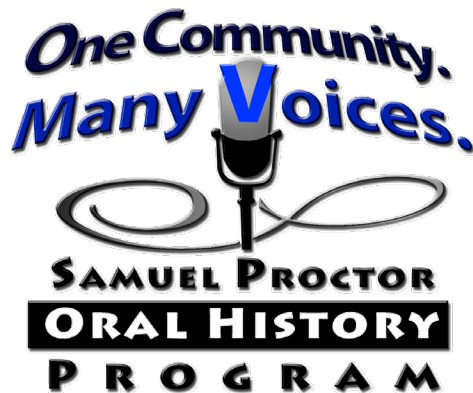


# **William R. Bradford Jr.**

**Southeastern Indian Oral History Project (SIOHP)  
CAT-143**

**Interview by:**

**Emma Reid Echols  
January 28, 1981**



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**CAT 143 William R. Bradford Jr.  
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Interviewed by Emma Reid Echols on January 28, 1981  
41 minutes | 18 pages**

**Abstract:** William R. Bradford Jr. is a historian of Fort Mill, South Carolina. He provides information on the history of the Catawba people. Bradford details their circumstances surrounding their move to now South Carolina and how it impacted the relationship with the nearby Cherokee and Shawnee peoples. He also details the life of King Hagler, a Catawba Chief who ruled from 1748 until 1762. Then, Bradford describes the arrival of White colonists, the spread of smallpox, and how White-Catawba relations compared to other relationships with Native American peoples. Bradford details the relationship with the South Carolina government over time regarding land rights. He then leads up to modern politics among the Catawba people such as reservation expansion and the current attempts to arrive at a settlement over land claims with Native American Rights Fund attorneys and the state.

**Keywords:** [Catawba Nation; South Carolina--Rock Hill; Tribal history; Land tenure]

**SAMUEL PROCTOR  
ORAL HISTORY  
PROGRAM  
University of Florida**

CAT 143

Interviewee: William R. Bradford Jr.

Interviewer: Emma Reid Echols

Date of Interview: January 28, 1981

E: This is Emma Reid Echols, Route 6, Box 260, Rock Hill, South Carolina, January 28, 1981. I'm recording the oral history of the Catawba Indians. I'm visiting in the home of Mr. William R. Bradford Jr. in Fort Mill. And I hold in my hand his recent book, *Out of the Past: The History of Fort Mill, South Carolina*. But it's more than a history of Fort Mill because I was fascinated with all he knew about the Indians, and their part in the early settlement of this section and many, many other Indian things. And Mr. Bradford isn't only our speaker, he is the editor of a newspaper for a number of years, as his father was, and I don't know whether he inherited his love of history from his father, or whether he has grown up with it. He's a real historian and a fine citizen of our community. So, I'm just gonna let Mr. Bradford tell you what he knows.

B: Thank you, Ms. Echols. I don't know whether I'll be able to live up to all that you said or not. The history of the Catawba Indians, as far as we know it, begins around the year 1600 in an eastern province of Canada. The Catawba Tribe, which is a segment of the Sioux Nation, numbered approximately 12000 at that time. They had lived in this portion of Canada for probably several centuries and had about exhausted their means of survival there. The game supply and the fish supply were just about exhausted. The winter weather was so severe that they were really having a hard time living; some of the older people and the papooses were dying from the cold. The old Chief called his tribal council together, and they decided that they would send out three scouting parties to see if they could find a territorial headquarters in a less hostile climate. So, the parties went out,

and two came back rather quickly. But one that went due south was several months in returning. Finally, they came back, and they had a very glowing report on what they had found. They reported on a broad green river valley with fertile land on each side; they had forests, and the forests were filled with game. There were deer, turkey, and buffalo, and the stream was filled with fish. Actually, it looked almost like a garden of Eden to these people who had grown accustomed to the frigid climate of northern Canada. When the old Chief and his tribal council received this report, they immediately took action to attempt to make the long 1500-mile trek to this promised land, so-called. It was not unlike the exodus that took place in Egypt when the children of Israel left for the promised land. They left, the women and children and what few family possessions they had, they tried to carry along. Their flight was somewhat delayed by the old people and the young people, too. They had to go through some Indian territory in which the Indians were very hostile. But the Catawbas had a number of braves who were quite adept at fighting, so they were able to hold their own against these marauding Tribes that resented their passing through their land. Finally, after two years as I said, they arrived at a new headquarters which was the Catawba River Valley, in what is now Fort Mill Township and a portion of Rock Hill. Even then, their troubles were not at an end. This territory had been claimed by the Cherokees who had their headquarters up in the mountains of North Carolina. And they conducted regular raids against the Catawbas, and also the Shawnees who bitterly resented the intrusion of the Catawbas. They also conducted raids against them. They had one very large and severe pitched battle with the

Cherokees, in which a number of braves on either side were killed. And at the end of the day's fighting—you know, the Indians didn't fight at night—at sundown, they decided that the Chiefs from the two Tribes would have a pow-wow. So, they got together, Catawba Chief and the Cherokee Chief and some of the members of their council, and they discussed whether it would to any advantage to either Tribe to continue the fighting. The carnage had been so terrible. Finally, the Cherokees said, "Well, we have so much territory in North Carolina, and this is so far from our headquarters that we really don't have any use for this territory down here. Without any further fighting, we will just withdraw and permit the Catawbas to live here." So, they smoked a peace pipe, and the next morning the Cherokees withdrew. Well, with the exception of a few isolated raids, they didn't have any more strong hostilities with the Cherokees, but they continued to have trouble with the Shawnee. One of the main Catawba villages, probably the main Catawba village, was known as Nauvasse, which is located about a half mile from Fort Mill's Main Street. It's now Bank Street in Fort Mill; formerly it was known as the Catawba Trading Path, and also Nation Ford. Nation Ford was the Chief crossing of the Catawba River that the Indians used. Also, those who were conducting trade with the Indians, they used this to cross the Catawba. It now is directly beneath the railroad trestle across the Catawba. This was an exceptionally shallow point in the Catawba River. Apparently, the engineers who were building the bridge for the railroad when it came through—they built the bridge about 1850. The railroad was completed in 1852—they knew that this was one of the most logical spots in which to build a bridge. So, it now covers most of

the Nation Ford. Incidentally, up around Charlotte, they misspelled the name "Nation Ford," they put an "s" on it. There was only one Catawba Nation, and they called the crossing of the river, "Nation Ford." Around Charlotte, they call it, "Nations Ford," without any apostrophe to show possession or anything. It's just plural. But that's an error. It should be only "Nation Ford." The Catawbas had a number of well-known Chiefs. Probably the best-known Chief was named King Hagler. He chose to be called King, because at the time that he was ruling the Catawba Tribe, the king of England, King George III, was the ruling monarch who had control over the colonial United States. He was a **Larusso**, and he took his name from King George. He ruled the Catawbas from 1748 until 1762. He died a very tragic death by the way but before I go onto that, he was sort of a one-man United Nations. He was an attempted peacemaker. He went around to the Waxhaws, the Shawnees, and the Cherokees and made strong attempts to cut out all the hostilities between the Tribes. He was successful to some degree, but he was never able to affect any influence whatever toward peace with the Shawnees. One day he was on his way to talk with the Waxhaws, who lived just across the line over in North Carolina, to talk with them and down near Van Wyck, a band of Shawnees lay in ambush, and when he passed, they shot and killed him, and they scalped him. He had a servant boy with him, and the servant boy escaped, and he ran all the way back to the headquarters here in Fort Mill and told the Tribe about their beloved King Hagler being killed. They formed a war party, and they chased these Shawnees down. They caught 'em down around Landsford, which is just over the line in Chester County, and they killed

every one of 'em except one and he was an excellent swimmer, who jumped in the river and swam across and escaped. King Hagler was buried in a very regal manner. His grave was ten feet wide, ten feet long, and ten feet deep. All of his worldly possessions that were considered of any value or would be considered of any value to him in the happy hunting ground, were buried with him, including his silver rifle. They appointed sixteen Indian braves to stand guard over his grave for a full moon, which would've been a month. Some White traders from Virginia came along and they got some whiskey to the Indians who were guarding the grave and got 'em all drunk. Then they dug up most of King Hagler's possessions and made off with 'em. There have been a number of attempts in recent years to find the site of King Hagler's grave, but none has ever been successful. Really today, nobody knows exactly where King Hagler was buried; it's somewhere in this area. With King Hagler's death there was only one person who had royal bloodlines, and she was just a child, so she couldn't succeed him. Her name was Sally New River; she was a niece of King Hagler. I might say before I get into this, the Catawbas population was severely decimated by smallpox. Sally New River's parents had both died of smallpox. She was an orphan, and she was taken into the home of the first White settler in the Fort Mill area, who was named Thomas Spratt. Later to be known as Kanawha Spratt and I'll also get into that later. She moved in with the Spratt family and lived there until she was eighteen years old. And then she returned to the Tribe to be granted her royal heritage. Well, all of the other members of the royal family had been wiped out by smallpox, so she had no one of royal bloodlines to marry, so she never married

during her lifetime. In 1764, the colonial governor of South Carolina, with the approval of King George III of England, recognized the Catawbas as a Tribe. They gave them fifteen square miles, or rather fifteen miles square, there's quite a difference. Actually, fifteen miles squared amounts to 225 square miles, or 144 acres. He gave them this as their reservation. The Catawbas were never good custodians of their property. They sold some of their property, they leased some of it, and perhaps they bartered some of it, and certainly they gave some of it away. But here I'd like to explain that simply there's a different concept in the land dealings with the Catawbas here in South Carolina and those that took place out in the West. All of us have seen pictures and have read stories about the way the U.S. Cavalry attacked the Indians out West, drove them off their land, massacred the men, women, and children in order to get the land. Well, nothing like that ever took place here in South Carolina between the White man and the Catawbas. They were always very friendly, and any land that the White man got from a Catawba, the Catawba was either paid for it, or he gave it up in some manner voluntarily. To prove their friendship, during the Revolutionary War, the Catawbas went right along with the White man, and helped them defeat the British and the Tory forces. They fought with the White man at Brattonsville against Captain Hook, and they fought at King's Mountain against Major Ferguson. They also enlisted in the Confederate Army and fought for the South. Fort Mill has a main street park known as Confederate Park, it has several monuments in it, and one on the monuments was put there honoring the Catawba Indians who fought right alongside the Confederate forces. They fought



with exceptional gallantry. Prior to the War Between the States, the Catawba Tribe had come into a period of decline as I mentioned before, smallpox was the Chief factor. Dr. Maurice Moore, a physician and a historian of that day, wrote that the Catawba doctors so-called used unusual treatment methods to deal with smallpox and other diseases. It seems that they had the same treatment for all illnesses. They would give the patient, or the victim, what they called "corn sweat." They would boil a number of ears of corn, and they would completely encircle the body of the person who had smallpox or whatever disease with these hot ears of corn, until the patient developed a real heavy sweat. Then they would pick the body up and throw it into the cold waters of the Catawba River. It was said that more times than not, the bodies that they took from the waters of the Catawba was a dead body rather than a live one. One observer said, day after day, that he had seen as many as twenty-five dead bodies taken from the Catawba after this type of treatment. The population declined so and the ability to cure themselves that by the 1830s, the few remaining Catawbas were in a desperate plight. They were near starvation. The South Carolina legislature, realizing their plight, made an offer which would give the Catawbas a 652-acre reservation and pay them \$16,000 for what remained of their original land. Actually, this was a humanitarian act rather than one trying to take their property away from them. They readily agreed, and the once proud Catawba Nation, which now numbered no more than seventy-five men, women, and children, gladly moved onto the reservation. They also received a small state subsistence pay. A technicality developed on which a land grant of today is now based. Indian

attorneys have researched this and have found that the treaty which gave them the reservation and took their property was not ratified by the U.S. Congress, and they have used that as a technicality to attempt to throw out this treaty of 1840. The Catawbas were never very good farmers, although the land that they received was fertile. That's the 652 acres that I previously mentioned. They cut the timber from the land, the land soon eroded, and actually, it was nothing but gullies and eroded hills, and soon was rendered unfit to farm. The men took jobs wherever they could be found, and the women made pottery which they offered for sale on stands and from door to door. As I stated, there was never any animosity between the Catawbas and the Whites. Indeed, the remaining Catawbas began intermarrying with the Whites, and now and for many years in the past, there have been no Catawbas of pure bloodlines. Certain White men have always shown an interest in the welfare of the Catawbas. They have seen that the living standards of the Catawbas were not up to what the living standards of most Whites are. One of these is my father, William R. Bradford, Sr., who was a member of the House of Representatives in South Carolina for almost a third of the century. Back in 1943, to aid the Catawbas, he pushed a bill through the South Carolina General Assembly, which authorized the purchase of 3,432 acres of fertile river bottom land to be purchased and added to the original 652 acres that were already in the reservation. This gave the Catawbas 4000 acres on their reservation. Well, this new land was never developed. Very few homes were ever built on it, and there was little farming on it. Sixteen years later, in 1959, the Tribe voted to sell the newly acquired land and divide the money among the tribal

members. Representative Robert Hampfield introduced a bill in Congress that would permit this. Also, the bill, at the Catawbas' request, would completely dissolve the Catawba Tribe so that it would no longer have any Indian status. A few of the Catawbas kept small building lots, but most of the 3,432 acres was sold, and the money divided. It is not known the exact amount that the sale returned to the Catawbas, but state estimates have said that at the time of the sale, that the property was worth an excess of two million dollars that was in 1963 when the sale was completed. I stated there are no full-blooded Catawbas today, and practically all knowledge of their language has been lost. It was never a written language, only a spoken language. So, the Catawbas were unable to record their history in writing for posterity. The White man has done this for them. In 1976, a claim was filed at the insistence of Native American Rights Funds attorneys, and they base their claim on the technicality that I have previously mentioned. More recently, the Catawbas have been unable to arrive at a settlement, although a commission has been appointed to try to reach some agreeable settlement. They have filed claim—they have named eighty-five defendants in their law claim, but they're seeking to enlarge their claim so that it will contain the names of 35 to 40 thousand landowners who are now occupying the land which was in their original grant from the King of England. Demands for withdrawing their claim and lawsuit include an expanded reservation, which would add 4800 acres of new land, \$30,100,000 and a case settlement from the federal government, and \$1,300,000 as a case settlement from the state. They say the claim is for the entire fifteen-mile square original territory, more than

140,000 acres in York-Lancaster, and a few acres in Chester County. The claim area included all the city of Rock Hill, Fort Mill City, and township in its entirety, including half of the Caro Winds Amusement Park, all of Tega Cay and Heritage Village, and the panhandle section of Lancaster County. Today, with all industry, residential development, et cetera, the area is worth in excess of \$1,500,000,000. Now, I have not gone into White settlers who came into the area yet, so I'll give you a little information on that now. The first White settler was named Thomas Spratt. He was originally from Scotland, but his family moved to Ireland with the idea of migrating on to the United States. He was not actually born until the family was on the Atlantic, en route to America. He was born on the Atlantic in 1731. He grew up in the Spratt family home, just north of Charlotte, and when he became a young man, he was married to Elizabeth Bigger, whose family also emigrated from Scotland. He decided to leave the family home and to go over to the Long King Creek community, which is near Abbeville, South Carolina. So, his first night there, they got a covered wagon and horses, and some of the family possessions, and they started on their journey. The first night's stop was here in Fort Mill, at a point known as Spratt Spring. They wanted to stop at a spring, so they'd have the benefit of the water. They camped around the spring for the night, and they could see the Catawbas in the trees surrounding the campfire. At first, they were a little afraid of what the Catawbas might do, but then they realized that they were coming more out of curiosity than from anything else. Spratt invited the Catawbas who were surrounding the campfire to come up closer and they fell into conversation. And it was a quite

animated and friendly conversation. They asked him where he was going, and he told them. They asked him what for. He said, "Well, there's some good land for me to farm. I'm a farmer." They said, "There's no use for you going over there; we have good land, plenty of it around here in this area, and we'll be glad to give you as much as you want if you will stay here with us, and let us benefit from your knowledge of farming, and of guns, and of fighting." Well, he was somewhat of a warrior himself, he had quite a bit of knowledge about that. They talked him into it, and the record is that he received 4500 acres of Catawba Indian land, and quite a bit of that is still in the Spratt family in Fort Mill today. The way he got his name—well, he would go on raiding parties. While the Catawbans were never hostile toward the White man, they were known as quite strong fighters among the Indian enemies. They would go on raid into West Virginia and into Delaware, and places like that. One time, they engaged another Tribe of Indians and battled on the Kanawha River in West Virginia, and Spratt **acquitted** himself so well in that battle and showed such bravery that they bestowed the name Kanawha on him. From that time forth, he was known as Thomas Kanawha Spratt. Well, rather quickly he was joined by a number of his other White friends, who came from North Carolina and Virginia and moved into the area. They were farmers. The second family to arrive, I believe, was the Irving family from Virginia. Then came the Whites and the Harrises and the Garrisons and the Springs and Elliots and a number of other names that are still prominent around here today. They set up farms and grew crops and eventually organized the first church, which is the Unity Presbyterian Church here in Fort Mill, which was established in 1788.

Almost two hundred years ago. Then came the Bent Hill Baptist Church, which was organized four years later in 1792. Well, this about concluded the story of the Indians in this part of the claimed area of the Fort Mill township when the state authorized the reservation down below Rock Hill, which is the 652 acres, which is about eight miles south of Rock Hill on the west bank of the Catawba River. Practically all of the Indians moved out of the Fort Mill area, and except for visits, we have had very few Indians who have lived in Fort Mill township since that time. Ms. Echols, if you would like to ask me any questions, I will certainly see if I can answer them.

E: Well, it's all so fascinating. There are lots of things I'd like to ask you. First of all, I want to know what happened to Sally New River. Do you know where she's buried, or anything about her?

B: No, she is apparently buried in the old Indian graveyard and there's no record of where that might be. You know, the Indians buried their dead on mounds, and their graveyards or mounds have never been uncovered yet.

E: Your book tells many instances of the friendship between of the Indians and the Whites, and I've been impressed with that. I want to know what is the relationship today to the landowners in this area with the Indians and their suit?

B: Well, surprisingly, the White landowners do not have any feeling of animosity toward the Indians. You won't find a landowner, even though he owns 500 to 1,000 acres, trying to give the Indians a hard time. There's no great resentment of it; it's just a matter that they feel that the Indians are just not entitled to their land. Some of this land that they're claiming has been in these White families for

200 years, and even though mistakes may have been made, which has yet to be substantiated by their forebearers, they just don't believe that the Indians are entitled to it. Without any resentment or animosity, they are willing to let the court decide the issue.

E: What about the unity of the Indians themselves? I know they're divided into two sections.

B: Well, at first, I attended a number of these meetings. One of them ended in almost a free-for-all between the Indians. No White person was engaged, but there was a strong feeling of division between the Indians; some wanted only a cash settlement, which I understand was the largest segment of the Catawba people. Some were strong on getting new land for a reservation and a sort of a redevelopment fund. The group which was wanting only a cash settlement was headed by David Harris. And of course, Chief Gilbert Blue, the current Chief, has his committee and they are for the claim which, I have previously stated, included land and cash from both the state and the federal government. It's not very surprising, but since it has been mentioned of the financial settlement, the Catawba Tribe roll has grown quite a bit. Originally, I believe they said it was around 1000 or a little more. Now, I think the membership is up around 1400 or a little in excess of that. There had been ruling on a blood quotient that would entitle someone who claimed Catawba blood or Catawba heritage to share in this settlement. The Indians themselves, Chief Blue and his group, said if a person had as much as one thirty-second Indian blood coursing through his veins, well,

he would be entitled to participate in the settlement. But the Attorney General of South Carolina—

[Break in recording]

E: –And McCloud, let's pick it up right there.

B: Alright, he sort of surprised both the Catawbas and the members of the commission and those who were present because he pushed the blood quotient for the people who would share in the settlement up to one hundred and twenty-eighth quotient of Indian blood. Which I believe, I tried to figure it out one day, and I think it goes out seven generations, which might include about a million or two people. I don't know. [Laughter]

E: That's a lot of 'em! It's very difficult to figure that because the Indians kept strange records. If an Indian girl was married and had children by a White man, they were included on the roll. But if an Indian man married a White girl, they were not kept on the roll, is that correct?

B: I think that's correct. These meetings were largely attended by the council members of the Catawba Tribe, and a few new men; most other people were excluded. But you could look through the Catawba people, and some of them look like Scandinavians; they have blond hair and blue eyes, and very few of them have the facial and the characteristics that you associate with an Indian: dark skin, dark hair, and that sort of thing. Chief Blue has the complexion and characteristics of an Indian, and some of the others do, but a majority of them just look like the everyday White person that you see on the street.



E: Did you know the old Indian Moroni George? He looked more like an Indian than any that I remember especially.

B: Well, he is, apparently, some of Buck George's ancestry. Buck George is a member of Gilbert Blue's committee. I didn't know him personally.

E: Buck George was a famous athlete. The youngsters liked him very much. Will you make any predictions of what's going to happen with this lawsuit that we're facing?

B: Well, most of the property owners, of which I am one, are hopeful that it will reach some successful conclusion in the not-too-distant future. These things have a way of dragging out year after year, and there have been predictions that this one could last as long as ten years. It's creating something of a hardship on real estate; it's a little difficult to get title insurance, and there has been a bill introduced in the South Carolina General Assembly that would have the state guarantee the title insurance. Also, it has something of a handicap to bringing new industry into the area. People are just a little reluctant to build an industry that may entail ten, twenty million dollars on land that has some cloud over its title. For that reason, most people are hoping that it will be settled. The attempt by the Catawbas is to get a class action suit involving every property holder in the area. I don't know whether they'll be able to do this or not. I don't know. All the judges in South Carolina have declined to hear the case, and they are going to import a federal judge from Pennsylvania to hear this case. But no date has been set, there's still efforts under way by certain members of the McFadden Commission, which is no longer the McFadden Commission because he's not on

it anymore. He was a legislator who had been elected as a circuit judge. He'd been succeeded by York County Senator Coleman Poe. There have been efforts to get the Indians and this commission back together to try to agree to an out-of-court settlement. But to date, these efforts have not met with any great amount of success.

E: You've known the Indians and their hopes for the future. A number of them, I think probably Chief Gilbert Blue and his group, have a dream of a museum, of developing a park and recreation area all up and down the Catawba River, of buying lands next door to their own reservation, and making it really a showplace where they can display their artifacts and their history. Do you see that they will have the ingenuity and the determination and the industry to carry out a project like that?

B: Well, I don't want to put the Indians down. But if they do, it will be a strong departure from the use that they have shown for their land in the past. They have never had high regard for the land. Even the most recently purchased land was promptly sold it to get the money. It could be that with some federal assistance, that they could do that. One of the main objections to the expansion of the reservation, the additional 4,800 acres, is that there have been requests that this reservation be made a sovereign state in itself. Which would mean that the authorities in York and Lancaster Counties, or South Carolina, or even some federal authorities would have absolutely no jurisdiction to go onto this property or do anything about it. For instance, if someone committed a murder, regardless of what color he was, whether he was White, Red, or Black, and sought refuge

on this reservation, it would be very difficult to find and extricate him from this reservation. In talking to the landowners who are more directly affected, I find this to be one of the major objections that they have to it.

E: That would be a real objection wouldn't it. You are such a wonderful historian, and you're so proud of the history of Fort Mill and this whole area. Do you see that the Indians are proud of their history, or do they know anything of their history and heritage?

B: Well, really you can't be too proud of a life that you don't know much about. The Indians are not very familiar with their heritage, or with their history. I think this is because, as I stated back in my earlier remarks, the Indian language was never a written language, and they were not able to record that history. As you well know, when you pass history or any other story down from generation to generation just by word of mouth or spoken word, well, so much of it is lost. I think this has been the case. I think if they knew more about it and had been able to preserve it themselves through the written word, that they would have a greater interest in it. But the White man having to write the Indian history has, for the Indians, taken something away from it.

E: And they are divided, it seems to me, among themselves: between the Cantys, the Blues, the Harrises, and the various Indian families. They should have a common bond of kinship, but it doesn't seem to be the case.

B: No, they seem to be fighting among themselves more, at least at one time in this development, than they were with the White man. That is, verbally fighting, there

is no actual physical fighting. Most of the verbal tiffs took place among the Indians.

E: You mentioned a moment ago that it would probably be ten years before this is settled. In the meantime, you and I hold onto our homes and hope that they will not be attacked by the Indians.

B: Well, that's true. We've heard a lot about hostages in recent days. We may be held hostage on our property. [Laughter]

E: Let's hope not. [Laughter] In the meantime, if you wanted to sell your property, would you have to have a legal problem selling it?

B: Well, yes. It's possible. Some insurance companies are still writing more or less a conditional title insurance. For homes and things like that, it's not so difficult. But when you have a large investment, like an industry, well, you run into trouble there.

E: We'll just have to wait and see; the years will show the result of this.

B: That's right. We're just going to have to wait it out and hope that it will end favorably and as quickly as possible.

E: Well, you're the historian, so you'll have to record what the years are going to bring for us.

B: Well, if I'm around, I'll try to do my part. [Laughter]

[End of interview]

Transcribed by: Easton Brundage, November 21, 2021

Audit-edited by: Callum Karoleski, March 28, 2022

Final edited by: Evangeline Giaconia, August 1, 2022