some people or lots of people might come. That's what we call an open confession, or something that we call it. And by confessing their sins to the minister. And after that we have a fellowship by shaking hands.

U: And the baptism?

W: Baptism, oh. Baptism basically go on the Bible. Sometimes we ask, how does the Baptist people became Baptist, or something. There where was a joke came up from that. One boy said, I think it was Brother James, he said, "Well, if a people

ask you if is Jesus Baptist,” or somebody else in the way it said, and they said something like this, "Jesus baptized from John the Baptist so Jesus must be Baptist.” [Laughter] So Jesus is Baptist, is what they say. I don't know. But the baptism come from the Bible. Where you accept Jesus Christ as your lord and savior. When they take you to baptism, the baptism that you're buried with is when you die with Christ. When you rise from the water, that means that when Christ comes that time—the second coming—that the resurrection from the dead, they rise from the resurrection, that's what gonna happen. Like your sin is buried with Christ, and the resurrection comes, and you rise from the dead.

U: How old does a person have to be to be baptized?

W: Well, in Baptist, some say twelve and some says you don't have to be a certain age.

U: Or when they're old enough to make their decision?

W: Yeah. Old enough to make their decisions, or ... Mmhm, yeah. Old enough to make their decision.

U: Do you think the young people listen to you?

W: Oh, yes, I think they listen to me because of, more things that I want to say is more interesting to hear, 'cause I basically base on the Bible instead of go jumping into another subject. I just based on one subject. So, the young people can hear what I say and what's the Bible's talking about. Sometime I use some illustrations or a little joke or something that the people can hear. I get their attention by using a joke, see if they're hearing, and most of them hear that. They will listen to what I will say 'cause I give more attention to what I say to them. I

think that I get through to the young people better, 'cause some young people doesn't want to listen to what the minister might be saying 'cause it not be interesting, 'cause it be boring to them, 'cause it's kinda different from a young minister speaking from an older person. But the older person knows better than young person sometimes—it's always the same both of them, one might know better and one know might not, so it just depends on the person, how well he uses the Bible and how well he does God's work and stuff they do.

U: How do you like your job?

W: Well, I enjoy doing things of God's way cause it's more interesting doing things— one of the things about it is that when you're a minister, when you're going to school, you like to study more Bible than the books you have, 'cause the Bible's more interesting to study, 'cause you going to have it head or in your heart that you gonna bury with it. So, the book I carry and the things that I want to do, it's nearly uninteresting things, 'cause the Bible's more important to me than the books. But I have to study the things I want to know, so I just usually be happy doing god's work instead of doing schoolworks, 'cause I study more. [Laughter] I think when I get out of high school, I think I'm going to a Baptist college or somewhere to learn more. I know I can learn it by myself, but I want to know more of what the people is doing in other places and what things they are doing. It's hard being a minister and going to school on a public school or any kind of school you going to, it's hard. I think most ministers here are not really educated or anything, but that's not important, the Bible, the things they learn from, that's important. 'Cause they will know what they are talking about, what they're saying.

You might see a young people now might not read a Choctaw language book or a Bible, but most elderly people be reading Choctaw, 'cause I think the older person knows better the things that they say...

U: What have you learned from your experiences?

W: I learned that it's hard for me to do what I wanna do. 'Cause I used to go drinking and sniffin' gas and stuff like that, that's what I used to do. But it's hard for me to look back and go back, it's hard. [Break in recording] Well, it's hard. It's not really that hard from my experience, the things that I did to lay off. 'Cause I know what I got is more important than what I want to do. Most important things that sometimes I think—I really don't think the same thing at one time. I just think one thing at one time instead of lots of things at one time, so whatever I think that is good, that's what I do. Experience with young people is kind of fun with them.

U: You satisfied with your job, what you're doing?

W: Yeah, I'm really satisfied with the things that I'm doing. But really, I really want to quit school 'cause it's hard for me. But I'll make it though, I'll make it through school and do what I want to do. But I know that I will make it if I stick with it. If I don't stick with it, I'm going to drop out 'cause it'll be hard. [Laughter]

U: How long does it take you to—

W: Well, my job is, I think it's working out well with others. More people are interested to hear the words of what I'm going to say. They call me whenever they ready. They call me to come into their place to preach the word. I think I enjoy this work 'cause I get in touch with more people and I meet lots of people. And sometime I think maybe someday I might go around this world preaching the

word, maybe. I really don't know yet, what really I'm going to do. I might be a pastor here, around here. But I really don't know. I don't know what's going to be next. [Laughter] [Break in recording] When I was small—I think I told you I used to be a sharecropper then. My father and mother, our parents were sharecroppers at that time. I think from their father's father, they were sharecroppers at that time. [Laughter] I think my father didn't have really education, he just know how to sharecrop and things. I think my mother comes from Bogue Chitto and my father comes from Noxubee County. So, we really didn't stay at one place, at a certain time, just a year or two years or something. We just go around the country. But first thing, when I was six, when we were sharecroppers, I used to hoe the garden, or hoe the field, work at the field, drive tractors, that's what I used to do. We had some kind of special school that I went to every day. It's kind of a little school, one-room school or something they used to call it. We had about twenty-eight or thirty students we used to have kindergarten to eighth grade, that's what we used to have. We just called it one big ol' family. [Laughter] We had one teacher; we had a kitchen in that class. We used to eat soup—Campbell's soup, you know with those noodles and stuff we used to eat those stuff in those classes. And we had a milk box that was in the hallway. We used to goof around in that hallway. The school was big, you know. It had an auditorium and it had twelve classes, I think it was, but we only used one classroom.

U: What room?

W: I think it was the first room to your left. It was a big room. We had only one teacher. We didn't have many teachers. We didn't have no pencils. We just had a teacher. It was run by Mennonite Church's people. I think the teachers up there think that Choctaw need education up there, so I think they run the places. I think that school has done turned down, I think it was, last time I was up there.

Farthest thing I remember is that Neshoba County was that county that had a peace treaty or something—Dancing Rabbit Creek. It was up there, and they used to talk about legends and things that would happen up there. But I really don't remember how it went. They used to say that some kind of stone or marble thing, a standard white thing that they used to sign the peace treaty or something. They used to say that the peace treaty is supposed to stand on the other side of the road instead of the other side. Something—they said some kind of been tricked by a White man by doing that, you know. It had some kind of Chief's names was up there. I really don't remember it, whose name was there, but it was up there. They used to say that in that creek—about, let's see, I think it's half mile from that stone is standing. They used to say a little creek that used to run about—I think it's shallow water just running across. The used to say that that used be a diamond or gold or stuff that buried down there. When the sun sets, that water comes up—I don't know how really they said it but it's something. It sounds interesting but I really didn't believe the things that they were saying, because sometime the water usually will raise up by itself or something. But somewhere they said there's supposed to be a gold in there somewhere, but they couldn't find it. The only thing they remembered is that the Chief has been telling

about the things that have been happening. The Chief died a long time ago. I think it was in [19]60, [19]68... We had a good time listening to the things that we heard, but I really can't remember what the things they really did say, it's been a long time. We used to have some kind of dance or something they did, long time before, long time ago. We had a Choctaw dance. It's not a house dance or anything, it's an outside dance that we used to have. I think it was every third Friday or Saturday night. Sometimes Thursdays. We used to dance the dances. They used to dance a duck dance, or a snake dance or something, they used to dance. I remember dancing one of them somewhere, but I can't remember where. But I did. That was when I was about ten or nine or something. I remember the first time my father asked me to drive a car when I was small. I couldn't even reach the clutch or accelerator. [Laughter] But I didn't drive, though. I mean I really didn't step on the accelerator or anything, I just steered the wheel, that's all. Steered the steering wheel. [Laughter] I was really that small.

U: What do you hope that these young people get out of what you're saying?

W: I think that they will listen a little. 'Cause I just brief their mind what really happened that time. 'Cause most young people today are growing up in a place where—a good place. I think they will listen if they have these books on Nanih Waiya books they publish that. If they buy some, they will look at it and see what happened to other persons at time. And it'll be interesting 'cause probably some person you know, but something you didn't read about and that's what's happening.

[End of interview]

Transcribed by: Evangeline Giaconia, May 5, 2022

Audit-edited by: Sofia Echeverry, June 1, 2022

Final edited by: Indica Mattson, July 13, 2022