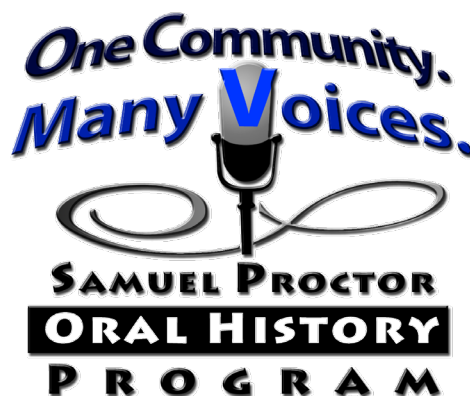


Houston and Fields McGhee

**Poarch Creek Project
CRK-035**

Interview by:

**Dr. J. Anthony Paredes
August 28, 1972**



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CRK 035 Houston and Fields McGhee
Southeastern Indian Oral History Project
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Abstract: Chief Houston McGhee and Fields McGhee discuss the Indian dance group they began in the 1960s. They made costumes and regalia to perform in, and learned dances from a Creek man in Pensacola, who helped them put on programs. They discuss dances they picked up at pow-wows, and list places they performed. They became interested in forming a dance group primarily as a way of economic growth for the community. They discuss how their father, Calvin McGhee, began wearing Indian regalia such as head bonnets in public. The talk about the effects the dance group has had on the community by connecting them to their heritage. Finally, they discuss about their hopes for the dance group's future.

Keywords: [Poarch Band of Creek Indians; Chief Calvin McGhee; Dance]

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CRK-035

Interviewees: Houston and Fields McGhee

Interviewer: Dr. J. Anthony Paredes

Date: August 28, 1972

P: This is August the 28, 1972, and Chief Houston McGhee and Fields McGhee talking about the beginnings of costume-wearing and Indian dancing in the modern history of the Creek Indians. So, to your knowledge, when was the first time that anybody in this community made any piece of Indian regalia of any kind?

H: Well, it was in [19]58, when my mother made my father some Indian regalia to go to McGillivray Bay which is in Pensacola, Florida. Then, from there, I got took Fields and we started the Indian dance group. Got boys together, me and Fields, and started practicing. No costume for boys, dancing, feathers, bells or nothing. So, we had several practice sessions that led on to us getting our costumes for our dancing performance.

P: Who were some of the boys in that early—that first dance group that you guys got together?

F: It was **Mike Morris**, Johnny McGhee, Edward Rolin, **O'Dell** and **Mel McGhee**, **Steve Thee**—

H: Ronnie Jackson.

F: Ronnie Jackson.

H: Don Jackson.

F: Don Jackson.

H: Ricky McGhee.

F: Yeah.

H: And **Edward Gibson**.

F: Oh, and myself and Houston both, we danced back then.

H: And also had about twelve girls were interested. Young girls were interested in taking part in Indian dancing.

P: And this was 1960, you say? Or—

F: Yeah. This was [19]60.

H: And the main back-up right now couldn't have—

P: Of the girls.

H: Of the girls, yeah.

F: I can remember a few of them.

H: Go ahead.

F: Savannah Lee **Daughtry**, and . . .

H: Barbara Ann.

F: Barbara Ann Gibson. . . And . . . others—**what's her daughter's** name. Was she involved in that?

H: Rolin, Sam Rolin's girl. Dora.

F: Dora.

H: Dora Ann.

P: Plyman?

F: Dora Ann **Lyman**, yes.

H: And Jackie McGhee, **Bernice's** girl.

F: Jackie McGhee.

H: And the . . . **Harris** girl, and . . .

F: What was her name?

H: Hattie Mae.

F: Yeah, Hattie.

H: Hattie. **Saylor**. We had a practice session going, sometimes two and three times a week we'd get together. Our first appearance was for **Ms. Airy** for the **Frequent Carriers** in **Boyd**, Alabama, about twenty miles **north** side of Birmingham. The starting with it, me and Fields, we put a lot of time in it with the—we had a costume building at the schoolhouse one night. It went on about two or three nights. We made and prepared for the program, and we dressed up twelve boys and twelve girls, and we had invited everybody **else who had been** invited to go to make Indian costume, **to appear** would have gone on the program. We have, on that first program, we ended up with a hundred and fifty-eight going to the first program.

P: All in costume?

H: No, there was some—

F: There were quite a few that wasn't in full costume, but they had—some of them would have, maybe, a feather or so in their hair. Other of them would have just some fringe in their shirts or something like that. Just something Indian-like.

P: Let me interrupt for just a second. How did you get in touch with the people at Rickwood Caverns, or how did it come about that you were invited to take part in that?

H: This come about from . . . who is the name up there?

F: **Rickers**.

H: No . . .

F: You're talking about a guy named **Wickers**. I didn't think I'd forget that guy's name.

H: Me neither. Oh Lordy.

F: Not after so—**thirty-eight dollars**, I never did think I'd forget his name.

H: It would come back with a, he was a—

F: —business.

H: —public and postcards and artifacts. Trinkets for sale. So he was wanting to promote Rickwood Caverns and so he got in contact with my daddy, and this is between him getting in contact with Daddy and wanting to put on a program. This is when I got interested and got with Fields, and then we organized a dance group, between them.

P: How did you learn the dances?

F: Out of a book. I don't know, where did you get that book at?

H: *Indian Lore*.

F: It was a book. We went by a book and leaned them.

H: Then, several dances we got from this guy in Pensacola, Thundercloud.

F: Yeah, Thundercloud. Which, his name is—

H: **V.R. Stewart**.

F: V.R. Stewart, yeah.

P: Was he a Creek Indian?

F: Yes.

H: Creek Indian, yeah. And he learnt those several dances.

P: Do you know how he learned them in the first place?

H: No, I don't. Researched by book—

F: I think mostly, see, every year, Pensacola has something to do with the Fiesta of Five Flags down there. They have something, white people, they mostly dressed up like the Indians and put on a real small show. I think V.R. got the idea of this, and the know-how. Watching the program there, and he took it up himself.

H: V.R. was a good—I mean, to get us on a good dancing group was from him, through him. He had a dance group before me we did here.

P: Was his an Indian dance group, or whites dressed up—

F: His was mostly Indian boys.

H: Yeah, he had part Indians and he had a mixed group.

P: Was, in any way, his getting involved in the Indian dance group, was the stimulated by activity up here on the land claim and so forth, do you think? Was he the one that signed up for land claims—

F: Oh, yes.

H: Yes, uh-huh. It could have a bearing on it, and he was real interested in this group. He come up several times to help us practice, and we had programs, he'd come out to the schoolhouse with us and help us put on programs. But, getting back to where—Rickwood. We had a—chartered one bus from **Bran's**—

F: Brown, Brown was it.

H: Brown and Brown Bussing. So, everybody got so interested in it, so we went to the schoolhouse—I mean Brewton, the county board—and my father, chief at that time, well, him and Mal McGhee and Norman McGhee and two or three

more went and rented another bus from the country and had to pay insurance on the bus, papers. The group bus. So, we left and had a meeting time. We—

F: [inaudible]

H: —about fifteen or twenty that had never come to a meeting, wanted to go, they were dressed right there ready to go. And then got on the bus, got in the seat, and the ones that's been coming to meeting, planned on going, they wouldn't get on to give the others a seat. So we had a little confusion right there, and some of them then at the meetings—so they decided to let's let them go, so we'll stay home this time. And winding up, there's about four or five missed the trip—interested in going, and the other ones, they drove their own car. So we went on to Rickwood Caverns, for a two-day trip. Was a Saturday and a Sunday evening program. And it went over real good, everybody was treating the Indians real good. From that day on, we've always been trying to have an Indian dance group, an Indian route that recognized an old-time Indian program.

P: And some of those original ones are still sort of taken, like Odell and so forth? They're still kind of taking part?

H: Yeah, we've still got some of the old dance group that still—when we call on them, they're ready to dance. But it's kind of hard now to keep the old ones interested in a dance group.

P: Fields, were you living up here at the time, or were you already down in Pensacola?

F: Yes, I was living here during the time. Matter of fact, I only lived in Pensacola about three and a half years.

P: So, really, once you said the whole Indian dancing activity is you and Houston, they've really put [inaudible] was there ever anybody, between the two of you and Billy Smith, that sort of took over and—

F: Yes. Kenny McGhee, a couple years ago, he took them to [inaudible] in Scottsboro. Yeah, he put on a program up there, and really done really well in that. And, also, we been to Horace, Fort Wayne, and Gary, Indiana with this here, this show.

P: Just getting ready to ask, now. You said when you first started, you had to have this guy, Stewart, help you look up things in books. Did you pick up new dance steps and things by going to the pow-wows and stuff?

F: Yes, yes. We loved—it was a fancy dance. Not a fancy dance, but what do they call it? What do they call that? What real fast dance that they was doing?

H: Parade of—

F: Parade of Indian Dance, yeah. We got that from V.R. Stewart. He had one that could really do that step. **So O'Dell and Mary, both, McGhee**, they took that up.

H: They **hit** it right fast. [Inaudible]

F: During the time—in Indiana, Fort Wayne, Indiana, they had—you know, I believe it's seventy-three, anywhere from three or four hundred out there, all different tribes of Indians. And they would do all they fancy war dance and different dance, hoop dance. You pick up the buffalo dance, the green corn dance, which the **girls** done. And several of them, during that time when we was on these trips, we'd pick up—

P: Which ones did they used to?

H: Bear dance, we used to with the girls. **Know** how to—

P: How did you learn your singing, which you're pretty good at?

H: I picked it up just listening. Being at pow-wows, meeting with other Indians.

P: The first time out in the dance, did you have singing with it, or was it just the drums?

H: It was just the drums.

F: Our group didn't, but the other groups in Indiana, they chanted.

P: I was talking about when you went to Rickwood Caverns.

H&F: No—

F: Huh-uh.

H: We never have no—

F: Yeah, strictly drumming—

H: —chanting at all. We didn't know what it means, the chanting. As I go on to different pow-wows, I learned it. Chanting is mainly just a tune with a drum. That, with specialty dances. But in some dances, they are **mainly** with the chants, but which I hadn't learned. Those songs go to a dance, with a meaning. But other than this chanting with the drum, that's just keeping a rhythm and making dances.

P: Could you all just sort of list off the different places that the dance groups, through the years, have formed?

H: Well, I believe—

F: We performed in Rickwood Caverns twice and performed at Crystal Caverns once.

H: No, twice.

F: Twice, yes, twice. And—

H: Then from there to Chattanooga.

F: Chattanooga, Tennessee. We stayed up there about, I'll say, around two months.

H: Let's see, we had a Thanksgiving program up there. Wasn't that before the summer, or the summer after?

F: But I'm talking about the show, the regular show to be put on. In about two months when we stayed there. I built the Indian village on top of a mountain up there in Tennessee. We worked there, I say, about two months.

P: **I'm going to get some more water.**

F: Then, from there, we went to Fort Wayne, Indiana.

P: Just keep talking.

F: About—what was that? Two or three days? About three days, was it?

P: About three days, yeah.

F: Then, from there, to—we come back to Scottsboro.

H: Yeah, Scottsboro.

F: Scottsboro, Alabama. We been there, going there for about three years.

H: No, since [19]64. We started going when I was about—

F: Right, [19]64.

H: And it's continued.

F: Then we went to Gary, Gary, Indiana. Then we went to Florala, Alabama.

H: Three times.

F: Three times.

H: Roann, Indiana.

F: Yeah, Roann, Indiana.

H: Roann.

F: One time.

P: What was at Roann?

F: It was a pow-wow.

H: Pow-wow, yeah, Indian pow-wow.

F: That was in a [inaudible] parade, and I was included in it. Oh, we've had several shows out here at the schoolhouse, also. To make up money to afford to—

H: And then Clinton, Alabama, to a rodeo.

F: Yeah, Clinton, Alabama. And also to Birmingham one night to a horse show.

Wasn't it? That where we's at one night, the horse show?

H: Yeah, horse show. And went to Birmingham for a flower show.

F: Yeah. And also, we did—well, he did, I'm pretty sure he did. Him and his father there participated in it, Governor Wallace's inauguration in—

P: What year was that?

F: What year was he elected governor of Alabama?

H: For the first time . . .

F: For the first time that Governor Wallace was elected.

H: Well, anyway, it was **three** zero. [laughter]

F: And another place, we also went to Baton Rouge, Louisiana. Baton Rouge.

H: But we didn't have no dances there.

P: Did you mention Pensacola while I was out of the room?

F: No. No, I didn't mention Pensacola. But hadn't y'all participated in Pensacola, **those things** down there.

H: I had, my father had.

F: Some of them put theirs on down here.

H: I participate in the McGillivray Day about **twice** before we organized a dance group here.

F: Matter of fact, we been on—I guess, television, from Mobile to, I'm pretty sure I know we got them from Chattanooga seven or eight times.

H: Yeah, Chattanooga.

F: Birmingham and Crestwood.

H: Montgomery.

F: In Montgomery.

H: Dothan.

F: Yeah, we would **follow**—been on TV, they were advertising this thing and—

P: All of this since [19]60?

F: Yes.

H: Yeah.

P: What has been the general reaction of white spectators, first of all, and secondly, other Indian groups that you've come into contact with, to your particular group?

F: Well, we've never had any trouble with the white groups. They seemed to like and agreed with the way the Indian people had been done.

H: And they encouraged us, they thought we were doing a really good thing to keep up our heritage through the different programs we were **following**. Some whites

we've met know a little more about Indian history than **we ourselves do; which is** had a lot of time to read up on it, but some we've met was interested to learn the Indian history of our ancestors. Then, between the elders and I and the group, right now we've got a lot of young ones still interested in trying to keep the heritage up.

P: When you went to these big pow-wows, where there a lot of Indian groups there, do you have any comments from any of the Indian groups?

F: Well, they've come in on our dancing and **no longer time** that we've got to train them and get them together. They say that we have a real dance group. I mean, a real good dance group.

H: Some—one time was up at Fort Wayne, one time was, our boy wouldn't fancy dance like a lot of the others come off from the reservation. So they kind of wanted to run over our boys a little bit, so we just—Fields didn't like it right off, and we had another guy about as big as Fields, and he didn't like it neither. So we had a little talking with them, and so, after that, telling them to be real good, we told them we just don't know all the Indian dances and Indian steps and we was interested in learning. So, between Fields and Jonathan McGhee, got them straight right there. They kind of chimed in with it, they kind of looked out for the Creek dance boys on the next session of dancing.

P: In traveling around like this, how often did you encounter Indian groups that were surprised to find out there were Indians in Alabama?

F: We never did have—I didn't, I don't know about you yourself—but I never did have any other Indian groups ask about the Alabama Indians. It was more or less

the white people themselves that live within the state of Alabama that didn't realize that there was that many living here.

H: But then, some of the Indian groups we met with, they didn't know there was Indians in Alabama. They just didn't know they existed here until . . . well, we've met some on the money claim, come up by the newspaper clippings in the paper and learn about it. But the majority of them didn't know there was Indians in Alabama, the groups of Indians, which we met with.

P: I forgot to ask you, too, about your costume. Who helped you out on getting started on making costumes, where'd you get the materials and all that kind of stuff?

H: Well, that wore back then when our first appearance in Rickwood Caverns. They donated materials to start making costumes and donated made money to buy part of the feathers. And then, between me and Fields hustling around and **telling** some of the other ones, we finally got enough money and enough costumes to where we had twelve boys, dressed out. It wasn't dressed out perfect like an Indian dancer could be, but we's doing the best we could with what little we had. So, we had our heart in it, and we're still **striving**. It's been a long struggle since we really started a dance group in [19]60, and me leaving, going to Illinois for three years, Fields had to leave for Pensacola and find work. It's slowed down a little bit, but part of that time, Kenny, the one we mentioned, he come here; he was working close with me and Fields. He would—when we weren't there, Daddy and **the** Chief, Calvin McGhee, could call—be one of us around. He could call on. But [inaudible] said, well, so-and-so wants to be in a

pow-wow up in Indiana or Birmingham or where it's scheduled. But one of us will be ready to go, and I don't care where Fields was, they could give him a ring and he would be ready, **say**, Calvin, you can always count on me, I'll be there. Any time you want to take on an Indian dance, I'll be there.

F: How about the onliest one he would trust with his trucks. [laughter]

H: **You** could always depend on Fields for a driver. Well, he bought—Daddy bought a bus just particularly for taking Indians to pow-wows. And Fields was in one of his favorite right-hand man. Being with the group, cause it—where Daddy say it couple times that Fields wouldn't be there, he says, oh, we lack something, **say** Fields **was it**, and that's what we're lacking. He just had this—Fields had something, a spirit, in there with him.

P: I was just getting ready to ask, what was the motivation for both of you in really getting involved in all of this?

F: Let me put it this way. It was something that was new to me and, when I first seen it and got interested in it, I thought—well, if we could start something around here and make a go of it, it would kind of help our older people in years to come. Maybe they can help them make a living with themselves, because there's a lot of people around here that's not able to work. And if we can get something here, built up here, so they can start making trinkets or baskets or things like that. I'm going to mention about going to North Carolina, up where the Cherokees is at. We took a four-day tour up there.

H: Yeah, we got there.

F: We went to the **places** up there, the workshops where they was making arrowheads and things like that, and by me seeing things like that, it got me interested in it because my mother's old and his mother's old, and just say I got it into my mind, if I can learn this to my people that these people do it themselves, maybe they can make a living for themselves just right at home. So that's one reason that I really got interested in things like that.

P: Just primarily an economic motivation. Not for yourself, but for the community as a whole?

F: That's right. See, I was able, I was a young man and I was able enough to get out and work for myself.

H: Then, I might say that which we're hearing about, the drums and Indian dancing, we've had never had before us when we were younger and teenagers didn't have nobody to teach us. But when me and Fields made our first drum, just the sound of the drum brought some feeling to us. [laughter] You might . . . could carry on for our ancestors, because we heard so much talk and which, in our heart, we're Creek Indians, and that drum, the sound of that drum, and know we've made it, that this does something to you. That gives you the feeling of kind of want to keep on doing the Indian side of it. We mixed up with the—we have to go out and do other work and all that, with society and all that. Right now, I believe we're what you say—a versatile people?

P: Yeah.

H: And we mix with either group. Rock and roll music and that. You come back beating an old drum, it gives you a feeling of way back then when the ancestors

were, real happy, and then kind of let down by a lot of folks, especially the government. Beating the same old drum gives you a sense of kind free, you're happy, you just want to do your thing your way.

P: Do you think that the younger kids that you got involved in this thing felt the same way, or was it just the thrill of going off someplace, for them?

F: I believe a lot of the boys, I actually believe they did it for their own benefit. I don't believe it was just the thrill of getting away from home. I believe it was just something new to them that they wanted to learn.

P: Since you went to Pensacola, have you continued to try and do something with the dance group here?

F: Yes, I've been in the dance group. Been back and forth up here with Houston and trying to keep the dance group up. Matter of fact it'd been, oh, three or four months ago, we was up in Birmingham. Up there to ah, I believe it was the **Dollar's place** we **set** up there, wouldn't you?

H: Yeah, uh-huh.

F: The Dollar's place up there in Birmingham, we sit there?

H: For promotions and . . .

F: You know, to advertise or things for them.

H: For the promotion deal.

F: Yeah, it's promotion. It's like you said, look, I got this stuff in my blood and I don't want to get rid of it. If I can keep going and keep in health, I got two little boys coming up, and my oldest used to dance for the group until we moved to

Pensacola. But I plan on moving back up here to help Houston himself keep this up.

P: I've noticed that the basic dances that y'all do are the kind that a lot of tribes are doing, basically derived from the Plains Indians. Have you ever given much thought to trying to revive some strictly Creek Indian type dancing at all?

H: Yeah, I've thought about it several times and me and Fields talked about it several years ago. But we haven't been able to get a regular Creek Indian that knows the Creek songs that goes to the dances and the Creek way of dancing. But the most outstanding dance of the Creek Indians was the corn dance, the green corn dance. Or either the stalk dance, was real great in the Creek dance. But they had like things like the Beaver and Rabbit and several others, concerning the forest and hunting. But they didn't have no, really, fancy stepping war dance, that I know of. But I imagine they had some kind of little spirit of the dances, for war dance, but that's something I'm still looking in for, I hope to learn. But, between myself and the other ones, really interested in helping to capture the really true Creek Indian dances.

P: Of course, when you go to these other pow-wows, the basic dances that all the other tribes are doing is the same—

F: It's the same. It's based on the same type dancing that we do, yeah.

H: Yeah, and this—

F: Now, excuse me a minute. About the onliest thing that I've seen different in the dancing that the other tribes are doing that we do, they got what they call a fancy dance. As each brave gets out there and shows his style of dancing, he does,

and that's about the onliest one that I know that we haven't got, I think the other tribes do.

P: Let me go back to the very beginning. This will be my last question, you guys can talk more if you want to. Houston, what was your dad's inspiration, really, for getting—before the dance group actually got organized—for getting into costume and all that kind of thing? How'd he feel about getting started on that?

H: Well, my feeling of it, he wanted to be recognized. He wanted the group recognized, the Creek Indians recognized. The onliest way to get it recognized, you'd have to get before the public, and it started with—well, first, when he first really started rooting for Indian rights and Indian privilege, it was back 1948, [19]47, [19]48, there in abouts. We didn't learn, really, what the Indians wore. Then, as he grew old, in the politics and meeting the public, he wasn't as recognized as much as he wanted to be. So he started adding a little more of an Indian touch to it. Then my mother, she saw it, and several more of the people working around with him close saw it, so we've had—Mother finally got him a headdress, which he wanted, a headdress. When he went public speaking, or somewhere, he wanted to identify himself as an Indian. In one way, a lot of people say, well, the Creeks didn't wear a head bonnet. The pastor didn't wear a head bonnet, similarly, but at this stage of time—**age** of time—that's the best way, if you've got feathers around you that's anywhere good groom the feathers—you recognize, you say, well, he's part-Indian or something.

P: Because that's what the public expects.

H: Yeah. The public expects a head bonnet, since the first—the moving picture shows put the Indians so in their class, what they wanted to, but that's what the public expects. Also, the public wanted some—when they know you's Indian, they wanted you to do dance. I mean, they thought the Indian's supposed to dance. And we've got, I think, the Indian's doing good. We've got some good dancers, Indian dancers and modern dancers.

P: It was really you and Fields that put that dancing component in there, more so than your dad, you think?

H: Yes. Me and Fields were strictly the ones—

P: I was going to ask, too, what was the reaction of other members of the Indian community around here when your dad first started putting all the feathers and this sort of thing?

F: Can I answer that?

H: Yeah, go ahead.

F: I hate to say it about the people around here, but I think, when he started that . . . oh, he was trying to help his people out around here. He was trying, just like Houston said, he was trying to make the public be recognized, and also, he was trying to get his people be recognized. A lot of these people 'round here thought about him wearing that headdress—he was trying to con **them out of everything** if they **could reckon** straight. **Which I know is wrong myself.** But I know the man, I've been with him near and far, and if I remember correctly, he never did have to ask anybody for anything. Matter of fact, he died. . . a poor man. And when I can remember myself, and Calvin McGhee, had anything that

he wanted. A farm. Cars. Tractors. Anything he wanted, he had that himself. He didn't have to ask nobody for nothing. I know he's told me a lot of times, he went to the bank and signed with me to get money, and I never did get to pay it back. Well, he paid it. And I actually believe it—that's why he does—he started wearing his headdress was to help his people.

P: But you're saying some of the people didn't understand that.

F: They didn't understand it. They thought, by him wearing it, and suppers they would have for him to go to Washington, they thought, well, he's taking that money and pocketing it. Benefit himself. But he was trying his best to help the people around here. But there's a lot of people didn't realize that.

H: And also, maybe I speak—a lot of them thought maybe, said, well, he's trying to make a big name for himself. Only thing he was trying to do was meet the public and interesting people what could help the Indians and show there was Indians in Alabama. At first, we wasn't organized, wasn't—by government level, **weren't** no Indians existed in Alabama. This is one of the ways, and every time he'd meet another public eye, he would know they was—might have to—want to add another feather to his bonnet. So, after then, he kept on till he got a full Indian costume, which wasn't at all a Creek costume, but it was something to attract the eye of people, trying to get help for his people. This is when he—in a lot of caces, he bought some beads from the store, and then Mother bought—I mean, made—most of the beads he wore. But to make it in a rush period, he had to do something, because he known he was going to—to say, that something had to turn over. Seemed like he was so mad at wanting things to go the right way, but it

wasn't going a little fast enough for him, so he worked around till he got him a full Indian costume. That could be lots of **Apache** designs on it, it could have been a few Creeks. But a head bonnet, he wore that everywhere he went to meet the public. And would you know, the head bonnet was made in Western-type Indian, but the Creeks did wear feathers in their hair that might hang down with quills sticking through the hair. But, also, they had feathers around them. So, if you copy them out West, well, that's [inaudible] —I like head bonnets, myself. I think it's beautiful.

P: You know, I've noticed in some pictures of your dad at your house, there was a sort of a red necktie-type thing that you had with sort of little curves on it, which looked really Creek to me, and I wondered about where that—

F: His wife made that.

H: Yeah. That's one mother **strictly** made—

F: I got quite a few of them things in my house, that **my mom** she made. Everything I made—

P: That particular one looks really like a Creek design, more so than—

H: And from the designs she got—I don't know, the spirit might have been with her to make it in the design of a Creek, but, to me, **I'm with you, it do kind of resemble** some Creek beadwork.

P: Let me ask you one more thing. Do you gentlemen feel like you really are beginning what you began in 1960, is beginning to pay off in something other than an economic sense, or, in economic sense, either?

F: Well, in one way of speaking, yes. We've got—I was asking Houston, this afternoon, about over here on the interstate. They're supposed to put up a big lake over there and motel, and just a tourist attraction, in other words, what it's going to be. Boat rides, and that, and it's supposed to be done by the Indian people here. I figure, if we could just get that up, I think we've accomplished quite a bit.

P: What about in the spirit of the community? You think that your dance group is having any effect there?

F: Yes, I believe they have. Tell you the truth—

H: Yeah, I believe on an Indian basis, it's helped. It's been one of the work horses.

F: When we started, we used to practice these boys right out here to the schoolhouse. You couldn't hardly get a person out of the house to come out there and watch it. We kept on it, and we showed them, we're going to come back. The kids themselves would tell the people, tell their parents, about the good time that they had, the things that they seen and the things that they've done. We put on a show out here where we get bigger groups. Even a **big part of people that white, in** town, would come to it. The mayor or the chief of police and all that. They participated in this. The Governor. Matter of fact, I've got a picture of Governor Patterson right here at the school house, was took. I think, if we get this site over here, what's in progress now, I believe we've come a little bit of a way.

P: Would you go so far as to say that, in term of the long-range effects, that the Indian dance group will be as important as the land claims money?

H: I believe so, because the Indian dance group will give just a feeling back to the people, and especially the young ones growing up. Which the old ones, now—what, forty, seventy years old, they lost that. Myself, I didn't have nobody to teach it to me and Fields didn't when we was teenagers. **And we feel again**—I enjoy it, and I knew Fields would if we heared some of the old ones around beating the drum. This sense, to me, the drum beating and the dancing, the old Indian dancing, is something, a part of us. And they enjoy it. Back, go on back to the—I don't believe, if, that depends. Really, the dance group working together—between me and Fields, Kenny, and now Billy Smith is taking part, doing a very good job of working closely with the dance group—we can bring more outside people, attention, to our group. But [inaudible] is willing and wanting to do something for our young generation, which will build up their generation. And this is what we're hoping, in the past, we'll do. But our Indian heritage is gone, but not forgotten, so let us keep it up, and this will benefit our people, the Indian people, our local, non-Indian people, and cities out around us will know where some ancestors of Creek Indians in Alabama, which are doing a thing that needs—because Creek Indians is a part of the history of Alabama, and which we think, in my opinion, and when I first come to Fields for a dance group, this should be kept up. I mean, if we lose it now, we'll never get it.

P: Right.

H: So, I think it plays a good—a big part of the local community, and city-wide and to a state level. Because Alabama—the Creek Indians made up the history, first, of Alabama.

P: They were the history of Alabama.

H: They were.

F: They were the history of Alabama.

H: And I think that the state of Alabama should recognize this group that's been trying to struggle for years to hold something, to be recognized and do something for the older people. This is what hurts. You talk it over, just like Fields spoke, say, we'd like to get a program started to help the old people, or . . . and this, you're talking with different people anywhere in the community. Said, I wish we had a place where some of the old people can have really good care. And then some of our young people would say—families who are not able enough to give good health care to them. One thing is dental care. This is where we're really hurting in our area, is dental care. This is to help our kids growing up, their teeth. This is the type of program we'd like to work in with. It could be worked in, and be promoted by Indian heritage.

P: Have you consciously thought about the Indian dance group as really being a means to getting health care and this sort of thing? Has that really been in your mind?

F: Not long.

H: Not really. In my opinion, it's brought a light on it, I would say. That which, we got a program, we've got little kids interested in doing something which we never have had in the past, or which—different programs, for poor people, taking care of them. But in some way, the Creeks Indians—the Indians—is lacking to get this type care. The dance group will help for the public to see the light on what their

needs are, and this is one of the ways we can really profess—express—our feeling to the public about performing, doing an Indian dance.

P: It gets you before the public in the first place.

F: Yeah.

H: This is what—it'll get us, a means of getting before the public.

P: I wanted to ask, you were talking about the older people and I know that your dad went places with the dance group and also the late Norman McGhee—were there any other older people who would put on costume and go?

F: Yes, we've had several—Mal McGhee, he—

H: Yeah—

F: Before he passed away, I think he went on a couple of trips with us. And Norman's wife, she went on several trips with us. Matter of fact, she worked in Tennessee with us on a mountain up there. And—his two brothers, I think. Didn't they go to a lawyer one time with us, **Curtis and Frank**?

H: Yeah. But he's speaking of old ones, say, sixty—fifty or sixty years old.

P: How long has, for example, Tom McGhee from Pensacola been putting on costumes?

F: Tom start this, he started us off with—did he go to Rickwood with us?

H: No. Well, I think the first trip was Indiana, I believe.

F: Was it?

H: Now, I'm not sure on this. But somewhere in—

[Break in Recording]

P: . . . the older people to put on costume and take part. For example—

F: There was—it wasn't easy. [laughter]

H: Yeah. Let me stay on that. Norman, the medicine man, and which—he knows his herbs and medicine. He was a well-liked gentleman. He could be in the community, sometimes he had a little government sway but they didn't go along with it, but as a person, they all liked him. But he was one, he was all for it. When he first seen them—daddy, Chief Calvin McGhee, had on a head dress, he wanted something Indian. He didn't care what it was, he wanted to start fringing his clothes up. So, he was a good backbone, helping promote—and, I mean, get together with the group, to meet the public. He was a star of the program, might nearly say.

P: What did he do?

H: Well, at first, as when—and I really don't know where we got it from, it just come up. Norman might have, but it come up before we made a dance appearance, and we never did do no [inaudible]. I don't think we did. No religious ceremony, Creek Indian dance, and not other tribe dances—a ceremonial dance. But he'd always run the evil spirits away. That was his part. He was the medicine man, we let him play the part of the medicine man. But this was all—he didn't do none of his ceremonial medicine in front of the public.

P: You mean his actual herb medicines.

H: Yeah. **Open** in front of the public, he never did do. He just would go, as a rule, he would say—evil spirits have to be away from the dance, and things. And so, this happened in years ago, when all the villages get together, there was always everybody there, and evil spirits had to go, considered by the medicine man.

Then, I speak—Mal McGhee, he was a good backbone of Daddy, Chief Calvin McGhee. He stood behind me. He'd come down and talk—I've heard him come in the house and talk for three or four hours at a time on what do we do. And he's always, see this ballpark out here, a little bit. He was always wanting, say we need a ballpark for the young kids. He was a firm believer in a ballpark, a recreation center right in the community. He would—we went for years, we just couldn't get nobody in it enough, kids interested in doing this. But it's **broke** down, it's come on down, just play enough. But he was the backbone of really pushing the ballpark, Mal McGhee.

P: I was going to ask you about Norman. Do you think the fact that he had, for several years in his life, practicing as an Indian medicine man, do you think that was part of his inspiration for wanting an Indian costume and all of that? Or not so much as an Indian medicine man, but as an herb doctor?

H: I believe so, because if you'd tell me—he said, I wished I'd have knowed about my Indian costume years ago. He said, I wished I'd have learned more years ago, because, he said, I've met so many interesting people since—when he had his feathers on, his Indian costume on. I believe—all that, he just loved to wear it. Everywhere he went, when he carried **out to meet the public, he was** like my father. He'd put that bonnet on. And boy, then he'd—and he didn't meet a Indian nowhere. He was always friends—

P: He was really up into his sixties when you all started, or . . . ?

F: He was seventy-three when he died.

H: Yeah, he was in his early sixties when he started.

P: He died in what year, again?

H: [19]60 . . . I believe it was [19]68.

P: You mentioned, you didn't ever do ceremonial dances. Was there ever any time that there was Christian religion, say, as having a prayer, getting the boys together for a prayer or anything like that? Or was that not part of it?

F: No, I don't believe it ever, ever did have an Indian prayer before the shows or anything like that. But the people themselves, when we go to the park, put on a show, they would always have a flag-raising or, you know, have a prayer before the full show would begin. They would do that.

P: So there was no actual religion involved, but was there an attempt to try and make it just as much Indian dancing to be sort of a moral uplift program for the boys at all?

F: Yes, and mostly to entertain the audience or people themselves.

[Laughter]

P: Well. Is there anything else that you guys would like to say about the Indian dancing activities that I haven't asked you about?

F: Well, there's one thing I'd like to say. I actually believe, deep down in my heart, that we have got one of the best, if not the best, Indian dance group there are in the United States. **All the** time that we've had to train the boys, you train one of these boys around here, and when they gets a little older, well, maybe he wants to drop out. But the younger boys is coming on, they take up. They just about watching the show themselves, one time they take up a step, and that-a-way, we don't have to go to trouble of training him. He watch it, he pick it up himself. By

that way, see we can continuously have a dance group. We've had—excuse me. We've had several boys here's won trophies dancing, but I believe they had it at the schoolhouse, didn't they?

H: Yeah, by Thanksgiving.

F: They had a trophy giveaway contest out here, and they participated in it, set about and won trophies out there.

H: And this, to bring up trophies, but this is what we want our group to do, to be really recognized is to go to other pow-wows and put forth and join in their dancing, and we would like to have it big enough and strong enough that we could bring other tribes here to perform Indian programs with our Creeks here. This is a program where I thoroughly want to see, is bring say, fifteen or twenty tribes right in this community right here, just have a three-day pow-wow. This would give, really—our young boys and young girls on par, about Indian heritage. And this is what we really—and I'm interested in, I know Fields is—other ones working close to us is interested, see, in our young ones. Take hope and don't drop out at an early age, as they do. We've had a lot of trouble with this in the past, and we can get them up for a good Indian dancer. And start, able to learn more about their Indian heritage, and then they'd get discouraged. But we've got to bring up some sort of program that will entice them to keep on trying and make it better, and enjoyable program, and then joyful great together. Using—or not using, being their self. Keep the Indian heritage alive. That's really what I'm interested in.

P: You are at the point, though, where many of the boys who were dancing now, they can't remember a time when there wasn't dancing going on in the community, I guess. Some of those boys that are eleven and twelve now, since the time they were babies, there's been dancing going on of some kind.

H: I would say they would **be here**. Because Odell and Mary is our oldest dancers, still will perform at a dance troupe, and they were alive, six years old when they started. A lot of the other boys, like **Ronnie** Rey Jackson, Don Jackson, Edward Gibson, Edward Rolin, and myself . . . [Inaudible]

F: Or are you talking about, like, Hal?

H: These boys is dropped out. And might have got kind of shy, when he got bigger, but these are the type of guys I like to keep, for them to jump back in here, and really, when we have a pow-wow get in there and get with the Indian dance, because it was something their ancestors left them. I know they would feel better in the happy hunting ground if they know the young boys and the young generation kept practicing their method of back from the olden days, where . . .

P: That's a good—

[End of Interview]

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