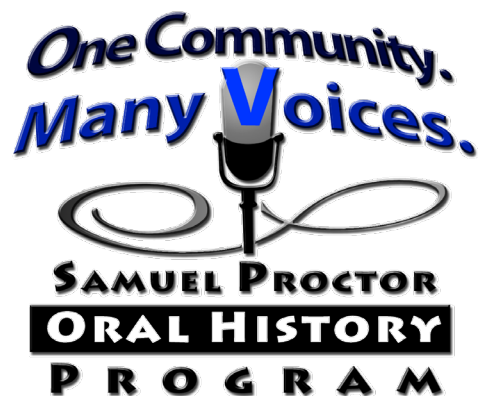


Buford Rolin

**Poarch Creek Project
CRK-038**

Interview by:

**Dr. J. Anthony Paredes
April 6, 1973**



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CRK 038 Buford Rolin
Southeastern Indian Oral History Project
Interviewed by J. Anthony Paredes on April 6, 1973
2 hours, 1 minute | 47 pages

Abstract: Buford Rolin discusses his early childhood, including his education through high school and his experiences at Vacation Bible Schools in the summer. He recounts his summers spent picking potatoes, as well as the one trip to Virginia he made to pick tomatoes. He discusses how Indians began travelling to harvest crops through agricultural extension programs. He speaks about the history of the churches in the area and discusses community gatherings, particularly the Christmas play at his church. He speaks returns to a discussion of his and his sisters' educations. Finally, he discusses the nature of Indian identity and customs, the historical oppression they have faced, and his goals for the future of the community.

Keywords: [Poarch Band of Creek Indians; Florida--Pensacola; Education; Religion]

SAMUEL PROCTOR
ORAL HISTORY

P R O G R A M
University of Florida

CRK-038

Interviewee: Buford Rolin

Interviewer: Dr. J. Anthony Paredes

Date: April 6, 1973

P: Two, three, four.

[Break in Recording]

P: Testing, one, two, three, four. This is April 6, 1973, and this is in Pensacola, Florida at the home of Buford Rolin. Buford Rolin has been a very important and helpful person in my research, one of the first of the Creek Indians that I met, and actually, the first council member I met and set up my very first appearance before the council. Now, we've talked many times informally in the past, and I hope to get some of this information on tape. So, this will be a kind of informal and rambling interview. Why don't you start off, Buford, by just starting with your early remembrances of life in the community, how things were back when you were a boy?

R: Well, you want me to include the schooling in all this?

P: Include your experiences in school, yeah. Your own personal experiences in growing up in the community.

R: Well, in our earlier childhood, of course, one of the things that we were taught was that in order for life to have any meaning at all for us, we had to become self-sufficient. Other words, we had to—for life to have any meaning or anything, we had to first—my father taught me, even though he was uneducated, I can remember back in my early childhood, even in grade school, he wanted me to have an education. I remember we were very poor. But we had, there was a lot of love in our home, I suppose. That's why what I like to attribute to my success, whatever it might be today. School—I was always very active in school, grammar

school through high school. My earliest school I attended—which was, what was rather in the beginning, for any formal education for anyone was set up in a church-owned building, which later became a public school. I attended first through the third grades there. And the fourth, fifth, and sixth grades I attended at the school at Poarch. Then the seventh through the twelfth grade I went into Atmore; was bused daily, some over fifty miles roundtrip.

P: Incidentally, before we get too far, for the sake of posterity, would you say how old you are now on the tape, so we know what time period this is?

R: Okay, I'm thirty-two years of age. Earlier childhood, as I remember like, we were—my parents, I guess to really—my life has been involved always in church work. And what I mean by this is that my family—I was born in a log cabin that belonged to the church, which was a caretaker's home. After a few years of living there, we bought a small farm, probably—I'd say a half a mile, a forty-acre farm—my dad did, from the church. My earlier years, we were just spent mainly involved in, I would say, church activities, mainly to and from church. Then to school. We lived at a distance close enough where I walked to and from school. Even as a child, as I stated earlier, my father—one of the things that I remember so vividly today is that he instilled and taught us the value of an education, mainly I think because he hadn't had the opportunity. And with having worked with the people of the church there who were, I would say, missionaries and having been exposed to travel—not extensively, just throughout Alabama—

P: In connection with the church?

R: In connection with the church. He could see the value of education. So this is one of the things that he really stressed to us, the importance and value of one—he could see the need of education.

P: What part did he play in the school issue back in the late [19]40s?

R: Well, now, I don't remember specifically ever having him say, other than that he did support Calvin McGhee and Jack Daughtry and those others, because he knew that he had children that would soon be at the age that—school-age that they would be needing—in order for them to have education equivalent to or being able to attend an institution of higher learning where they could attain more formal education, they would have to have—either the schools would have to be set up there or we would have to go into town. So, he supported this. Now, just how actively, I haven't heard him say.

P: Now, along the line of general schooling and all that kind of thing, you yourself, how much association did you have with children outside the community of your own age? Any at all?

R: No, none at all really, that I can recall. With the exception of—here again, I have to go back to refer to church work. At this time, I remember my early childhood, I would say in my earlier teens, the Vacation Bible Schools were beginning to be a part of the community life, because of involvement in several of the other churches [Vacation Bible Schools are usually short-term summer programs designed for specialized religious education]. So therefore, our church began to have Vacation Bible Schools. Then through the church—now our church had a camp in Northern Alabama, that—

P: Episcopal Church?

R: Episcopal Church, yes—that our young people from the primary—not primary, I guess first-grades level up through the senior high school—various camps throughout the summer that they attended and we were invited to these camps. Now, traditionally, in order for you to attend these camps, even though it was church-sponsored, each family was supposed to provide the expenses for their own children. Course we weren't in any position to have any funds or monies just specifically set aside to really—I guess . . . they could see the value and all, I'm sure, the need for the outside contact and the benefit we would see. But having worked with what we had and the small farm that we did, it was just very important that in order for us to have school clothing and to try and save up some little money to have during the winter, it was essential that if there was any kind of work available, we needed to work, whether it be at home or in the community. Sometimes, I remember in the early spring, I didn't go as often as a lot of the other younger people in the area into Baldwin County and work, in the potato season. However, during the later years and my later teenage years, I was permitted to go down and work—

P: Did children miss school to go do that?

R: No, these were—at this time, it was always right at the school—our school year was set up to where, at that time, we were out of school no later than, I would say, the twenty-fifth of May. And normally, this is when the season really began to become—

P: Do you recall how young the youngest children were that went over to Baldwin County?

R: Well, I would say some as young as six years of age. They went and picked these potatoes, you know, with their parents. Now, the one thing I never did, I can remember, this one man that—well, there were several men that had these big trucks, you know, would just pack people on them and drive them down there. And they would pick these potatoes. But I never rode that; the only time I went down would be to work on the potato shed itself, and I actually lived there for a week, then we'd go home on the weekends—

P: Where'd you live when you lived over there?

R: Now, there was always this camp that they referred to—it was referred to—but it was normally usually a big house that the farmer had for, I guess sharecroppers or migratory workers. And I guess he could classify us as migratory workers, because we did that. Now, mostly the women lived in these houses though. The boys, we just sort of roughed it, you know. We'd stay on the —after we'd completed the work for the day, we had our quilts and blankets, and we'd just sleep right on the potato shed, mostly. Then, you know, morning come, pack that away and back to work again.

P: Were there groups of people that would come from other places to work in these potato fields, too?

R: Yes, there were. I know, in particular—now just, these people that I referred to earlier that went with these trucks, they were Indians themselves; they had this truck, but they would also take the Negro laborers in. Mainly, I would think—and

just because I don't know if there was any reason for this—but generally, it was your Negro laborer that picked the potatoes, mostly. Because the fact that—I don't know long that they had been working down there on this potato shed, so I don't know, I remember most of our people, we worked on the potato shed—

P: Now, what's a potato shed, exactly? That's the storage area?

R: The potato shed is the area where they used to—your potatoes were. They gathered them in the fields; they were bagged, trucked into the shed. They were then dumped and there was a grading area. They picked the bad potatoes, you know, from the yield there. Then, they were bagged and loaded onto vans and shipped out to different parts of the United States.

P: But you're saying, generally, the Indian People worked in the shed and the colored people were out in the field?

R: Were out in the field, that's correct.

P: Were there any white workers there?

R: There were white, too, but normally—as I look back over it, as I remember—this was mainly your two, as I remembered it—I never thought of it then as such, but there was probably that distinct difference. Because you had your colored in the field and your Indians that worked the potato shed. And of course, now, there was some of the colored people that did work on the shed.

P: What was the pay? Can you recall that?

R: Oh my goodness. I remember, I think probably—like I say now, we never did—I didn't get involved that much until the later years, but I can remember, I think, probably seventy-five cents an hour.

P: You were paid by the hour, right? Not by bag or something?

R: By the hour, by a bag. Of course, as I mentioned earlier, we had our own little farm. Now we, in later years there, we started planting the cucumbers. The production of the cucumbers, they came off just about the time that your potato season did. So, there was always plenty of work to do at home. I would say for myself, it wasn't just an annual thing. It was probably, I made three or four trips down there in the four or five years involved.

P: Did you yourself or any members of your family ever go off further, like to North Carolina or Wisconsin and work in the fields?

R: Now, I had one experience where I went with my aunt. She had gotten involved with the agricultural department.

P: Your Aunt Florence?

R: My Aunt Florence—through some other, the Indian men there. They had gotten involved, too. They were these different farmers—tobacco farmers and tomato farmers. They were looking for people to come and gather their crops from around the state. I did make one trip to Virginia with my Aunt Florence. I was there two weeks. And I didn't leave because of the work; I left mainly because of the living conditions.

P: Really?

R: Yeah.

P: What was it like?

R: Well, being young as I was—and I guess I was seventeen, eighteen years old—I just thought I had projected life away from home as to—even though working

under these conditions—as being a little different. And as I remember this particular situation: there was this long building that we stayed in. No privacy whatsoever. And everybody just sort of spread their little bedrolls or something in whatever end they're in; there were some areas that, I think, this building that I went to, it might have been three or four rooms. And they used one area for eating and cooking and the living area there. But now, we went into the fields during the day and gathered the tomatoes. But we gathered the tomatoes there.

P: Were there men and women both in this one building, or did they have two separate buildings?

R: No, no, the men and women were in there.

P: Together?

R: Together, yeah. Well, in this situation, I can remember, there was two or three families that we had that were a man, woman, and some children. And we were just all sort of just home folks, you know, living together.

P: Everybody in that building was from your community?

R: Yes, mm-hm. Yeah. Everybody—well, kinfolk, they were kinfolks.

P: Were y'all the whole crew for that particular farm, or were there other members of the crew, too?

R: Well, now, there were other members that were there. We were working—I don't remember the name of the company, but we went out, and when we went into the fields to work, there were other people that were there, either local or people who had come in especially for the harvest season of these tomatoes. Oh, it was so hot, I will never forget that. So hot out there. The work just wasn't—first of all,

even though we were poor and things were pretty—in our home, we didn't have the particular lifestyles and the conveniences of your more modern homes then. We had been taught to respect one another and what have you. And this type of thing, I could just see that it just wasn't—it just gave me the feeling, I just felt like I was just some outcast. Just living on a—just really living or existing. And I wasn't there really—I couldn't see anything beneficial from it. So I just made the decision, at that particular time, one of the men who'd went up from the community, he had been enticed into going, too. I mean, he'd heard all the reports of the success and all; that the money was available there, which it was. But you really had to work. And you had to have people that were really wanting to work, because I thought—I never, that I can ever recall—to picked up any potatoes and put in the baskets. But this was what you did in the tomato fields—you picked them baskets under arms. And I think it was something like ten cents a basket. The tomatoes were there; they were plentiful. But it was I don't know, I can say, I just couldn't see myself out there. I had some reservations about the whole thing, and I said, well gosh, surely life's gotta have more meaning than this. You know, and I said, at least for me anyways. So, at the end of those two weeks—and I had an aunt now, who was living there at the time. She was from Mobile.

P: She was living in Virginia?

R: She was living in Virginia. And she had invited me up to their home, to stay with them, and I said no. She had a real nice two-story home there, with several other

families who had—well, it was her stepfather and his wife and all had come up from Atmore, and they were living there.

P: Which aunt was this?

R: Now, this was my Uncle Edmond's wife, Myrtle, and they were there. He was living in Mobile, he worked the state dock. But she—I don't really know how she ever got up there, other than just to hear about this, about the farming and what have you. So, they asked me to stay, and I said, no, I must go back home, this is just not for me. So I did, I came back home, and I don't think I was ever so happy to see home as I was then. I knew that this just wasn't the type of life that I wanted to live. Now, several of the other families that I remember even went father, they went up into Wisconsin and that area, working potato fields. This never interested me. After that one experience, I just felt like surely things had to have a different meaning and there was more to it than—I just didn't feel secure in roaming all over the country—

P: One thing I've never been able to really pin down is how the Indians got started in this roaming around the country. I know Jack Daughtry, for example, carried a lot of people around—

R: Mal McGhee, that you never mentioned, I think Mal was probably—

P: Did they do it through agricultural extension agents?

R: Right, right. I've forgotten his name, but he came down from Brewton—the agent did. After, you see, at this time, Alabama and all the different areas—states I suppose—were being notified of the need of help to work in these fields and what have you. So, that's how it got started. Now, it was from that that you had more

and more of your people getting involved. It was just a means for—the older people, I can see—for them to make some quick money, you know, to support them throughout the year. If you had good working people and people that were eager to work, just like going into North Carolina into those tobacco fields—if you went in there and you had a good group of men, and women, too, that were eager to work, it could be very beneficial, worthwhile.

P: How long ago do you think this first began, this going to different parts of the country working—well even going as far as Baldwin County—do you remember when you were real small, the older people talking about having gone to the different places or not?

R: Well, I suppose as soon as—as I remember, hearing as a child, I can remember the stories of the people going to Baldwin County to work in the potato fields. Now, their mode of transportation, I don't know—I don't know if they went by wagons, if they drove down in a horse, in a mule and wagon rather, if it came about during the era of modern transportation, as it began. I would say probably, I think it'd be safe to assume to say probably, I would think, maybe the late [19]30s, most definitely during the [19]40s, that this—

P: Now what about working in Citrus? I've heard your dad talk about having to work down there. What do you know about?

R: Now, this was another program through the agricultural extension program. Now, my dad went to south Florida with Jack Daughtry to pick the oranges. Now, this was another time, you see, that during the harvest season—now, this was during the summer. Then, they could go—as this thing was set up, as your seasons, as

I remember, you had your spring harvest, such as your potatoes and probably your green vegetables and cucumbers and this thing. Then, they could travel to southern Florida during the summer for the harvesting of the oranges, and by the early August or no later than late August, they were back to pick the cotton, gather the cotton, see?

P: In the immediate area?

R: In the immediate area. And this cost us, I guess about six or seven months of really active employment there, if you were interested.

P: What about picking up pecans? Has that been something people have done for a long time?

R: Now, picking up pecans, I think probably, I would think, this came—you mention picking up pecans, here I think of Aunt Florence again. She got involved mainly because of the picking of cotton and all; she met, you know, different people in Uriah and what have you, that they had these pecans that had to be harvested. So, that's how that came about.

P: Now, what season of the year? Pecans are like in October, November?

R: October, November—

P: Now, that's after all the cotton season?

R: After cotton. So actually, you see, when they started including the pecans, and to really be truthful about it, from what I can hear, that it doesn't seem like something that small that you could really make any money at it. But I've heard those women mentioned that seventy and eighty dollars for one week, it just was—

P: Now, when people got started doing all these things—going around, gathering different crops—were they still trying to keep their own farms at home, too?

R: Yes. Now, in our situation—see, we had allotments for cotton, and this type thing. We had just a few acres. We could come in—we had these trucks again, these men, let's say for example I use Alton Jackson, Mal McGhee—those were the two in our community I remember most—and Willie Gibson, he worked with Mal and Alton. You see, they would take us over to Lottie, which is just a community just up the road from Poarch there. And we'd pick this cotton. Well, if thirty or forty of us went in the field in the morning, by afternoon, we could clear out quite a number of acres. And it got to the point there, I could remember one period, we used to pick the cotton. But then, somehow or another, through the ginnin' process, they found out that you could pull the whole burr from the stock. Through the ginning, they had engineered, and with technology and all, had advanced this to where they had some means of—you just didn't have to pick cotton itself, you know? They could eliminate this waste. And then after that, really during the cotton season then, after you started going in a stripping this stocks like that, it was just nothing to cotton picking anymore.

P: One thing I'm trying to get at is that it was still possible, say for a family to go off to different places, picking and so forth, and still keep their own farm at home?

R: Yes, mm-hm. I was going to make that point—in our case, where we had just a few acres, you see? Well, we could just set aside—maybe in the community, say look now, we're going to work over at this farm in Lottie a certain number of days.

And then we're going to be back and we can gather your cotton on a certain, certain day.

P: Oh, everybody that had worked in Lottie, say—

R: Yeah.

P: —would come and work on your farm?

R: Yeah, we could just do it like that, after we got—

P: Now, did you pay them something for helping you, or was that just—

R: Oh, yeah, everybody was paid.

P: Was there ever a time when say everybody would go pick this person's field then you'd go pick the next person's field—

R: Yes.

P: —in a group without paying any money?

R: No, no. It was always each farmer paid for the gathering of their crop—

P: Within the community?

R: Right.

P: Within the community, too?

R: Right, right. Yeah.

P: Let me stop—

[Break in Recording]

P: Yeah. Getting back to the church for just a minute, Buford. I remember one time, just in casual conversation, you were talking about—I've forgotten his name now, that Iroquois fella you met, who was bad-mouthing the missionaries, all that . . . in Tallahassee that time, remember that—**Beeman Logan**, that's who it was.

R: Oh, Beeman Logan, yeah.

P: He was blasting the churches and your feelings about that, if you'd just—

R: Let me tell you how I met Beeman Logan. I attended last—it was in last March, I guess it was—or was it April? I don't know, but it was a cold day in Tallahassee. The Creeks had been invited down there; there was a group in Tallahassee who had gotten together, it was several people and they were Creeks. They wanted to start a movement in the Tallahassee area. So, we were invited down, I went down to Tallahassee with them. At this particular meeting, Chief Beeman Logan, whose of the Iroquois Nation of New York—he's from Seneca, New York—was there. Now, I had met Beeman Logan one year—last February, it was a year ago—at a conference I attended in Boston. The purpose of this conference—some eastern Indians had, through various trade papers and what have you, there had been various Indian groups or bands, as some were referred to of eastern Indians. They had been listed as living in different parts of the Eastern United States. These particular people that organized the conference in Boston, well they invited the Creek Indians to participate, mainly because they had heard of, Calvin McGhee's name was listed in Washington—it was listed with the Bureau of Indian Affairs and others, he was listed as Chief of the Creeks in Alabama. So, they invited delegates from the Creek community to come and participate in this conference. Well, there was also some funding available, but they could only provide funds for one representative. So, myself and another council member attended this conference with our chief, Houston McGhee, at our own expense. And it was at this conference that I met Beeman Logan. And he

told about his work among the Indian people in general and his confrontations he had had with the delegates from New York and the Congress and the House of Representatives and the Senate, and his various other activities involving Indians—he said all Indians, representation of all Indians—in Washington. And his traveling through the west with this Indian movement to revitalize and bring about the religious movement within the Indian themselves. And it was, like I say, in Boston that I met him. Well, a year later, he was invited, as I was, to Tallahassee. And it was at this particular conference that he began—he was invited there, and he was given the opportunity to expound more on his feelings about various aspects of the Indian as far as economics, social life, as the effect that different people, such as missionaries and what have you, who had come to the various Indian groups to really, supposed to minister to them that had really just taken and their teachings had just taken the lifestyle of the Indian, the very roots right out from under him. Now, I listened to him speak, and right away I felt bitter. And I was bitter, because of this one fact: here I was, a young man who had—all my life to what I am today, I have to attribute to some form of religious teachings through a missionary. I'm an Episcopalian. I was born, baptized, and I'm an active member in the Episcopal Church, and I'm very happy to be a part of it. I would think and hope that because I believe in that particular church and all that my life should be continued to be a part of that, teaching. But getting back—to here was a man who says he was an Indian, full-blooded Indian. And he was attacking something that had meant so much to me. And in my own way, I felt like that movement was responsible for me having had the opportunity to be what

I was, and I didn't exactly appreciate it. Because all my life, I had been taught and told I was an Indian, I was a Creek Indian. But to what degree, I was never really told—all I knew was we were Indian. My mother was Indian, my father was Indian. I know my mother wasn't full-blood, but my father, as far as from what genealogy and research has been done, he was probably full-blood. But I know, most definitely so, not on my mother's side; her grandfather was a white man, Englishman. And here was a situation where, like I say, having grown up—all my life, as I said, I was told I was an Indian, I lived as an Indian, I was in a community, I lived in a community that was Indians—and to me, as far as I knew, and from what I could read, our lifestyle was quite different from the Western Indian. We didn't live—I hadn't heard any Indian language, I was not able to. I had no, really, customs. We didn't have any crafts or such, or anything, or make any crafts, or have any arts and crafts or anything to speak of. Mainly our lifestyle was that we just lived as Indians in a community. And myself, I don't know of any areas or times that I was ever . . . there was segregation, or I was segregated against. But I know from earlier stories and from what I could see just from going into town that there were those that were segregated against because they were—some of them were dark. Here, in my situation I have lighter skin. This wasn't that problem, I wasn't confronted with this. But getting back to—he was—the Chief Beeman Logan, he was again an individual who was attacking my very existence. So this is why, I just didn't understand and I didn't feel that all the work that the missionaries had done—and certainly not in our case—was all in vain. And in our situation, it meant the very difference in our life and in mine in

particular. And I'm thankful, and I appreciate the fact that we were accorded that opportunity. And I'm thankful to the church, that they had people who were interested enough to come and live and work in our community. And to work and minister to the Indians, not only in the church-type work, but for the social and economic standpoint, to give them an opportunity to really emphasize and teach them that in order for them to really—for their life to become—for them to have any meaning, it was entirely up to them, whether or not he was Indian, a Negro, or anything. Life was only what you made of it. Now, being in the situation that we were in, this of course did make some difference for—in the environment that we lived in and all, in order for an Indian to really, in that community, to really afford himself of any opportunities, he had to, really, leave the community.

Because—

P: How far?

R: Fifty miles away you could go, to Mobile and Pensacola. Nobody ever questioned what you were, or anything. That is why I think we have the migration into these two cities that we do have. Because the fact it was just an opportunity; they weren't stereotyped or anything classified as to being—because of his race, he was afforded that opportunity.

P: Excuse me just a minute—do you remember your parents or other older people talking about the times before the missionaries came?

R: As far as their lifestyle or what have you?

P: Yeah.

R: Yes, I remember. Of course, here again, I say yes and no, because so much of this—

P: Really what I'm getting at is, as a child, was it ever held up to you as a kind of contrast of, this is how bad things were before the church came, or was that not a consideration at all?

R: Now, here again, in our situation, my father—I have to refer to him again, because of his contact with the people in the church, and his having being able to move around within the state with these people—I think, mainly, there wasn't any contrast or anything, it was just the fact that he was just facing life as it was and seeing the importance of an education. To really, for your own lifestyle, if you wanted to really have the better things—

P: I know for example that he's—a number of occasions—has talked with me about how one of the good things that Dr. and Mrs. Macy did when they first came—

[Break in Recording]

P: The question I just asked at the end of the other side was whether, as Buford's father has told me before, about how when the Macys first came that they did a lot of medical work for people, whether he had talked about that to—whether Buford's father had talked about that to his children, and Buford said—

R: No, I don't recall really ever hearing him make any contrast or comparison to the earlier childhood, other than they did just relate how—different stories about just how hard it was for them, and being neglected of this medical attention at all, in schooling, and this thing that they didn't have the opportunity to take part in. But

mainly, I remember as them telling the stories of the work that they had done there.

P: The Macys?

R: The Macys had done, you know, in the medical treatment, and the schooling, and just how important that was. And this type thing . . . I just don't ever recall any earlier stories.

P: Main church workers when you were growing up were Father Merkel—Preacher Merkel, or Reverend Merkel—

R: Reverend Merkel.

P: What was he usually called in the community?

R: Well, Mr. Merkel.

P: Mr. Merkel, was what you—

R: Mr. Merkel, mm-hm.

P: And Ms. Bradshaw?

R: Now, Ms. Bradshaw and them, they came in the [19]50s, you see? Ms. Bradshaw was one of our first—well, she and Estelle Warren were the first two ladies who came down from Birmingham—Bible school teachers. You see in the earlier—well, in 1929, when the church was first established there, they didn't only build the church there at St. Anna's, but there was St. John's in the Wilderness which was built. And right now where the present Holiness Church is located, there was an Episcopal Church—St. John's in the Wilderness. And that house that Alton Jackson used to live in—the lumber from that house, he purchased when the church sold that to him and it was torn down.

P: When St. John's was torn now?

R: St. John's was torn down, and he brought and built a home.

R: As a child, did you ever go to Holiness Church services at all?

R: I did.

P: You did?

R: I did. And one of the most fantastic experiences I ever had in my life, and I'll never forget as long as I live was—of course, if you're familiar with the Holiness religion, as you know, they have these tomes that people—to shout and carry them when—I can remember as a child, even though we attended the Episcopal Church and all that, it was just common, you know, this was some place to go. And if there the other churches and all, we visited. I was an Episcopalian—that's just like when the Mennonites came in there—I was an Episcopalian. I attended Mennonite services. I attended Baptist services. No big thing, you know, it was just something to do, somewhere to go. We didn't really have any activities or as such in the community, other than—any organized athletics or anything, by no means. If we had a softball game or something, it was just some—as a bunch of boys, we got together our own. As far as having toys and this thing, it really depended on your own creativity. If you could create something to—I remember, we used to take and cut down a tree, and take a large board, and you know, make a seesaw, this type thing. Or a Flying Jenny, we used to call this thing.

P: What's a Flying Jenny?

R: Well, it was—actually, you get this board, you know, and they get to pushing you around this thing; this, I think, is how the term Flying Jenny, if I remember correctly.

P: But it's basically constructed like a seesaw, except you go round and round—

R: Round and round, yeah.

P: —instead of up a down?

R: Up and down. But relating this experience at the Holiness Church—I never will forget this. I don't know, I think, as just a child, I was very inquisitive. I found myself in the beginning of the service seated on this front pew. And there was a little church, it's a little Holiness Church—actually, somewhere right in that area where Edward Rackard lives now, used to be a little Holiness Church in there; just a little one-room building. They had the—I don't know if they call it the altar—anyway, it was a raised area. They had these railings around it when they had the prayers, you know, they would go there and pray. But this one lady, she got to shouting. The next thing I know, she was in my lap, and I thought the woman had died. And I was never so horrified in all my life. That's one experience I think I've always really remembered about the Holiness Church and everything. Of course, our teachings in our church were—we were taught just what—well, we were accused of, because we had a prayer book, and we had this formal service that everyone could participate in, it wasn't the type of church service that these people projected, you know, where they just had these preachers that come and just read a passage from the Bible, and you know, just preach and expound from that. And this is, I guess more or less from what I've seen and recognize from the

Holiness Churches—of course, they would have the singing. Then, they would have the preacher, you know, reading from the Bible, preaching, what have you. Of course, during these preaching, a lot of times the people would get to shouting, and what have you. And that was the occasion for this lady.

P: She passed out in your lap?

R: She passed out in my lap. I think I might have fainted also, but it was an experience, I'll remember.

P: Other than going to church over there, did you ever just go over and play with kids in Poarch Switch or did you stay pretty much around Headapadida?

R: We stayed pretty much at home. You know, it's a funny thing, but maybe it's because we just didn't have the means of modern day transportation and communication. Even in our own community, we were just sort of—we were Indians here, and those were those Indians over there. And the strangest thing about it, as I grew older, I found out that this is my very own relatives, my dad's folks that live there. And here they were to be such strangers, I couldn't figure that out. I used to think, well, now, my goodness. So often I've asked my daddy, I said, Daddy, why in the world? I said, that's your sisters and all that live out there. And we just never—I knew that Aunt Molly and Uncle Dave lived out there, and that was about it, but we really never socialized with them any. We just lived in the community.

P: What about you mother's people?

R: My mother's sister, one—well, there was Aunt Florence. Aunt Florence I was very familiar with. But she had a brother that lived in Mobile. Well, actually, the

two brothers; one was a merchant marine, merchant seaman, and he shipped all the time. I saw him occasionally throughout, when he would come home, you know, he'd come and visit. And then, the sister that lived in Pensacola. That was about it, as far as her family. Now, in my situation—I never saw a single grandparent from either side of my family, my mother or father. I came just shortly after they had all died. If I could say, if there was any one person that was in that community was something of the stature that you would classify a person as a grandparent, and she was, certainly, I think she was a godmother to me, I would think of Dan McGhee's wife, Lena. Lena was like a mother to me. I don't know if she was just, sort of—I don't know it was just that I really, I can't really say how I became so attached to her. In my late teens, she died, but I really became attached to her. And I just sort of—just as a second mother. Then another lady that I really became very close to and fond of and perhaps was Clara Rolin. Clara was more, just like I say, even though she wasn't that old—it was just somebody I knew, that just I felt like had that special love and feeling for me, and always seemed so interested in what I was doing.

P: When you were a teenager, did those people—Dan McGhee and Clara Rolin—live in the places they live in now? Or live in, more or less, that area?

R: General area, yes. At one time, Dan and Lena, up until Lena's death—well, and after, had a man, Howard, live with Dan, and they were still caretakers there. Well, Lena and Dan came to live in the caretaker's home after mom and daddy—when we bought the farm over there. Excuse me.

P: Speaking of that area—has there, as long as you can remember, has there always been a store where Kelly's store is now?

R: No. That store, I would say, is in the early 1960s, late [19]50s.

P: And it was Mal McGhee that originally built the store?

R: Mal McGhee. And it was one little building. When he first begun there, it was one little building. And he enlarged it—added another room. Of course, he still kept the one building. And then of course as he passed away, Martha continued to operate it. Then she later remarried and made it into the grocery store that it is today.

P: Had there been any store in the community before that?

R: Well, not in our area, but out there now at Poarch, across from the Holiness Church, Riley McGhee had that little—

P: Oh, his store is older than the one in—

R: I think so, I'm sure it is. Riley had that little store out there. But like I say, here I grew, I guess, to really see these people in the Poarch community, really actually know them more, as I began to, was the fact that our school bus traveled through there, see.

P: You started going to Atmore?

R: To Atmore, to school. Now, of course, the children were bussed from there up to the school, and I got to know them.

P: You knew them in school, but then they went home, or?

R: And that was about it. Then, of course, during the harvest seasons, we would see them. But you know, even at that, when we would go and pick that cotton—I

remember this so well—they were still, they were just . . . that was there little group, and we were—oh, well now, we socialized. Always and I remember, in these cotton fields, we'd go and pick the cotton. Lunch time was a big affair. Everybody, we'd go out into the woods there. If you hadn't brought a lunch, you know, you'd stop by the store, and you always picked up Cokes and what have you. And this was just sort of, you know, you mingle and mixed and saw each other. But other than that, really, the only times you really ever got to see everyone was at funerals and this type thing. I always—

P: Those funerals would bring people together?

R: People together. And now your dinners on the grounds, and this type thing, now this would really would bring the people together. We, I guess, as far as to really mix with the people or anything, did you know—that's why, I would think you probably in your travels now, and those people that you have met in the Pensacola area—you'll meet some people who are Creek Indians. If you were to mention some of the names of those people living there, it just would be news to them, they wouldn't know who they were. And here they might have been, I would say, as close as kin as the first or second cousin. They just never really—they adapted their own lifestyle where they were living, and had their friends, and that was it.

P: Now, it would seem to me that this land claims money might have been something that got people getting to know each other better, too—at those meetings and all. Do you remember, as a child, going to some of those early mass meetings?

R: Back in the early [19]50s, I remember that, yes. Back in 19 . . . uh, let's see, I started school in 1950—now, Mrs. Grace K. Mays, who is still living in Atmore, she taught me for two years, fifth and sixth grade. She, of course as in later years, and I'm sure that I heard about it, but as a child, this didn't mean anything. But as I grew older, I began to understand things more. I was told again that she was the one responsible for this Indian claims case ever materializing. I can remember attending some of those meetings.

P: What did kids do when the parents were having a meeting? Did y'all sit in on the meeting, did you go outside and play, or?

R: We just played, that was it. I mean, if they had a meeting, just maybe Calvin would—I remember, probably—really for this thing, even though it got started in the early [19]50s, really. I think, probably, it was in my teens that I really got to—as far as seeing Indians grouped together for something other than a funeral or, they used to refer to it in those Holiness Churches as Fifth-Sunday meetings, and things like that [Fifth-Sunday meetings are special events held in months that contain five Sundays]. Here again, let me tell you a situation that—another time, a focal time that we got together was at Christmas. Now, in our church, in the Episcopal Church, we always had the Christmas play. This included speeches by the children, the singing of the carols, and doing the Christmas story. This, to me, as I can remember from a child, this is what Christmas was. We never knew what it was to have a Christmas tree in my early childhood. That was Christmas. We had this great big huge tree in that church, and we decorated it. We had this Christmas play. And that was Christmas. The toys and candy and apple and

oranges were sent in for the Indians. And various toys were given. And this was Christmas. I guess the very most special thing that I can ever remember getting at Christmas time was—maybe, I must have been about fourteen years of age. At this time, record players, the little small record players were becoming very popular. And my sister—she at this time, even though she was married, she didn't have children.

P: It was Leola?

R: Leola, this was Leola. 'Course, she's passed away now. With Jack, her husband, being in various veterans' hospitals having recovered from tuberculosis and surgery and things that he'd contracted from the war, she traveled to—I remember, Kentucky, Memphis, Tennessee; different areas, Montgomery—where he was hospitalized. I never made any of those trips with her, or anything. At least I had some member of my family, at least was moving around and being exposed. This was a high point to me, this in my lifetime; I can remember that, too. This particular time, I never will forget, Leola, she was home—I just don't remember whether Jack was . . . I think he was in Montgomery. And she came home, and I had just heard talk, and we had the radio on, top of these record players. And it was getting close to Christmas. And I said, I would like to have one of those record players. And she got me that record player. Now, we had had, at the church—at St. Anna's Church—I don't know how we came about it, but we'd had a record player. Now, and I think, really, that's where I got to become acquainted with the record player. Then again, Ms. Mays, in the fifth and sixth grade, she always had this old record player. It was the old, windup type,

you know? And she used to play some little marches and things for us, you know? And we were just really, after we started going into the public schools like this—I say, public school . . . I really should correct myself, that's all I actually knew was public school—but we were never really taught that we were any different, even though we are Indian, we were just taught what the state of Alabama had set down as the format for education. We had the basics: reading, writing, arithmetic, and this type thing. The basic studies. And your social studies, and what have you. I can remember saying, I wanted that record player, and she got me that record player. To really associate something, to getting a gift at Christmas, that's the one thing that I remember most. Other than the Christmas play at our church. Did you know? We always looked forward to that time of year. And we would walk from home. We would get in from school, we would do whatever work or chores we had to do, and we would walk to that church and rehearse that play until it was—and my sister Leola directed it. We would rehearse that play and sing those carols, and all of that leading up to that night. That night, it was referred to always as that night. That night. You don't wanna come out here and do a little sloppy old speech, like you're saying that now. Now remember, that night, that's the big performance. This has gotta be perfect for that. So we always would rehearse, and we would walk back and forth. Then Leola and Jack, after they came back and Jack was able, they had an old pickup truck. We could walk up there, but she managed to deliver us all that night back home. You know, in that old pickup truck.

- P: If the Christmas—on that night, then people would come from all the different churches?
- R: The communities, yeah. To see the play. Yes, this was a big performance.
- P: Was there ever any children in the play who were not Episcopal children?
- R: Yes, in the later years. Now, some of the girls from out at Poarch—I remember, Annabelle McGhee, and, uh . . . well, the Daughtrys, Houston—see Houston and Emma Jean Daughtry, and Charles, now they lived out at Poarch, but that was Dan's—Inez and Adam Daughtry—Inez was Dan's daughter, you see? And Adam, having worked in the pulpwood and all—at one time he had his own pulpwood truck—then during the potato season and the cotton season, see he did have transportation. So, I would say in my later teen years, we started to really socialize with one another and become familiar. And here again, like I say though, I think probably just traveling to that community every day on that bus, back and forth, and seeing the people and all, really I got to see them more than I ever really did at any other time of the year.
- P: Tell me a little about—I know you have before—but talk a little bit about what it was like when you, as among the first to go to high school in Atmore, what it was like in the early days of the Indians being bused into Atmore.
- R: Well, in my first year, when I went into the seventh grade into Atmore, here again, I have to refer back to—there were Episcopalians who lived in town who had at one time or another had come out to St. Anna's. I suppose that really the town folk really realized that it had to be, and the Indians were going to be bused into town, they—I can't really say that this was their reason for doing it, but

because of the fact, too, that some of our teachers who had come from town and to the grammar school. Now, this was after I had left, there was beginning being bused into town. They had come from town, I remember Mrs. Broughton and Mrs. Williams. Now Mrs. Broughton's son—he and I were classmates from seventh grade through high school. But I guess just that they had realized and begun to know that they were going to have to accept them. And through Mr. Merkel—there was some of the people in town who attended the church there who had made visits out there, and then through contact with my folks going into town had got to know 'em. And I remember that there was some children of Episcopal families in town that I had seen, you know, and that were very friendly to me, when I first went into the—and continued to be.

P: You had seen them when you had gone to church in town, or they had come to your church?

R: No, well, we didn't visit that much in the churches. Maybe I'd go into town, and I'd see them. I don't really ever recall attending any services in town until after I was in, I guess, junior high school. And the first time I really actually ever remember going into Trinity Church in town, was I participated in a **World Day of Prayer** program. I did, I read for them the Indian version—now who wrote this, I don't know—the Lord's Prayer.

P: That was the first time you went to church—

R: Yes, there at Trinity Church, that I could remember, in town. This was a Friday, a World Day of Prayer service.

P: Were you the only Indian that went in that time?

R: This particular time, yes. And I came from school—Mrs. Bartel came over and picked me up from school and brought me over to Trinity Church and I participated in that program that day.

P: Because you were an Indian?

R: Yeah, they had wanted one of the Indian children to do that.

P: And how old were you at that time?

R: I must have been twelve or thirteen. I was in seventh grade or eighth grade. But as far as after going into high school in town, as myself, you see, I can remember even as my sisters and my brother—you see, I never attended school in McCullough. Now, the Indians were just flatly—they went there, but they weren't wanted. And I had often thought, and I said, when it came time for me to leave that school there at Poarch, if I would be confronted with this, knowing that I was going to have to attend school where I wasn't wanted. And I was so thankful that that year when my last year there—maybe it was a couple of years, maybe in fifth grade that they discontinued that up there, at McCullough, the school there. And they started busing those students in town.

P: But before the Indian children had been bused to McCullough and Atmore, or just McCullough?

R: Well, some of them, I understand, had went to—up in our area up there, they went to McCullough.

P: Mm-hm.

R: And I think that some of Calvin's children and down in that area were going into town. I know the students in our area, they were bused to McCullough.

P: To McCullough?

R: Mm-hm. Well it just had from grades one through nine there. Then, to finish your education, you had to go into town to Atmore to do it. Now, my sister, Bessie, who lives in Mobile, now she—I think she completed the eighth grade. I'm sure it was eighth grade at McCullough. Now, my sister, Lottie, she all the way up eleventh grade, but she went into town. She rode the bus into town. But she just got married; you know, gave up school and got married. Same was the case—now; I think Bessie just quit school, because she just—not living under pressure, not being wanted, and what have you, I think, probably was one of the reasons that she wasn't interested in completing.

P: I've heard this about McCullough a lot—do you have any ideas that you've come up with to explain why Indian children weren't as well received at McCullough as they were in Atmore?

R: You know, I have often wondered about this, and I've heard different reasoning for it. Now, another thing—that we had to be—I think if there was one single incident or a situation that could distinctly separated the two communities was the fact that—now, over in the Hog Fork area, in the Poarch area, well over there you had your state farm.

P: State prison farm?

R: State prison farm. A lot of those people over there were just associated with those trusty prisoners and things like this. And in some cases, even married to them. And some of the women had children, illegitimate children because of these people. And of course, you know, how the stories go back and forth. And

like I say, here we felt in our community, we just didn't want any part of that. I mean when the prisoners ran, oh that was—we were just fearful. Because we just thought every man in prison was a convicted murderer, you know. And they were just out to kill everybody. I remember a situation back one time during the practicing of the Christmas program. We went into the church, St. Anna's Church. We opened the door to the wood stove that was there to build a fire, and reached down in there and out come convict clothing. And we ran. Well, that's all we—we just became fearful for our lives. And did you know that just that very day, children—Jack Daughtry's daughters, twins, Earline and Pearline—had walked from over at where the building that is adjoining St. Anna's Church right now, which is Aunt Perry's house, used to be the school that was over across the pond there—they had walked through that pond, there used to be a just a trail through there. They had walked through that pond, and they had seen these men in St. Anna's Church—two men. And they thought it was my dad and Dan McGhee and they had waved to them as they walked by that afternoon. And here we were in there that night. And they had, at that time, there used to be a building out there, see, the women used to can all of these vegetables and things and kept them in this building out there, because they used to cook, you see. They had the cook room and all for the school. They cooked us hot lunches and all over there. There was all of these, I remember blackberries, all of these different tomatoes and vegetables that they had canned. But to us, I mean maybe that was one way even ourselves, we as our own community, we just felt like, we just didn't do that. And so actually, we just sort of had that different

among us. I was just always felt like—and you hear it occasionally, those people are just different from us. You know? And here they were Indians, too, you know. And often times I think now, as involved as I am in the work for the Indians, all of them, often I think about that now. I wonder, so many times I'd heard that, they're just different from us. When you start to really compare the lifestyle of the three different communities, you can really see the differences that really were amongst them that made them almost three separate communities.

P: What are those? In your opinion.

R: Well, I think probably, mostly—now, here again you get your church involved. Again. And, you see, one of the, as I was growing up, and what have you—my teenage years—I used to have—we were permitted, the parish house at the church, we could have . . . I used to have little dances and all there. And I was criticized. Oh boy.

P: Dancing's sinful?

R: Very sinful. No kind of activities, none whatsoever. And I just sorta took it on myself, you know, to have these little . . . we'd have these little dances and all, just some way for us to socialize and all. And boy that was—here again now, you see, this was at the time of my—and later years, too—that we was introduced to the rock and roll era of music. We all had radios and things, and the forty-five records, you know, were out then.

P: By the time you were like in high school?

R: High school, yes. Yeah, this was, you know, all beginning—

P: Can you remember the first radio your family had, or—

R: Oh, yes.

P: —was there always a radio in your house?

R: I can remember the old box type with the batteries. We used to run an antenna. We used to go out into the woods and cut down these just black jack oaks, small—probably an inch and a quarter, two inch, and three inch—and we'd take a wire and put up there and run into the house. And you bought these dry cell batteries.

P: That was before y'all had electricity?

R: Yes, before. Oh, I can—well, yes, we had lamps and all.

P: Do you remember a time when your family didn't have a radio?

R: Um . . .

P: Or from the earliest you can remember there was—

R: From the earliest I can remember—

P: There was a radio?

R: We always had a radio. I can remember, my dad listening to the ball games. The St. Louis Cardinals baseball.

P: Getting back to the school thing a minute, did you feel like when you went to school in Atmore—coming from Headapadida or Poarch—did you feel like you encountered any prejudice at all as an Indian when you went school?

R: No.

P: Yourself, personally.

R: Myself, no, I don't . . . here, again—people occasionally, you know, with children, it was mentioned. You know, I can remember just hearing some of the snickering

in the back and this type thing. But as far as myself, really, any real problem, I really don't recall.

P: Almost to the end of this tape, and I wanted to ask you this question, from earlier tonight: you said that frequently you say to people, don't be bitter. Which you grew up through that, you know what it was like. But don't be bitter—could you expound on that a little bit, what you mean by that.

R: As I said earlier, there's so many things—to use a good example is we have the Indians claims case. I feel like when I see someone, and he makes mention of the fact that he got his hundred-twelve dollars and thirteen cents, and now he's so proud of that. Sometimes I felt like, probably, I wanted to look back and feel like, well, where were you during the struggle? Where were you? But if I became—and I think I was bitter, I really was. Because of this. But I feel now, in order for me—

P: The struggle now, what struggle do you mean?

R: When I say struggle, I mean actually living the life in the community as an Indian, a Creek Indian, you see. Here I was in a community where we were known as Indians and lived as Indians. But because the fact that this particular individual's parents had a opportunity to go away, get away and to make a life better for them, I don't think that I have the right to really feel bitter to them because they weren't active or grew up in the lifestyle and all that I did. I think one of the easiest things that there is for us to do is to have our prejudices against one another for that, and it's definitely the wrong attitude to take.

P: Have you ever yourself felt bitter towards white people?

R: Uh, not that I can recall. But, now here again, I guess it's just from, I don't think my mother and father ever taught me to hate anyone. They never did. My mother, she always taught, whether he's black or white or yellow, God loves us all. We're all God's children; we have to love one another. I guess the most friendliest relationships I had with the colored people at all, as working with them on our farm. They worked together; we're on that forty acres and gathering up those crops.

P: Yet, you said you were as a child, lower grades, you were concerned about the possibility of going to a school where you weren't wanted.

R: Right, yeah. Yeah, yes. Because that was the situation up at the school—

[Break in Recording]

P: Two, three four.

[Break in Recording]

R: Now, if in doing whatever they want to do, if this sets them apart or establishes for them a lifestyle which is Indian, or non-Indian, or whatever, that they are living, are trying to project the image they want to project, then to me, this indeed would be—I think we should make available to these people, at least give them the opportunity to be aware of some of their own basic customs that our ancestors did. Some of their dress, say, the way that they prepared certain foods. The herbs and all that they made for medicine. Some of the crafts and all. Just these things in general. Now by this, I don't mean just reverting back to the lifestyle of just living like this. It's not possible. There's no way in the world it can be done. But the fact that I do have, I feel just as the other races—the Italians,

the Jewish race, or any other race—they want to retain some of that ancestry. They know that they—take for instance, your Italians, those that live in America, or your Germans, or any other race of people—if they come to America to live, if they had wanted to continue the lifestyle and all of that country, I'm sure they would have preferred to stay there. Because of the change and all that they saw and wanted to do, they chose to go elsewhere. Well, the Indian is here; he hasn't gone anywhere. Unfortunately, the Indian has been hampered by—I think he's a victim of his own circumstances.

P: In what way?

R: He was used. You had those people that they came here, those people that came. And the Indian—these people came, they were foreign to the land. The Indian taught these people their living conditions. And taught them how to adjust to the new area, and they helped them. In the beginning, the Indian—this is one of the things that distresses me about some of 'em—the Indian has always been portrayed and projected, in a lot of cases, as a vicious person, it was just a killer instinct almost. And it's because that they have—these wrongs that they were done. These things are disturbing in a sense, but I know and I feel that I'm in no position, and I don't feel any Indian really is to really go scream and hollering, this is my land and this belongs to me. Look, I've just lived here for the last thirty-two years. Well, who am I to say, it belongs to me. I have to, I think in order for something to belong to me, I have to get out and earn it. And have the right to have it. But in this situation, it's quite different. We know that there are treaties, I know, within our own Creek Nation that the government has made with our

people, and that were broken. Well, this is just again—we just didn't have those leaders or those people strong enough to really stand up. It was easier to step aside and just be pushed aside than to really to fight the establishment.

P: Do you think the government still has an obligation to Indians, even though that was done twenty, thirty, forty, hundreds of years ago?

R: I think, perhaps—

P: In other words, is a contract made between your great-grandparents and the government, should that apply today?

R: Well, it all depends on just to what extent this contract has to be fulfilled. Now, if it means, say we're in my home or what I'm buying now—I'm paying for this. Now, if it means going, say—I know this is probably going to the extreme—but if it were to come to this, saying taking what belonged to my neighbor, something he's worked for and earned, I don't think that would be wrong. I think perhaps what could—there could be a compensation made. I'm just not in favor at all, I don't see the need—I think the government could really, in the situation with the Indian—I just thank my God every day that I didn't grow up on a reservation. I can really see no good that a reservation does. And why the government continues to really segregate a bunch of people here. Say, because you're an Indian, you live there, when this is a free county. And as progressive as this country is, why that the agency that has been established to represent the Indians, to really to me as to why it cannot really get into the problems and the situations of going into these areas and really helping these people in that manner, rather than just sticking them off out into an area and say, alright, this is

what your forefathers wanted for you. This is it, you take it now. What little subsistence you're going to get, we'll give you. I think that this is the only way the Indian is going to be helped: if they just split it up to those that live on it. Give them ten or fifteen acres, however much it is. Section it off, this is ten acres for you. Alright, now you work for this. After you paid for this, then it becomes yours to do with as you want. And train, you know, work with these people. This is the only way we're going to really—

P: How does that fit with your feelings about their own situation up there with the grant land for example?

R: Well, it gets back to—here again, we had a situation that the grant lands, they were given for a service. They were taken away from the Indians; the gift was taken from them, excuse me. When they were taxed—it was originally as a gift for a service. Alright, there were those who lived on the land and are continuing to live on the lands who, through the process of law and all within the state of Alabama, those grant lands have now, they have become taxable. The only thing I think that I resent most about the whole situation is the fact is those individuals, the way that they were taken advantage of, and in different instances, the way their lands have been taken from them. Because—

P: But you would see nothing wrong with just splitting the grant land up amongst those who've lived on it?

R: Yes, yes, I wouldn't—I have no animosity against, I wouldn't want any of it. I would be happy if right now –or else if they maybe, if they could just say, take an area or section of it and say, for the older people—build an old folks home or

something of this nature. Something that could be—we have some trained Indian nurses now. And we have other people, I think, would be interested in coming and working in there. Something of this nature. But other than that, to let those families—I think I would still like to see, since it was given to the Indians for the service, I think I'd like to see Indians remain with it.

P: Do you think there is a place for—analogous to a public park—a piece of land that belongs to the whole community of all the Indians—sort of like a corporation-owned land—or if not, in this particular situation?

R: It's possible, yes. It could be, but of course you would have to have a lot of corporation of all of the people. They would have to really understand just what it was, and it would be up to them to support a program of this nature. They could capitalize off of it. In fact, if they wanted to—let's face it, the American public today is very much Indian aware. They're interested. And they realize the fact that the American Indian is a forgotten American. The American. And it's time that the country really initiate programs that are beneficial for them, rather than just saying that you're welcome to live on the reservation, and we'll take care of you. Which, I believe the old story that idleness is the devil's workshop. We have to—I see so many examples, just right up there at that little community at home, of people just having nothing to do. Not really applying themselves. They have the potentiality. But they have to really—you have to really motivate yourself. Success is determined on the individual. Just how successful you are is just means, really just how determined you are. The sky is the limit. And this is true of anyone. I don't like to pat myself on the back by no means, but I'd like to think if I

wasn't interested in trying to really look at life as such and prepare myself to want the nicer things in life, I could be like others, and just hold my hands and do nothing. But I certainly wouldn't be doing the wishes of my parents and my family. I think a family is, whether it be Indian or any family, morally –to me that pride in that family—the achievement, the accomplishments that you make really is an example of the things that you were taught in your childhood in the beginning. This is for everyone, everybody. And this is important.

P: If we could come back to another point on this business of Indian identity. I guess when I first met you, that you said that you had always said that you'd never put on an Indian suit to prove you were an Indian, or something like that. But that you had begun to change your mind and I'm really curious to know your feelings about your original position and then why you changed.

R: Now, I think what I had said, and I have said, and I still believe—if I have to wear feathers and put on a costume to prove that I'm Indian, to hell with it. That doesn't make the Indian. That doesn't make anyone. Now, I have got a costume now, and I wear it. Simply to the fact that people are such as, we stereotype one another, you know. There's certain things. You say Indian, automatically you think of feathers. You think of a certain dress. Which was true; the Indian dress that they made, I don't think it was made to really set them aside, as to really as to give our class a style. But I think it was pride in making something that looked nice. That they really made these beautiful costumes and things that they—we say costumes, it was dress for them.

P: Their clothes.

R: That was their clothes, that's right. And the fact that they had such originality and creativity and all, I think this is where their dress was unique. And perhaps they were classified; to be an Indian, you have to dress like an Indian. And to dress like an Indian, you have to wear the bright colors and the feathers, all a part of it. But I still maintain, if it's to prove to people that I have to dress with feathers and a costume, and if this meant an everyday life, I just couldn't do it. To me, it's being presumptuous and just really demanding and requiring something of me that I'm not.

P: But you are willing to use that to sell a product?

R: That is correct.

P: And what's your ultimate goal in selling that product?

R: It's to revitalize the Indian, to make the people aware. The Indian is a proud person. He should be. We have our heroes in our Indians. We've had our heroes, as well as others. And we have them today. I like to feel that in the position that I am, the people I'm representing, that those people are proud of what I'm doing, little as it may seem. And the representation that I give them, wherever I go and if I travel, I never have, or whatever I do. And this is my reasoning, I feel, for being involved in an active position and telling the story of the Creek Indian today.

P: Well answered the next question I was gonna ask, and that's why do you do it all? And that's it.

R: Yeah. That's it.

P: One last question: looking say maybe about ten, fifteen, twenty years into the future, what would you like to see in the future for the Creek Indians East?

R: Well, you know, one of the very finest things that I could think that could ever happen to us all right now—there's the interest that we have developed . . . eh, not developed, but we've stirred—I think of, there's a time in our church services that we have what we call a stir up Sunday. It's time to—just once a year thing, I mean, certain time that we—you know, we're all prone to let things just slide by. And I'm real proud of the fact that because of our younger people—and when I say our younger people today, a generation other than myself—they're coming up, that they're very interested in the Creek Indian. What it's all about, what it was, and the history of it. I would like to think that in some, perhaps maybe fifteen to twenty years from now, we'll have some Creek Indian doctors and lawyers and others, scholars and education people. This is my point in selling the educational idea, so much to the fact—at least give them the opportunity. If that person has the ability and the need and desire and the want to do, we will have them. But at least instill in them, work with them. And give them that chance to really work in their behalf. I think with the programs that we got in mind and have in mind for our people and with this culture center—if it goes through, and hopefully it will, and looks like from all indications—that we can just, perhaps, just carry on some of this tradition and some of this older, perhaps—I'm very interested in, just from a standpoint of just being able to have some knowledge of the language. Like I say, first of all, I'm an American now. I speak the English language. But there's nothing wrong for me to want to speak any other language, if I have that interest to. But I would, since I have Creek Indian ancestry, I would like to be able to at least know some of the language.

P: You know, I often have thought about and wished I could almost get inside their heads, so to speak. But the younger generation that's coming up now, that never experienced the really harsh poverty and all that, younger Creek Indians, ones that are little kids now, that are growing up and don't have any direct first-hand or even second-hand experience with the poverty and the discrimination and so forth, and at the same time, all their lives have seen powwows and Indian doings and things, what their feelings about Indian are gonna be twenty years from now. In the sense that neither have they been able to see the contrast of what the old Indian life that you knew as a boy was like, and they just sort of take as common ordinary expectation that there will be a Thanksgiving powwow, you know, that in a sense, the younger generation seems to almost be growing up—in the sense of those cultural things—more Indian than the older people in one way, but less in that they haven't experienced the tradition of Indians in Alabama from the past hundred years of living on the farm and all that kind of thing. I wondered if you ever, do you ever think about the attitudes of those younger people that are coming up now?

R: I thought of this, I was thinking about this this Saturday. Incidentally, Saturday was the first time we used them, but we had—I know this is irrelevant to what I'm talking about, but I just had to tell you—that we used the little girls Saturday for the first time. And surprisingly enough, those four little girls went out there and just—

P: They danced?

R: And danced. Right there. And here were all these hundreds of people surrounding them. And I thought about that. I said, now here we are, with these little four and five years old children. Now, in my day, just as a boy and all, there was never anything mentioned of this. Then all of the sudden, here we are. We're telling these children. And they're real interested. And I thought, just, well, at least there'll be us around, and hopefully the history will have recorded to, there was a different side to them. It was, it wasn't, and here it has begun again. At least they'll have that recognition. You know, they'll be aware of it. And I think it'd be an outstanding accomplishment to them to think, well my generation's responsible for revitalizing this.

P: Yeah, it's funny to think of yourself as an old man telling those children as adults how it was in my day. I think that's enough.

[End of Interview]

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