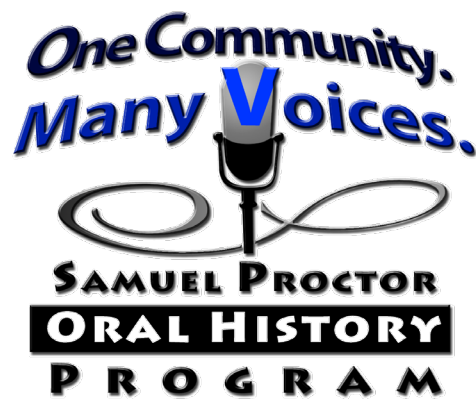


# Roberta Sells

Poarch Creek Project  
CRK-011

Interview by:

Dr. J. Anthony Paredes  
July 6, 1972



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**CRK 011 Roberta Sells**  
**Southeastern Indian Oral History Project**  
**Interviewed by J. Anthony Paredes on July 6, 1972**  
**1 hour, 20 minutes | 39 pages**

**Abstract:** Roberta discusses the history of educational discrimination in the area, and recalls how parents protested to get more teachers for the school by keeping their children at home until the superintendant acquiesced. She speaks about the establishment of a council to pursue land claims money, and discusses her work to enroll members of the community as part of that effort. She recalls how her family came to own their land, and then discusses her religious background. She was a member of the Episcopalian church before leaving to begin her own church in her yard. Finally, she discusses her work as a substitute teacher, and returns to a discussion of parents' advocacy for more teachers.

**Keywords:** [Poarch Band of Creek Indians; Alabama--Poarch; Education; Land tenure]

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

CRK-011

Interviewee: Roberta Sells

Interviewer: Dr. J. Anthony Paredes

Date: July 6, 1972

P: July 6, 1972, and I'm at the home of Mrs. Roberta Sells. We're testing this machine to see if it's gonna work or not.

P: This interview is with Mrs. Roberta Sells, a lifetime resident of the Poarch Indian community, doing this interview on July 6, 1972, in Mrs. Sells's home. She'll be talking about educational changes, and the beginnings of the Land Claims case, signing up people for the money, and the formation and development of the Indian Council. Now why don't you start back with where you were talking about before about the educational business and holding the children out of school and that sort.

S: Well, I believed in the beginning—this is when around my little boy was about six years old and he was gonna begin school, and he was an unhealthy child. And at that time, the teachers that we had we didn't feel like they was capable of taking care of the children from the things that they had been allowing the other children to do. And so we all got together, and decided we wouldn't send our children to school. We felt that we didn't have to have the teachers that we had. At that time we was more wanting teachers. We weren't thinking of the school, we was more wanting us some teachers. So we all decided that we would keep our children out and maybe then that they would do something about it. And we did, we kept them out about a month. Then, one morning, Mr. Weaver, the superintendent, met us at the school house. The teachers were still there, and they seemed to be awful hurt about the situation, but we had decided we had to do something

about it. We hated this, but there was nothing then that we could do because we hadn't started and we was intending to go on to the end. So he promised us some new teachers that day, which he did, and one of them was **Grace K. Mays**, well known in the town of Atmore. She owned a little farm out about five or six miles from town but she knew a lot of people in town. So she got other teachers, two more teachers, Mrs. **Bryers** and Mrs. **Williams**, at that time, which was good teachers. We promised Mr. Weaver that we would stay in the parish house, that's where we were having school at the time, and we would continue there until he could get us another school, which he promised that morning that he would build us a school. He had promised this for many years, and yet they hadn't come to it because Episcopal Church had given us land to build us a school, but they hadn't done it. They hadn't kept their promises. That morning he promised us that he would have us a school and we would start in another year. So this woman, she was an old maid, up in her late years—

P: This is Miss Mays, is it?

S: This is Miss Mays. She enjoyed the community, she enjoyed the people and she wanted to work for them, which she worked real hard. And in coming in contact with lawyers and with the Indian people, she found out that this money was available, but had to have some lawyers to get into it. So she went to lawyer Horne, and he told her to contact Hugh Rozelle because he was the Indian lawyer.

P: Now, let me interrupt for just a moment, would you say what kind of money it was that was available?

S: It was for the land.

P: And then also, how was it that Hugh Rozelle became the Indian lawyer? Why was it that Horn said that he was the Indian lawyer?

S: Because Rozelle had done some work for the Indians over the years at different times, but they had used him more than any other lawyer. So I guess that's why that why that he thought that. And too, I think at that time, Horn was against the Indians as much as anybody else was but Hugh Rozelle wasn't. So, I guess that's why that they called him the Indian lawyer.

P: Before we go on with that—and we will come back—I wanted to ask you if you could tell me a little about how the keeping the children out of school for a month was organized and who thought of that idea and who started that.

S: Well, I guess really it was me that had really come to that decision to do that, on account of this unhealthy child that I had. And I don't know, I guess a lot of times people felt like that I had, I don't know what you'd call it, but decisions that I would make, they were always kinda felt like they were right. And of course I never did really look up to that. I didn't want them to believe that, but they kinda fell to me more to be ahead of things so many times. So we all was just a family right through here, my cousins and aunts and uncles and things like that, so they just all actively decided this, we all just felt like that was the right thing to do.

P: At that time were there many people living over in Poarch Switch and Hog Fork?

S: Yes there were.

P: Did they take part in this too? Did they keep their children out too?

S: Yes they did.

P: How did their—

S: They were [inaudible] Huxford, too.

P: Huxford

S: **Yes, they did.** They were bussing them from Huxford, see they didn't allow the Indian children to go into McCullough or Huxford School.

P: So any Indian children who were not Huxford [inaudible] Parish house—

S: And the bus run every day for a whole month without a child on it. 'Cause, see, they come from Huxford on around through Poarch and Hog Fork and they picked up the children and brought them up to the school. It's been quite so long, I can't remember just all about it, but I know all of them stop their children except the Rolin family.

P: Well, with people scattered all over like that, how did you go about organizing this and getting people to agree to it?

S: Well, once someone had made a decision like this, usually the others would go along with it.

P: And how did they find out about that decision?

S: By the ones here stopping the children.

P: And then by visiting around. . . ?

S: Well, you see the children would come to school and they'd say, Mama or Daddy, the others is not sending their children. And see they all knew that this was supposed to be for years, that they knew that we was supposed to have a school. And all of them knew how the teachers was going along, doing the children, you know. They wasn't learning anything. They were more going up there for just a pastime cause they weren't learning anything, they were . . .

P: Were those not qualified teachers that were coming into the union?

S: There were some of them that wasn't.

P: But they were paid by the county?

S: They were paid by the county.

P: But they just weren't doing their job?

S: They wasn't doing their job.

P: Well, I'll let you go on now and begin talking about the land money, and I think I interrupted you when you were saying that lawyer Horne said to go see lawyer Rozelle at that point. Would you continue on there?



S: Well, I can't remember just really how it did get started from that point. Over in Philadelphia, Mississippi, they had already been enrolling the people over there. So somehow or another, Rozelle got in contact with Judge **Weir**, he was the one that was taking care of the Choctaw Indians over there. So in getting in contact with Judge Weir, they got him to come here. But at that time, we had done had our school built. She had done taught the year in the parish house and we had done got our school built and we had started school that year.

P: That school that's there right now?

S: That school that's there right now, which was in 1950. Must have been [inaudible] or [19]51. . .

P: Must have been what?

S: It was 1950.

P: [19]50.

S: They called a meeting. It had got scattered out then about this—the news had—so they called a meeting. And he talked. Judge Weir talked and told them about the things that they would have to do and how they would have to get it started. They would have to enroll the people and see how many there were and different things like that. So that night, after he did his talk and while they were all together, they choose the council members and also the chief.

P: About how many people were at this meeting?

S: I imagine **there was some** three or four hundred people, mostly just from right around in the community of the different settlements, you know. From Huxford and Hog Fork, and Poarch, and the people there.

[Break in Recording]

P: We just stopped the tape for a moment and were chatting and Mrs. Sells remembered that she should probably include, in connection with the school activities, a discussion of the bussing and Jack Daughtry's activities. And I will ask her if she might also work into this—show how they're all connected—Calvin McGhee's efforts to improve education that I have heard about. Do you know anything about that?

S: Well, the Indian children was never allowed to go to Huxford or Poarch. If they could get them away into town, into Atmore, they could go and finish their high school education. I remember when I had made it to the seventh grade, and they wouldn't let me ride the bus. So at that time, we happened to know a family of folks that lived there, and my daddy. . .

P: Lived in Atmore?

S: Lived in Atmore, and my daddy sent me down there. And that's the only high school education that I got. So after they—with all of this we never was allowed to go into Huxford or McCullough. After all of this got up, there was several children that needed to go to high school, so they still wouldn't let us go into McCullough. A man, Jack Daughtry, he stopped the bus so his children could ride, but they wouldn't let them ride. So the first year of high school education

they had to go to town, too. But after that, then they were allowed to go to McCullough. I don't know how it come about that they was allowed to go to McCullough, but they were allowed to go to McCullough.

P: Did Calvin McGhee play any part in trying to make it possible for children to ride the bus?

S: Yes, after he become chief. After he had become chief he had a big help [inaudible]. They all looked up to him then, and they would do practically what he asked them to do. And I believe that was how it all come about that they go to ride the bus to McCullough.

P: Just as an aside, it's kind of a personal note, could you talk for a moment about why you think it was that people looked up to Calvin McGhee and why it was that he would be the man that would be selected as the chief?

S: Well, they didn't look up to Calvin until he become a chief, all that much, but they felt like he was the man for the job because he had a good personality and he believed in fighting for what he wanted. And they just looked to him. And he made them be that way because of the way he acted, and how he worked after he become chief.

P: Okay, let's return to the formation of the council. And you had just talked about the first meeting in which the council was selected and the chief. And if you could begin there by saying how the people selected the council, and who it was they selected at that first meeting.

S: Well, Judge Weir told them that night that it would be better if they could get council members from different families, like different names of the families. And they were **Weatherfords**, so there had to be two or maybe three different names because most all of them had the same name. And I was a McGhee before I married, see, but then I married the Sells and my name was different. So they always put me into things like this, and now in the mass meeting they had that night. Well they voted on it, the ones that they wanted to be our council members, but he had told them, too it would be better for them if they had different names. So that night they voted me as Sells, Mrs. **Leola Manack**, of course that's an Indian name. Sells is not. Claude Colbert and **Artie Reed**, Mrs. Ruby Weatherford, Tom Weatherford, **Kinsey McGhee**, Brooks Rolin, John Phillips, and John Williams. There's another one but I can't remember his name. And that was the council members. I believe that's all of them.

P: Could you say where each one of them lived, where they were from?

S: Well, Mrs. Ruby Weatherford was from Bay Minnette, Tom was from Uriah—

P: Tom Weatherford?

S: Tom Weatherford, yes, Uriah. And Brooks Rolin, he was from the Poarch community, Kinsey McGhee was from the Hog Fork community, and of course me and Leola was from this community.

P: Which is Headapadida?

S: Then it was, but now it's Poarch. [Laughter]

P: Okay.

S: John Phillips, he was from Robertsdale. John Williams was from Uriah, and Claude Colbert was from Huxford. And Calvin, of course he was from Hog Fork.

P: And Artie Reed?

S: Artie Reed? He was from Uriah.

P: How many altogether were selected that night?

S: Twelve.

P: Twelve. Why was the number twelve picked as a number of councilmen or did it just work out that way or what?

S: No, I think that is more of a . . . I guess you call it a law to make it be sufficient. So different things that they decided on, you know, they'd take the twelve and then the biggest majority of whatever they voted would be what would go.

P: Now, you talk about voted on. Was there ever occasion before this council was organized that the people from around here would get together and vote on things?

S: Not that I can remember.

P: That night, was there any discussion of how many councilmen there should be—the number there should be—

S: Yes, yes. He told them it should be twelve. See he had already got organized with his and he knew a lot about it.

P: From working with the Choctaw?

S: From working with the Choctaw, and he was a head of them; he was their lawyer at that time—of course, they called him a judge, but I don't know if he was a judge or not, but they called him a judge that night. And he had got into it enough that he knew a lot about it. And that was why the lawyers had asked him to come over and kinda get them set up because they didn't have but just a little while to get in on it. The time had just about run out. I think they only give them five years from the time the bill had passed and this was on the last, very last.

P: Well, now that the council was organized and Calvin McGhee was selected as the chief, then what happened next?

S: Well, they asked me that night—after he had told them that he had to start enrolling them—if I would do this. And I decided that I would do anything to help, and I did. After they had done started in the school—in the new school—then we asked a Judge—the Episcopal judge—if they would let us use the parish house to do this in, which they did. They were very anxious to let us do this. So we started, at least I did, and I didn't know how to do it, but I just got me one of these ledger books and I just started enrolling them the best I knew how. So I only took their names and who their ancestors was, how many children they had in their names, that was all I knew how to do. I left off the address, which I should have took cause later on when we had to go back and go over it and get addresses of

different ones so they could be sent notices to if things change and what they would need to know. So we had to go back over after we had started and get some addresses. So after I did this I carried again to Rozelle and asked him if that was what to do. He said that was all right. So we just kept going on, day after day, week after week for quite a while. And then it got to be a big job because it had got statewide, it hadn't got just right around in our community, it had reached on out into Mississippi and Pensacola. I mean Florida and Georgia, and different places, you know. People, ones that had moved away, and after they had heard about this it had got to be quite a job. And after it had gotten to be more than I could take care of then, Mrs. Ruby Weatherford, she was a nurse, and I believe it was in the infirmary—Mobile Infirmary— and she'd have days off. And the days that she would be off, she would come up and help. And then Calvin and his wife got to helping us. And it just moved on from that till . . .

P: Did you try to keep regular hours, or something, that you would be at the parish house to enroll people, or did people come to your house, or how did that work?

S: Well, Calvin was good to help me, and I didn't want to turn anybody away. We would start in the morning, somewhat about seven o'clock and we would stay until everybody left. Sometimes it would be nine or ten o'clock. People would come from a distance and we wouldn't want to turn them away, so we would stay until they would quit coming, you know.

P: Beginning at seven in the morning—

S: Beginning around seven in the morning.

P: Did you go over there every day?

S: Yes.

P: Even on Sundays?

S: No, not on Sundays?

P: Not on Sundays?

S: Not on Sundays.

P: Could you talk about, as you were doing the other day, some of the kind of interesting, and in some cases humorous cases, of people trying to sign up for the money?

S: Well, we was surprised that a lot of them had come in to sign up because . . . I don't like to say these words, but, you know, right round here where we live there was people that claimed that they . . . I mean were not always a white person, was so bad and hard against the Indian, that there was some of them that come to enroll. And some of them has proved up and I imagine if it's ever to be paid that some of them will get that money. I remember one man, of course he could never go back to be an Indian, but there was some. . . Over the years, when they were real hard on the Indians, this man had took Indians in his home to work. He come down and wanted to know—the Indian man was dead—and he wanted to know if he could sign up and get his part because he raised him and he had done so much for him and he wanted to know if he could get his part of the Indian money.



P: How many people would you say that you enrolled in those early days?

S: Well, all together I think what they have on the book, and it was all done kinda in the early days, it was about fifteen thousand.

P: Fifteen thousand?

S: Fifteen thousand. But I don't think there are going to be quite that many that's gonna prove up . . .

P: Where there any people who tried to enroll by mail that didn't physically come here but sent you letters?

S: No, I don't believe so . . . I can't remember a time that they had enrolled . . . [inaudible].

P: Well then, after the initial stages of enrolling people, then what was the next step, what happened next, what was the council doing at this time, and so forth?

S: Well, in the enrolling, after we got it set up that night, then we called council meetings. And most of the time, in the beginning we all went to Bay Minnette , 'cause that was about the halfway for us to gather, 'cause Mrs. Ruby lived at Bay Minnette, 'cause she worked at Mobile. A lot of times, she had to come up from Mobile. And then this other man, I can't think of his name, he was in Mobile [inaudible]. And John Williams he was Robertsdale, and after then we got started . . . with this, Rozelle, he knew Thompson pretty good, and Thompson is a smart lawyer. Then he got Thompson in on this, too, and that made the three lawyers, Thompson, and Horn, and Rozelle. So, Thompson being in Bay

Minnette, and he was a crippled man, too, he would usually want the council to meet down there. And he had a room in his office, we all met there. And he usually would be in the meeting. I can't remember a time that he wasn't there. He just more took over.

P: Thompson?

S: Thompson did. The others didn't seem too interested in it. They felt like, well, there's never gonna be nothing to it, and they just couldn't lose much of their time. I mean that's the way we felt about it. And at times we would go to him for advice or something like that, he would usually tell us to go to Thompson. And we had most our council meetings in there. Then after it got started pretty well, Thompson would go to Washington. And he'd get in contact with the people at Washington. And whenever he did these, he'd call a meeting, and the council would get together and go down to find out what he had found out. And from time to time, different things would come up, and we'd have our council meetings.

P: Did you pay your own expenses for going down to Bay Minnette?

S: Yes, we did. Yes, we did. Well, see when it started it was supposed to be a no money involved. That was one of the things that the lawyer Weir told them that it would begin with. It wasn't . . . not no money involved. But later on, Thompson found out that we could charge. They got forms in and we could charge for filling out the forms at the times we was registered but we didn't charge anything. A lot

of times the people seeing our situations and everything and what we was going through with, they did donate a lot.

P: Can you think of any people who did that and where they were from and so forth?

S: No, not right—you know, I couldn't. It's been so long ago, till I couldn't remember.

P: Well, through the years, the original council members have gone by the wayside, so to speak, and there's only a few of the original council members left. Could you talk about the change in the membership of the council through the years?

S: Well, most of us passed on. And as they would pass away, some members would know someone that they felt like would be eligible for the job. And of course around about in the communities and different ones, they would be all right if that's the way they wanted to do it. I can't remember a time that they called a mass meeting to select another one.

P: Who had been some of the council members through the years, other than the original ones?

S: You mean the ones that's on council now and the ones before them?

P: Yeah, and the ones before them . . .

S: Well, you see, Tom Weatherford, now he got too old. He's not passed on, but he got too old. And his son took his place, John Weatherford. And then . . . John Phillips, he's resigned. But now I can't remember who took his place because it's been quite a while. But Claude Colbert he's deceased . Mrs. Ruby Weatherford,

she's deceased. Brookes Rolin, Dave Presley, that was one of the older ones that I didn't remember.

P: Dave Presley?

S: Dave Presley.

P: Where was he from?

S: He was from Poarch. And he's deceased. And those that's deceased they have the new ones. **Bernestine** Daughtry, Tom McGhee, which I told you a while ago John **Weatherford** took his father's place. And Leon Tullis, Buford Rolin, and Mrs. Perloca Linton, and Miss Mary **Luckie**. That keeps them from coming to the meetings and they have to have a majority, you know, to pass a rule or make a new law or something at that time.

P: Has there ever been any, what you might call jealousy, about who was on the council and who wasn't?

S: If there have been I don't—

[Break in Recording]

P: **Enrolling people** for the Land Claims money, what have been the different kinds of things the council has done?

S: Concerning what?

P: What have been their activities over the past twenty years? What kinds of things have they done since the earliest days of the council?

S: Well, in the early council, they didn't have any activities. Just the only thing they did was go to these council meetings and listen to what the lawyer had found out, and different things **of that sort**. One time, I remember all getting together and went to a lunch down around . . . I believe it might have been right around Bay Minnette. They all got together and had a lunch down there **with people**. Other than things like that, in the early part they didn't do it. But now over the years in the latter part of it, they go about places, you know . . . now I had forgotten Billy McGhee, he's on council, too, and he's the one who trains the little ones to do the Indian dance.

P: Is that Billy Smith or—

S: Billy Smith.

[Break in Recording]

S: Married a white man and he wasn't raised around here.

P: What was his mother before she was married?

S: She was McGhee. And he didn't know much about his people until the late years, but since he has got in with them now I think that's his—the old saying—pride and joy. All his spare time, he spends it around the Indian school up here with his dancers. He takes them different places when he hears of things concerning Indian, you know. He'll take them different places.

P: I've heard it said that in the earliest days that it seems sometime like Calvin McGhee sort of did everything and people just sort of helped him, but here lately the way the council operates has changed a little bit.

S: Well, I know people really looked up to Calvin, especially after he had been in this for so many years, and they had found out really what he stood for. And it wasn't only the Indian people that looked up to Calvin, there were other people, too, outside people. He really stood out. And he usually got what he asked for. He could help his people in so many ways, you know, and whenever they'd be in trouble and different things like that, he could really help them, because he had that much authority and people knew it. Such as when voting time come for sheriffs and different things of that sort, you know, well they would already contact Calvin. And they felt like that the people would go the way that he would want them to go. And they really looked up to Calvin in so many ways. And they loved him. They really loved him because he was that type of a person. But I think, more what I see, the difference in the council today than what it was then—was now Calvin did have no education. He learned what he learned and what he knew from experience. From going into Washington and getting in contact with people, and Calvin, he just didn't stand back. He'd get in. They could laugh at him or whatever they might he was going to find out what he needed or what he wanted to know. But Houston is a little bit awkward, 'cause he's young on the job and of course Calvin he was too when he began. And I feel like lots of this is . . . they've got to work a little more with Houston until he really gets hold of what he know that has to be done. And Houston didn't get too much education either. Of

Course I know that the ones on the council has helped him a lot and he has improved a lot to what he was at the beginning. But other than that, I don't know too much more about it.

P: Do you all vote on things now or have you always voted on decisions?

S: Yes, we do.

P: What does it take for something to pass, does it have to be a simple majority, or what's the rule on that?

S: The biggest majority. If some council member finds out that they all could be a different [inaudible] something to come up or should be done, then they'd bring it up in this council meeting. Well, if they all feel like that that's right, they vote on it.

P: One thing that I thought you might know something about that I heard mention of, was the political party that Calvin organized, **Kilroy**, or something like that. Do you know anything about that?

S: Well, I just don't know too much about it.

P: Was the council involved in that in any way?

S: Not that I knew of.

P: This is a separate activity of Calvin?

S: Yes, it was.

P: One general question that I wanted to ask was, why do you think that it wasn't until about 1948, 1950 that the community got involved in trying to improve education? Why didn't this happen years before? Say, in your parents' time?

S: Well, my parents didn't get no education. I guess it's . . . the only thing that I can think to say, that the younger generation didn't stand back just like the older generation did. I guess they was just down under the white people and thought they had to stay there, they just didn't know that they—

P: Well, what caused that change in the younger generation that was willing to do things like keeping the children out of school? Do you have any ideas what changed peoples' thinking along those lines?

S: Well, I couldn't really right off say why the change come about. Well, one thing that I feel like, the younger generation wanted their children to have education because they knew—they had come to realize—that education really meant a whole lot. And they knew it was gonna be hard for them if they didn't get their education.

P: I wonder how they came to realize that. What had happened that they realized it and their parents hadn't?

S: Well, one thing was getting a job. You know, going out hunting jobs, they'd say your education would turn you down.

S: Well, that leads me to another question. Why were they going out hunting jobs rather than staying home doing what their parents had always done?



S: Well, the parents was always on little farms. And then at that time there wasn't too many. I can remember the time when there wasn't over three or four houses in this community. At that time people just, as they called it, **pea patched**. They just had little farms, you know. And my daddy, he owned this land where we are now, right here, he owned it. And I'll tell you how that come about. You see, right through here is land that General Jackson gave the Indians. There was three eighties.

P: Three eighty-acre tracts?

S: Yeah, three eighties. And now I don't know how. I can't even remember how Papa told me that this come about, that they come in possession of. But, you know, then, if the white man knew how he could get the Indians to do things, that he could come in possession of what he had, then he would do it. So I remember there was a man, Old Man Tom **Pickling**.

P: Tom, what?

S: Tom Pickling.

P: Kiplin?

S: Pickling.

P: Pickling.

S: And my grandmother, on my mother's side, was real sick. This was just before she died. And this Dr. Moore had doctored her. And, Tom Pickling wanted the land that they owned. And on her deathbed he persuaded her to sign the papers

that would make him become the owner of their land, and he told them that he was paying her doctor bill. That's how come **he owned this land**. And he wanted this. Tom Pickling wanted this.

P: This piece of land?

S: This piece of land. So he got in contact with Richard Walker, he was an Indian too. And he told him he should write to the government about it. He didn't—

[Phone rings]

[Break in Recording]

S: His land ought to be taxed. It should be just like everybody else's land. It should be taxed, and for him to write the governor about it. And he'd write the letters for him, he told them that he would write the letters for him. Richard Walker, he come around to different ones and he told them about what he had said and all, and he wanted to know if it would be all right for him to let him write this letter. Well, some didn't want him to do it because they was living all right, they didn't have to pay tax, but he just kept adding and kept at him and kept at him until they let him do that. Finally, he let him write the letter. Well, when they got the letter back from the governor, they told him this land would never be taxed as long as the water run and the grass grew green. But that didn't satisfy Mr. Pickling. What he wanted, see, was, if it got taxed, then they was too poor to pay the tax, and then he could take over. Well, he kept writing, he kept writing and finally they taxed it. They thought, well, I guess they wasn't satisfied without paying a tax and they would tax it. So after it got to being taxed, then it had to go to

[inaudible] to assess it and pay the tax on it. By that time then, my daddy, he come into possession of a forty acres. Richard Walker come in possession of forty acres. Charlie McGhee come in possession of forty acres. Over the years, different ones would move out. And when they would move out, they would sell it to the ones that, you know . . . So Charlie McGhee sold my daddy his forty acres. I remember him selling it for forty dollars, a dollar an acre. 'Cause he wanted to move on someplace else. And then there's Richard Walker, he sold my daddy his forty acres for an automobile. And with the forty acres he owned and the two forties he bought from Charlie McGhee and Richard Walker, made him 120 acres, which we in possession of now. We still own that. Then, Fred Walker, he come in possession of the big McGhee forty, but over the years they sold it. And this 120 acres, now, is all of the granted land that the Indians had been in possession of, and it's just my family.

S: And it's in your family's name—

P: It's still in our family. Well, we over the years, we have divided it up. But different ones share, just three of us now that owns it.

P: Three things I'm not real clear on was how the paper your grandmother signed fit in this. She's on her deathbed? I'm not sure how that fit in to the story.

S: Well, see that was granted land, too that they had had—

P: Oh, that was another piece—

S: That was before that it become taxable, see.

P: Pickling got that by having her sign it over to him—

S: Signed his papers saying that he had paid it. But now, that was homestead places.

P: I see. That wasn't grant land that was homestead?

S: That was homestead. See, my grand daddy had homesteaded the place. And then a Rolin man had homesteaded the place. I can't say it on back from that, but them two is the ones I remember.

P: But the land that Andrew Jackson had given, he had to get that taxable; he wanted to get that taxable.

S: [inaudible]

P: Did he ever get any land once it became taxable? Was Mr. Pickling—

S: No.

P: He didn't?

S: No. He—

P: After all that he didn't?

S: After all that he didn't.

P: About what time period was this, about what years?

S: Now, I can't remember that.

P: Was that before you were born, or where you a small child, or what?

S: I was a small child.

P: Incidentally, so were getting some idea of when these various events were taking place, what year were you born in?

S: [19]17.

P: 1917.

S: Um-hmm.

P: I just wanted to quickly ask you about one more topic briefly, and I wondered if you could just say a few words about the history of the church that you go to.

S: The church I go to now?

P: Um-hmm.

S: Well, I don't know too much about the history of the church, but see, I tell you what, when I was about thirteen years old, when brother Edwards, the Episcopal preacher come in, we joined church then. And I was a member of the Episcopal Church until about two years ago.

P: How long?

S: About two years ago. But the church that I go to now, see, I was going to the Episcopal Church, then some things come up that we didn't go for, so we moved

out and we went to the church in this shed out here. We were just gonna be out on our own.

P: What shed is that?

S: My little shed out here.

P: Out front?

S: We started our church there about two years ago. And my brother and sister had gone out of the church for quite a long time and joined the Mennonite church. But I had went back to the Episcopal church and they had—it's about like it is now. And **Leola** was leaving then, and she come and asked me if I would go back—and Mr. Lodge was a preacher—and if I would go back and help them. See if they could get some improving in the church, if we could get the people to go back. And I did. And it did, it really improved, and got to be a big congregation. But, some of the things they just didn't go for—

P: What were some of those kinds of things?

S: Well, I'll tell you. Cookie and Bill Style, Mrs. Robertson was here, and she was working real hard for the church. And they thought I guess they could help the church. They come down here for a meeting a weekend meeting, and they said that was what they did. And in the meeting, I don't know how you feel about really spiritual, being really spiritual, genuine Christian, but that's what we believe in. We don't believe in this drinking, and smoking cigarettes, and using tobacco. We believe in the Bible, really strictly on the Bible. So, seeing how somehow or

another that was a little—they just didn't go along with that. She said her daddy let her drink, and he wanted to test her out with drinking and all of that, and we just didn't go for that. When I was out in the world it didn't bother me really, but since I have really come to know my Lord and to live strictly to my Lord, well, I just don't go for it, you see. So we pulled out, after then we pulled out on our own. So at the main time, the Mennonite people, they had had a squabble in the church, too, so most of the members had—well, all of the Indian had got out of the church that had belonged there. And the other people, they moved back to Freemanville, and the church out there was just empty.

P: So that building was built by the Mennonites?

S: It was built by the Mennonites, but it was built for the Indians.

P: What year was that built, do you know?

S: No, I can't remember what year it was built.

P: So, you feel like the Episcopal Church had gotten away from true religion here? Is that what you—

S: Well, some of the things they stood for, yes. They really—well, you'll find out more than what I can tell you. But, you know, just different things that they allow in church, the members. 'Course everybody is free to do what they want to.

P: Which includes going to another church if they want to—

S: Which includes going to another church if they want to.

P: How long did you have your meetings in the shed out here in the front yard?

S: From February till October.

P: Of what year?

S: It's been about three years ago.

P: [19]69 or [19]70?

S: About [19]69, I believe.

P: How many members do you have in your church now?

S: Well, going to church we have forty-eight, but they go over that every Sunday.

P: What percentage of the members are Indians?

S: Well, most all of them. We have three or four families—

P: Are any of them from Poarch or Hog Fork, Poarch Switch, or Hog Fork? They're all from right in here?

S: The people of Poarch and Hog Fork goes out to Holiness. Did you go over to there?

P: I've been to the Holiness Church—

S: Which one?

P: I went to the Friendly Holiness, Reverend McGhee's church. Next week I've been invited to go someone wants to take me to the Pentecostal Church down



the road, and I thought maybe the next week I can get to your church, but I've been to the Episcopal, and I went to the Friendly Holiness next week and I **thought sometime** next week maybe I can get to your church.

S: Well, Sunday night that you are here, I believe it's the fourth Sunday night, we have singing at our church at night. I'd be glad for you to come then too really. . . . But I'd be glad for you to come to our Sunday school, too, and church. We have church and then Sunday school in the morning.

P: Well, back to just a general review of the history of the Land Claims case, the council, so forth, could you just make a general statement about what you have seen in your lifetime and sort of the major events and development in the history of the Poarch Indian community.

S: I don't understand what you—

P: Well, just sort of a general statement on what had been the major changes in the community and how things are different now than how they were when you were a girl.

S: Well, I'll tell you, you may have already heard, but if we don't never get no money, that money has really brought us out from bondage. Because there have been so many people that didn't claim Indian, until this money come about, they claims Indian now. And they knew that they had to face the ones that knew that they didn't claim Indian when they was enrolled on the book. And I feel like that is one of the things that really have brought us out.

P: You said brought you out from bondage?

S: Yeah. Well, back when I was a girl we wasn't hardly allowed to go into people what called themselves white in their homes.

P: What about businesses—

S: We was just bowing down.

P: What about businesses, restaurants, were you allowed to go in those?

S: Some of them. And some of them we wasn't.

P: So, when you say that even if the money doesn't come, the effort of getting the money has been good for the people?

S: It really has. It really did help us.

P: What do you think lies in the future for the Indian people of the Poarch community?

S: Well, I think it's left up to the individual now. I really do, I think the future will depend entirely on the Indian himself, what he wants to make of his life because he is not bound no more. They're mixed and mingling with now 'cause there are no more Indians, like it was when I was a girl because they have been intermarried until they just as one now, they just ain't no more.

P: Are you suggesting that as such the Indian community will disappear?

S: I believe it will over the years. I really do.

P: Even though the council continues to exist?

S: Yes.

P: How do you feel about that happening? Do you have feelings one way or the other?

S: Well, the older people would rather have it just to stay on like it is, but the younger people is getting out and marrying into the white people, so I just don't know what to think about it now.

P: I'd like for you to talk about, Mrs. Sells, which is kind of unique to yourself, I understand, is the fact that you are one of the few people of Indian descent who taught in the Indian school here, and if you could talk about how you got your certificate, and some of your experiences in teaching children of your own people in the school here.

S: Well, we used to have a little school, just a little ways from where I live now. A little one-room school, with one teacher who taught the sixth grade. And whenever things would happen, if the teacher wouldn't be there, she would always want me to take care of the school and the children. So, I was always the one to help out whenever the teacher wasn't available, or something would happen and they wouldn't be at school. But whenever we made this change in our school and Mrs. **Mays** come into our school, and she found out that I could do the job even though I didn't have all that much education, but I could do the job, she always told me that she'd rather for me to take the class then. . . I felt like that I couldn't teach the fifth and sixth grade. And I would always exchange

with the other teachers whenever she would be out, that was the grades that she taught. But when she found it out, she wouldn't let me do it anymore. She said that I could do just as good as they could. And then, she told me to write in for a certificate for the county school board. And I did. And they issued me a certificate, a substitutes' certificate. And then all of the years from then on when I was available, I substituted for the other teachers.

P: And how much education did you say you had?

S: I just went to the eighth grade.

P: And you got that only because you were able to live with a family in Atmore?

S: That's right.

P: What year did you get your certificate?

S: In [19]49.

P: [19]49?

S: Um-hm.

P: How was it that you were the one in the first place that that teacher before Mrs. Mays asked to take her class when she was gone? What caused her to do that?

S: Well, I guess she just found out that I could do the job. At least that's what she said. And I guess I did because over the years, well, the year she had to quit school, her brother got sick in California, and she had to go out there to take care of her brother. And then I had to substitute for her from, I believe I began the first

week in September and I kept the school for Christmas. And the children that went out of the school that year made honor roll in high school the next year. So I guess maybe I did do the job.

P: But they only went to school for three months that year? Is that right? Or, she came back in December?

S: No, she never did come back in the school. They got a teacher. They found out that she wasn't going to be able to come back anymore.

P: And that was substituting for Mrs. Mays?

S: [inaudible]

P: That first teacher, when you still had the school in the parish house over there—how did she get to know you or how did you get to know her?

S: Mrs. Mays, you are talking about?

P: No, the one before her that you said you first started out watching the children, taking care of the children before Mrs. Mays came?

S: Well, that's whenever we had our little school in the. . . As you come up this hill right here, we had a little school, one-room school. They had church, Sunday school, and school in that one little building.

P: That was before it was in the parish house?

S: That's when it was in the parish house.

P: That must have been quite a while ago.

S: It was.

P: What years was that?

S: Well, I can't remember just the years, but I must have been about in the fifth or sixth grade, 'cause we didn't go further than the sixth grade there.

P: So you were just a young girl—

S: I was just a student.

P: You were just a student, I see. And many years later when Mrs. Mays came she found out that you had done that as a child, or what?

S: Well, I just really don't know how she found out. But I guess just being with her, and my personality, and things of that sort [inaudible].

[Break in Recording]

P: Twenty-two, interview with Mrs. Roberta Sells. Mrs. Sells is going to talk for a moment about the time her husband and some other men went to Montgomery in connection with the school.

S: Well, I can't remember if this was before that we stopped sending our children to school to get us a school or after, but I can't remember how it come about. But I do know that we all got together and decided that we'd have to get in contact with the governor before we could ever do anything. So my husband—at that time we didn't have cars and things like they do now—he owned a paper wood truck.

And he took Calvin McGhee, and Adam Daughtry, and I believe Brooks Rolin, and went to Montgomery. I believe at that time the governor was Jim Folsom. He come out on the grass that day and talked with them. And he promised them that we would help them. And I believe that may be how it come about that we got our school going.

P: Would you just mention a little bit about the fact that there used to be an Indian school over at Poarch Switch?

S: Yes, when we had our little school on top of this hill here below my house, now, the sixth grade, one teacher, there was one school and an old dwelling house at Poarch Switch. It was the same way. There was one teacher that taught up to the sixth grade. I can't remember then if there was a school at Bell Creek or not. But it seemed like they were, but I can't remember the teacher. But the teachers that we had come from Castleberry, Alabama. One of our teachers' names was **Berta Mae Weaver**. And a teacher that was teaching Poarch Switch was . . . I can't remember that teachers' name. But she was from Castleberry . . . and I don't know whether they was having school at Bell Creek at that time or not. But there was a school once upon a time at Bell Creek.

P: Was Bell Creek an Indian school?

S: Yes, it was.

P: And where is Bell Creek?

S: Between McCullough and Poarch.

P: Did the teachers live out here, or did they live in Atmore . . . the ones that came from Castleberry?

S: The first year that the teacher taught—she taught several years in our school—the first year that she taught she stayed out here with Miss King. It wasn't none of our people, she boarded with Miss King.

P: One thing before, you were talking about—you were giving sort of a bird's eye view of what happened the morning that there was the meeting when you had kept your children out of school—if you could give some more details on that—how many people were there, what was Mr. Weaver's reaction, and how people acted at that meeting.

S: Well, I can't remember just how many people were there, but there was quite a few of us there. And I think that he mostly had his mind made up when he come. He knew what he would have to do, because all these promises he had—things that he had promised and he hadn't done it. He knew that morning that he had to keep some of them promises. So I can remember that whenever he come he didn't even go into the school room. He just sit down on the porch and propped his foot up on the porch and told them what he would do. That was to get them some more teachers and build a new school.

P: Do you remember how the teachers at the meeting reacted, the look on their faces, or did they say anything?

S: Well, I didn't talk with them myself, but several of them did talk. Some of them was crying, and I think somebody had said to one of the teachers, Miss Moore,



which she didn't live too far from here, that maybe she would be one of the teachers after they got it settled out. But she told them no, she didn't want to. And then on, she's never been a teacher in this school. She'd always been our teacher, practically all the time, but then she's never been a teacher no more.

P: Tell me again what were some of the things that this one group of teachers were doing or not doing that the parents objected to?

S: Well, it was several things that they was doing that they didn't approve of, and one of them was allowing the children to smoke cigarettes and chew tobacco. They told them that if they would get across the road they could do it. Not to do it on the school ground, but they skipped across the road. Then I had a brother at that time was going to school and he was bad to hunt. And they'd take the dogs to school and go rabbit hunting. And there was several things that while they were doing these things that the children, that they would be sewing, or embroidering, or crocheting, or something, you know. We just . . .

P: Were they learning to read and write at all?

S: Yes. They were learning some, but not all that well.

P: So, the issue was really the parents just wanted better teachers?

S: That was the beginning, that's what started it. There was one girl I can remember. It was the Reverend Mace McGhee's daughter—his oldest daughter. And she had been going up there for several years, and she just didn't know anything. I can't remember what grade they had her in, but they would pass

them up, you know, even if they couldn't do the work they would pass them up. So the first year after we got the new teachers, and she just couldn't do anything. When they would give her homework to take home and everything, she couldn't do it. They said then, one night that her daddy told her that if she didn't learn, he was gonna whip her, and he did. After that she was just a smarter child, she went on now to high school making honor roll and she made a nurse. She finished up and went to college and was a registered nurse.

P: Well, anything else that you thought of while we've been listening to the other part of the tape?

S: No, I don't believe so.

P: Okay. This is enough for one day.

[End of Interview]

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