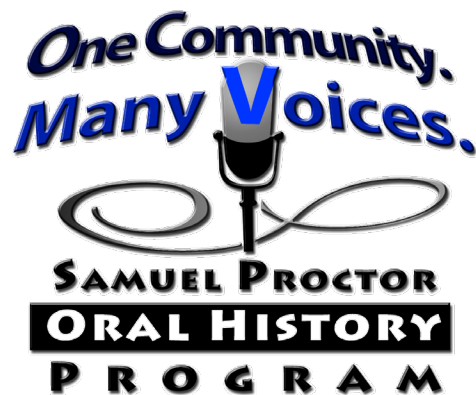


# Chief Gilbert Blue

**Southeastern Indian Oral History Project (SIOHP)  
CAT-151**

**Interview by:**

**Dr. Samuel Proctor  
June 1981**



University of Florida • Samuel Proctor Oral History Program • Paul Ortiz, Director  
P.O. Box 115215, 241 Pugh Hall, University of Florida, Gainesville, FL 32611-5215  
(352) 392-7168 [www.clas.ufl.edu/history/oral](http://www.clas.ufl.edu/history/oral)

**Samuel Proctor Oral History Program**  
College of Liberal Arts and Sciences  
Program Director: Dr. Paul Ortiz

241 Pugh Hall  
PO Box 115215  
Gainesville, FL 32611  
(352) 392-7168  
<https://oral.history.ufl.edu>

**CAT 151 Chief Gilbert Blue**  
**Southeastern Indian Oral History Project (SIOHP)**  
**Interviewed by Dr. Samuel Proctor in June 1981**  
**44 minutes | 27 pages**

**Abstract:** Chief Gilbert Blue discusses the Catawba Tribe's legal claim regarding the Non-Intercourse Act of 1799. He shares the Tribe's plans in the case that they settle the land claim. He talks about his early leadership and his election as Chief in 1973, in addition to his interactions with South Carolina's political leaders, other Tribal leaders, and other organizations in his efforts to resolve the claim. He discusses the Catawba Tribe's relationship with the broader community. He explains the sources of the Tribe's funding and the structure of its budget. He expresses optimism about the future for the Tribe and its legal claim.

**Keywords:** [Catawba Nation; South Carolina--Rock Hill; Politics and government; Land tenure]

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

CAT 151

Interviewee: Chief Gilbert Blue

Interviewer: Dr. Samuel Proctor

Date of Interview: June 1981

P: Okay, we're here in Rock Hill, South Carolina. We're in my room at the Holiday Inn, and I'm talking to Chief Gilbert Blue of the Catawba Indian Nation. We're just generally talking about the goals and aspirations of his people. Okay, you're gonna tell me a little bit now about this plan that you have and some of the difficulties and problems and situations involving the lawyers. Well, back up just a little bit, and we'll talk about some of the things we've talked about before, so that we've got a full story.

B: Without going into a whole lot of detail about our background, of course, we have had a lot of economic problems among our people over the years because of low-paying jobs and things of this nature. But I guess to look at it from the positive point starting now—as I've told you earlier—in recent years, we have sent a lot of young people to colleges. We have people who are getting better-paying jobs. The hostility that at one time was prevalent against the Indian people has now diminished, so we have a good relationship with the people in our communities now.

P: It hasn't disappeared—

B: It hasn't disappeared entirely but has diminished drastically, and so we don't really have much of that at all really anymore. To kind of get into the other thing I wanted to tell you about was that the attorneys, of course, have to look at things from a legal point of view as to how we're going to settle our claim.

P: Who did you tell me was representing you—what legal group?

- B: They're called NARF, which stands for Native American Rights Fund. They're a group of people out of Boulder, Colorado. They do have an office in Washington, D.C., and they get their money from grants and from private organizations and private donations.
- P: Now, that's the group that contacted me.
- B: Right. They have to look at it from a legal point of view, but what we're trying to—hopefully, will be our final destiny—is that we will get a settlement that will enable our people to higher education, that we will be in a position to develop our river bottom agriculturally, that we will have better homes, that we will even have our own facilities for looking after our older people. We will have programs that will be able to motivate our young people into educational areas that they're not maybe aware of at this particular time.
- P: Let me ask you something. What's the basis of this claim since you've never had federal recognition as an Indian group?
- B: The basis of it is the 1799 Non-Intercourse Act, whereby the law says, in essence, there can be no treaty made between Indians, any governments or groups without the express consent of Congress. Well, the State of South Carolina in 1840 took, through a treaty, 144 thousand acres of land from the Catawbans in exchange for some land that was going to be bought in Haywood County, North Carolina, and some other monetary services. Well, the land in North Carolina never came about. A lot of the monetary things they were going to give us never came about. And, of course, with Congress not approving that treaty, it was really illegal to begin with. And I'm sure, looking back on the papers

that we have found in the archives of South Carolina and so forth, that they knew that Congress would not approve of such a transaction, and that was one reason why they didn't go through with it. We were a very small number of people at that time as a Tribe, and I guess they felt like if they could just get this thing through, that there was never anything that would ever come of it later on. But of course, immediately after this happened—this is the one question I want to clear up because people are always asking me, they said, “Chief Blue, why are you doing this now, after all these years?” This is a legitimate question, but it's not “now, after all these years.” Immediately after what happened in 1840, we had some of our Indian people go to the state people in Columbia and ask them what could be done about getting some of our land back—that we had no place to go, no place to stay. You haven't bought our land in North Carolina that you promised us, and we have no land here. What are we supposed to do as a people? Eventually, they got back one square mile of land, which was smack dab in the middle of what was our original 144 thousand acres.

P: When did you get that back?

B: The treaty was signed in 1840, and it was about a year later before some group of people got together and said, “Well, the Indians have got to have somewhere, let's give 'em something back.” So they got the one square mile, and that's where we've been living ever since 1841, is in that one square mile area. So basically, that's the legal standard we have is the 1799 Non-Intercourse Act. That the treaty was invalid to begin with because Congress didn't approve of it. Not only that, but the treaty itself was never adhered to after it was entered into. And of course,

there are moral grounds there, too, but the courts don't look on moral grounds. They look more or less from a legal point of view. That's basically why we are where we're at now. What we are trying to get out of this claim, of course, is some more land that our people in the future will have a place to go to, and our young people will have a place to grow up and still practice their traditional things and their cultural things that our people did years ago.

P: What brought this kind of to a head in the [19]60s? Because none of this had happened up until the time you assumed the leadership.

B: Well, before I was elected Chief, some of the other Indian people wrote me letters and was informing me of programs that were available to Indian peoples, whether you were federally recognized or not.

P: Now, this was while you were still in the Navy?

B: No, it was after I came out of the Navy, but I had not really gotten involved in any Tribal role, so to speak. It was just that Samuel Beck, who is my secretary now, was in a leadership position in the Tribe years ago—even before my time—and he and I together began to go visit Cherokee, and the people up there gave us some information about programs that were available.

P: This was on your own time, out of your own pockets?

B: On our own time, out of our own pockets. And we went to Washington. There was an organization in Washington called Native—if I could get it properly in my mind now—but anyway, it was an organization that was developed to inform Indian people of programs that were available. Even there were some grants that were available to help us to do things in our community, So we belonged to that

group. Samuel Beck and some of the other Indian fellows used to go up there, on our own again, missing time from work and taking money from our own pockets to pay for our way up there and our hotels and food and everything. We would go there, and these people would give us this information. So we used some of these things to get a few things started on the reservation. And then eventually, of course, we had a meeting with the people and said we needed some leaders to kind of guide the Catawbias along into certain endeavors, and so eventually I was elected Chief in [19]73, and of course I've been Chief since.

P: You were elected Chief at that meeting?

B: At the meeting that I called to inform the people that I thought we ought to have some leadership. I didn't advocate myself. I just said somebody ought to be elected, and you think about it. Well, at that meeting, as I told you earlier, they elected myself and several other gentlemen to lead the Tribe at that time.

P: You know, one of the things I wanted to ask you earlier and had been thinking about for a long time is: What motivated you? Why were you concerned, as an individual, for the problems of your people?

B: There was two things. A lot of times I would go around just in my community in my regular working hours and visiting with the merchants and buying the things that anybody normally would buy, and what they would ask me about, you know, "What the Catawbias doing? Do you folks have any of this, or do you have any of that? Do you have any Tribal get-togethers?" And of course, we didn't have—we had no one to organize these types of things. I began to think that here we are, a Tribe of people who contributed greatly to the settlement of this part of the

country and fought with the colonies against every adversary that they ever had. We never fought against a White man, only fought against other Indians, and the people didn't really know enough about us. Even the Chamber of Commerce in Rock Hill—when people would call down here and want to know about the Catawbas, they didn't even have any brochure information on the Catawbas, and we was there all the time. It kind of irked me, I guess. At the same time, having spent quite a few years in the Navy and a lot of time out West, I had seen some of the cohesiveness in some of the Western Tribes. I felt that we could get some of that here in Catawba and kind of take our cultural things and traditional things into the future if we worked at it hard enough. With these kind of things in mind, I called the people together. After I was elected Chief, many of the problems that I'm encountering now, I knew were coming, so I didn't go into this thing blindfolded, nor thinking everything was going to be rosy. I knew there'd be a lot of trials and tribulations and headaches along the way, but I accepted those along with whatever good would come from it. So that's what we've been working for is the betterment of the people as a group—not for one faction, not for Chief Blue or any other individual, but for the Tribe as a whole. What's best for them—that's what we're trying to seek in our settlement of this claim.

P: Now, have you run into much opposition from the community and the state?

B: We first encountered the state and told them what we had planned to do. We told 'em that we thought, in our own minds, without looking at it from a legal point of view, that the state owed the Catawba people something. I spoke with Governor Edwards personally, and I told him, "I want you to listen to me for a moment, and



then you make your comments.” I told him about what happened in 1840, what conditions our people have been in over the years, and I said, “I feel like the state of South Carolina really owes the Catawba people some recompense. So I would like to see what you could do in this area. It might help us to become better people, to become a better citizen of South Carolina.” Governor Edwards said, “I agree with you.” He said, “Now, I don’t know exactly what we can do, and I’m not going to make you any rash promises, but I do believe that you have been wronged and you need some compensation for what was done.”

P: So right from in the beginning, he reacted very mildly.

B: Right.

P: Without making a commitment.

B: Right, and then he said, “Now, you can go talk with the attorney general,” who was Dan McCloud—and of course, he still is the attorney general. We talked with Mr. McCloud and other leaders in the state on several occasions. We even brought, finally, Ken Holland—who was a congressman—in on it, and he urged the attorney general to work some kind of out-of-court settlement out with us. At that time, we hadn’t even really talked strongly about going to court. Well, then the next thing that happened—in fact, we had just about worked out some kind of agreement with the state.

P: When was this?

B: Let’s see, I was elected Chief in [19]73, and I may be wrong by maybe a year or six months, but it was somewhere along about [19]75, I believe, when we first talked with the governor and the attorney general. I don’t mean to say that we

had anything worked out to all that we would get, but what I'm saying is that the concept was there. He said, "Yes, but there's some problems with that." He said, "Now, who would control the speed limits on the reservation? Would you have a gas station there, and could you sell gas for a lot cheaper than the people outside?" He was concerned about these types of exploitations, I guess, that we might do as a Tribe if we got all the legal things that we wanted out of this deal. So we began to talk about, "Well, we can make agreements with you. That we want the state to handle all the criminal things. We don't want to worry about holding trials ourselves. We do want to be able to determine who comes on the reservation and what they can't do, of course, because it is a reservation. And there will be certain laws that the federal government will say apply to us—whether you agree with it or whether we agree with it—because it applies to other Indian Tribes." But we were working in this vein and then the people in the area found out that we were working, and they got real upset because we didn't come and tell them, especially the *Herald* newspaper in Rock Hill. And then it became a real blown-up issue then. People began to clamor we were going to take their land, and why should we do it after all these years, and everybody's worked hard for their land and all this, which is understandable. But what we still haven't been able to convey to some people is that any land that the Catawbas acquire is going to be acquired through paying those people the fair market value for any land that we acquire. And it's going to have to be sold on a voluntary basis. We do not have condemnation rights. But even with these two things in plain view, there are still people who oppose the reservation altogether.

P: Do you think that the state would have appropriated the funding for this land purchase?

B: No, they wouldn't have had the money. The state does not have the financial backing to settle this claim. It's gonna have to come mostly through the federal government. But the federal government recognizes that it's a state problem to begin with, and they want them to contribute something. So the state, in the last agreement that we thought we'd just about worked out on, that the state was gonna pay—there was a certain amount of money that would come from the federal government through the states that would go to Indians, and they were gonna give that. And they were going to take care of our roads, and they were going to do a lot of those things. They had a pretty good package put together, and they were gonna present this to the federal government and say, "Okay, this is what we can do. This is really all that we can afford as a state." Then we were going to see what the federal government would come up with in conjunction with theirs and how close it came to what we as a Tribe felt like was reasonable.

P: How sympathetic has Senator Thurmond been on all of this?

B: Well, I've talked with Senator Thurmond on more than one occasion—in his office once, and I've just happened to meet him in an airport several times and several functions where we've been and we've casually and—he's always been very friendly to me. He's always asking, "Chief, how's things going with the Tribe?" And I, in a very few words, might say what we were doing. He's never been hostile. The people in the area now are pushing him to try to get a settlement for cash money only. They want Strom Thurmond to say, "Let's just

pay the thing off in cash dollars and do away with it.” They’ve also approached Ken Holland, but both of them are balking—if for no other reason, for the fact that they think that that would be unconstitutional, which I agree. And I’m sure that Mr. Thurmond, then in the halls of Congress and the Senate as long as he has, knows more about the Constitution than I would. I’m sure he’s aware of that. So I don’t think we’re going to have any real big problems from those two men, really.

P: How has it moved from just talking about it—working out an agreement out of court—now it’s moving into court?

B: Well, when the people of the community found out that we were very serious and this wasn’t just some plaything going on—that the Indians were really going to settle this thing and that we had some lawyers who knew what they were doing, that we wasn’t just somebody that was gonna go up on the street corner and holler about it. These guys that are representing us are guys that are graduates of Harvard and Yale, and we have some very knowledgeable men in Indian law. So for one time, the Indian wasn’t the man that was going to be told this is the way it is and they had no recourse. They found out we were serious and that we had some real legal guns to back us up, so what they finally did—they got to pushin’ and hollerin’, so the state of South Carolina formed a commission to study the Indian claim and to project some kind of settlement. So we had our attorneys meet with the attorney general, representatives of the landowners, and Representative Robert McFadden at that time, who was a congressional leader from South Carolina.

P: McFadden was a congressman?

B: Right.

P: He is not now?

B: He is not now. He's a judge now. So with McFadden heading that up, they worked for I forget how many months.

P: This was about [19]77, [19]78?

B: No, it was in [19]70—well, it was actually culminated last year, in [19]80. I believe in the spring of the year. Before then, we had wanted to go to court several times. We kept saying, "Well, look, we tried to talk to these people. We tried to tell them we've got a legal claim. They keep trying to say we don't have a legal claim, that we're not a Tribe, and this and one thing and another." So we finally said that if we can't—if they don't want to meet with us and settle it, let's just go on to court and let the courts decide it. If they say, "No, you're not a Tribe," or "You don't have anything comin'," well then, you know, that's it. If they do say we have something comin', at least then we've got a legal precedence that says we are, and they'll have to deal with it, whether they want to or not. This is the kind of attitude that we had because we had worked, and we had given and tried to bend so many ways so many times to get along and let the people of the community know that we weren't trying to take advantage of them, that we were just trying to follow the legal procedure that we thought we would have had coming to us as a people. Well anyway, to make the long story short, the commission was formed, they worked with our attorneys, and they came up with an agreement. They still was balkin' on the reservation. The landowners—the people that represent the landowners—they just didn't want us to have a

reservation even though we were going to get it from voluntary sales and pay a fair market value. So, at the meeting we had in Washington at the bank building—I mean in Rock Hill, excuse me. We had a meeting in Rock Hill at the bank building. That commission was there, and myself and our attorneys was there. We thought we had things pretty well worked out. The money was in the range that wouldn't have been bad. They were talking somewhere in the forty or some thousand acres range of land that we were going to acquire. [Break in recording] Oh, I really don't know. We didn't really break it down, I don't think, in dollars versus the acreage. The acreage was apart from the money. We were looking for moneys to put into a development fund to use to develop that land with too.

P: You said it was about forty thousand acres?

B: Somewhere in that area was what we were looking for as a people. We even said at one time that if we could get somewhere around five or six thousand acres, we'd be satisfied because we realized that we're not a large Tribe, and we're not trying to hog anything. We just want something that would be beneficial and worthwhile to our people—something workable. We wouldn't want to get a settlement where we only got two or three thousand acres of land, and then there wouldn't be enough to do what we wanted to do with it. So we wanted something that would be workable.

P: Now, let me ask you something. This land would be held by the Nation—by the Catawbas as a group. It would not be parceled out to people.

B: It would not be individually owned. It would be a federal recognition held in trust by the federal government for the Catawba Indian Nation, right. At that meeting anyway, the people were very adamant. They would not concede that we should have a reservation. There were several other areas that they wouldn't concede on, so we told 'em, "Well, we—". What made it so bad was that the other group had worked out the settlement where these things was included, then all of a sudden at this meeting, the landowners somehow or another put enough pressure on the people that was heading the commission at that they changed it at the last minute.

P: Including McFadden?

B: Including McFadden. McFadden, we talked with him later, and the impression that we got was that he didn't go along with that, that he was outruled or overruled by a number on the commission itself.

P: The newspaper constantly opposed you, didn't it?

B: Oh, yes. The newspaper has—for some reason or another—has been very belligerent toward us. They reported our feelings all right and reported the legal things, but it's very apparent that they have been leaning with the people in the community as if we're—it's kind of ironic that they're thinking that we're trying to take advantage of the people in the community. [Laughter] That's really a switch about there.

P: And that's true also of the political leadership in the city?

B: Not so much. I think a lot of the people in the community, I found out later—even the business leaders, the bankers, and so forth—they were not sure that settling

out of court was not the way to go. They kind of thought that should be a way that—some of ‘em said, “Well, these people, whether you agree with it or not, they’ve got a claim. And we’re gonna have to reckon with ‘em somewhere down the line. In my way of thinking, it would be best if we do that, rather than to go through a whole lengthy trial that’s gonna cost us some money.” And they kind of brought a point up, which is not really true in a way, and in a way it is too. See, it’s not costing us any money. The Native American Rights Fund are people who represent Indians in cases like this, and they receive a salary—the men that represent us—from their headquarters in Boulder. So we’re not paying them any money. If we don’t get any settlement at all—if we’re shot down in the courts or don’t get a nickel—then we don’t owe those people anything. In fact, even if we get anything, they have not even asked us to sign any contract saying, “We’ll give you ten percent, or we’ll pay you what you put into it,” or anything. There is no agreement. They’re just assuming that we are honest enough people that if we get a settlement, and however many millions of dollars we get, that we’d pay them for the money that they’ve put into our endeavor.

P: The time and effort—

B: And a little extra, of course. So they can use that to help other Indian peoples in their endeavors, when they take that.

P: You told me they get their money from grants, that they—

B: It’s a nonprofit organization.

P: But if they bring a witness in or whatever, they’ve got to pay for it.

B: They’ve got to pay, that’s true.



P: And so their money has to come from somewhere.

B: In fact, they hired Jean Toal, who was a congressman—congresswoman—in Columbia in state government, as our local attorney. She's a really sharp lady, and she handles our local area because she has connections with the people in the State of South Carolina in the government. She's been a big asset to us, and they pay her salary on time. However many hours she puts in over a month, they pay her a certain salary per hour for her time, and that is coming from their funds, which we don't cut either. So it's really going to cost the people in the area a lot more money than it's gonna ever cost us if they want to follow this thing through the courts and it goes all the way on up to the Supreme Court.

P: Do you think that's what's going to happen?

B: I'm a little dubious about it, because Mr. St. Clair, who helped negotiate some of the settlements in the cases up in Maine, is representing now the people here. They called him in and hired him—the town of Fort Mill, I think, Rock Hill, and I think the landowners' association. And he has even approached our attorneys and talked about some of the things that might still be done to work out an out-of-court settlement. Even though right now, the judge is gonna rule in a couple of months as to whether we legally are a Tribe, in his opinion, or whether we aren't.

P: You can appeal that if you—

B: Oh, yes, we naturally would, and he realizes because he told us plainly himself. He said, "I'm not gonna settle this issue in my court, but I've got to make some decisions, and whether they're right or whether they're wrong, there'll probably be opinions on both sides." And of course, we realize that.

P: Chief, it looks to me, from what you've told me and what Frances Wade has told me, that the state has been more sympathetic toward the needs of the Catawbas—at least they're aware of the presence of the Catawbas to a greater degree than they ever were before. And I guess one example to that is this new recreation center that you have. Who built that?

B: There was some grant monies that were available for what was called economically—I don't know what the terminology was, but it was something to do with economic areas that were undeveloped areas or—

P: Deprived areas.

B: Deprived areas—areas that didn't have a lot of things that other communities might have. And we were categorized in one of those areas, which put us in a position to apply for grant money. One of the grants that we applied for was monies to build up the community building with, and we—

P: Was that federal?

B: It was federal money. We were approved, so we got the building, and we didn't get to get the building we wanted. We started out with a bigger building and other things involved, but we had to keep cutting down because of the money, but we have a real nice building now.

P: Did Columbia support your planned application?

B: Oh, yes. In fact—

P: Do you think they would have if you had not been making some noises the last several years?

B: No, let me qualify that, I don't think the pressure of the suit itself was such a big factor, but I think that the fact that we had become more knowledgeable of what was available and how to go about getting those things made it possible. They knew that if they didn't support us, that we knew that they were doing wrong and not giving us the avenues to get these things because it was available if not to us, to somebody else, and we were just as entitled as was someone else. Being knowledgeable about the thing, I think, was more of a pressure than was the suit itself. That was the big reason. The state, with the CETA program—I've been to Columbia and met with the governor and with other leaders in the state government on our CETA program, which we run out of that community building down there on the reservation, and I've gotten nothing but support from the leaders in the state. I've had no hostilities whatsoever. In fact, they use Catawba—now this is really something that we're quite proud of. There are three other groups of Indians in South Carolina that have the CETA program just like we are. Even the federal government in Washington has been notified that the Catawbans have a very successful CETA program. In other words, we have put people on jobs. We have trained people. We have gotten things accomplished. We didn't just take the CETA money and run a program and extend it. We accomplished things with it. Frances Wade has done a tremendous job of organizing and teaching and getting people placed into different jobs in the community. We have had some nurses that have been trained up and actually work as full-time nurses now for the program that Frances has been involved in. We have people who are working in the library in Rock Hill that came to the

CETA program, and she got jobs for them. We've had numerous successes that we have been able to work. Just this year, the state let us be our own prime sponsor, which means that they knew we were capable of handling the monies in the program ourselves. Rather than letting them do all the work down there, they gave us the right to plan and to enact the program ourselves. This in itself, I think, is a tribute to our people—that we have the knowledge and the capabilities of running programs and organizations and making things work. So I think this is going to be a big asset in looking at things further down the road when people start asking questions, "Well, if we do this for the Catawbas, will they be able to show some gains out of it? Can they handle these things?"

P: What about the business community and the banks in Rock Hill? Are they more receptive to doing business with the Indians—extending them charge accounts, lending them money at the bank, approving mortgages for home constructions?

B: I know of very few instances where people have been turned down or anything because of this Indian-related suit. I'm not sure if there has been an upsurge of approval for Indian-related business and loans or not, but I do know quite a few that have gotten loans and gotten things. At least if they're not leaning one way or the other, at least they're giving the same look as they would anybody else. They're not trying to be lenient, nor are they trying to hold back on us, so that's one thing we're thankful about. But there are some bankers and some people who realize—and apparently the people in the community, even the businessmen don't realize it and some do—I think the normal person doesn't

realize that we're not going to be a hindrance to the community if we get additional land and if we become—[Break in recording]

P: What you're saying is fine, just exactly right. Okay, you were saying the money that's going into the to the banks?

B: The money, of course, that we would get to develop this land with would be put in one of the local banks. It would be drawing interest for our people, and of course it would be helping that institution there to lend money to other peoples. There's gonna be more ways than one that the things that we will be doing as Tribal people that will help the economy of this area. Not only that, but another thing that the peoples apparently failed to recognize—I don't know if it's just an oversight or they just don't see it or what—anytime you get involved in areas like this, regardless of what kind of group it is, if they become better-educated people, if they become more business-oriented, they become better citizens—more productive and more learned. They won't be a problem citizen. They will be a productive citizen. So naturally, if our people become better business-wise or better educational-wise, we're going to be more of an asset to our community, rather than we would be a burden. So there's all kinds of ways that we're going to be a plus rather than a negative.

P: Are you getting any support from the Indian leadership elsewhere in the United States?

B: Yes, the Native—oh, I can't think of the name every time I try to say it—the Congress of—

P: Native Americans?

B: Native Americans. They are a big organization, as you know, which involves all the Western Tribes. We have been to several of their meetings, and we have talked with them, and they understand our problem. Even though a lot of 'em can't get directly involved because of political things, as well. But they're aware of us, and they say that if there's any influence they can use in Washington to help us in these areas, they will do that.

P: As a lobby group?

B: As a lobby group. And what I was going to tell you earlier—I have made a trip to Washington within the last year and a half, and I went to almost every federal agency. I went to the Department of Interior, went to the Bureau of Indian Affairs, went to the Department of Housing and Urban Development. I went to the all—the Indian Health Service. I went to all these places, and I got from them what they could do for Indians now and what they could do for Indians once we became federally recognized, and what they could do to help us to become—like, for instance, we don't have a community center where the Chief would stay and have an office and a secretary and all this thing now. We don't have a file system where we would know about all the programs available and things of this nature. But they said once we become federally recognized, they had monies that would actually teach us how to set up the administration of an Indian Tribe. They would send field people actually out here to set us up and show us how to do these things—how to run our books, who to look for for grants. They showed us where we could get monies from if we didn't have enough money coming from any one area. They showed where we could go and get money from other areas. And this

was not only the way Indians worked, but everybody else works the same way. No matter what group you belong to or what part of the country, it's all the same. Everybody's clamoring for these federal dollars, and somebody's gonna get them. It's not a question that we're taking something from somebody else. It's just that they're available, and somebody's gonna get 'em.

P: What about your budget now? Where is this money coming from?

B: We don't have a budget. The only monies that we have now are monies that some individual Tribal members may decide to give us—fifteen or twenty dollars to put in our budget. There has been several cases where we got some money, like on our community building, and they gave us money for the Tribal of something that we just put in there that we didn't use. So we don't have—we're talking like, you know, a hundred-fifty dollars is all we ever have usually, and that just takes care of sometimes writing letters.

P: I suspect a lot of what you do comes out of your own pocket still, doesn't it?

B: Well, I've been the Chief now—it'll be eight years in August if I'm not mistaken. [19]73—this will be eight years, this year, [19]81. And I would estimate that time lost from work and money spent out of my pocket in those eight years would probably run between fifteen and twenty thousand dollars that I've lost or either paid out that I'll never see again.

P: That you will never get back.

B: I'll never get back. But I don't begrudge that. I'm just making a statement, and that's a fact. There's been some people that accused us long ago—in fact, one guy said, "You know, Gilbert has not gonna be going to Washington all these

times and staying in those motels and all the missing work and not getting some money out of it.” But we did. They just didn’t know that there were some people dedicated enough to the Indian people and their causes to sacrifice this much for ‘em without getting somethin’ out of it.

P: Are you likely to continue as Chief as long as you wanna?

B: No, I wouldn’t say that. They did pass a resolution that we would stay in as long until we got the case settled. And of course, they have the option to go back and change that if they choose to. That’s one question that I’ll have to face sometime in the not-too-distant future. Let’s just say, the case is settled later this year or the early part of next year. And let’s just say that the people show support for re-electing me as a paid Chief with a salary and everything and an expense account, I would have to really consider strongly whether I would even accept it or not over the job that I have now because I have so many benefits there. And if we were only going to be elected for a four-year term, there’s nothing that guarantees me that four years from now, they might decide to change leaders, for whatever the reason.

P: And you’ve got seniority.

B: Right. And I would be out, and the job that I’m working at now, all the seniority that I’ve accumulated, all my hospitalization and everything is paid for by my company. My retirement plan is completely paid for by the company, so there’s a lot of benefits there that I really have to think about. So it’s something that I’m not really prepared to answer right now.

P: What have you got, a council of five people working with you?



- B: It's really ten now. There's a council of ten, including myself.
- P: They're all elected?
- B: We're all elected.
- P: For how long?
- B: 'Til the duration of this claim, unless they choose to do otherwise.
- P: Who does the electing?
- B: The Tribe itself, at a Tribal meeting.
- P: Does everybody have the right to vote?
- B: Everybody over eighteen.
- P: Men and women?
- B: And women.
- P: Not as a family but as individuals?
- B: Not as a family, individuals. Secret ballot.
- P: You call a general meeting, and whoever is there votes.
- B: Whoever's there nominates, and votes are made, and whoever wins the most votes at the end is the ones who are the leaders.
- P: At that meeting.
- B: At that meeting.
- P: You don't have absentee voting or proxy.
- B: No, we have not had absentee voting. It's been strictly present.
- P: So there is not a single paid employee then, as I understand it.
- B: No, there isn't. There is no monies to pay for our travel or for our expenses or nothing.

P: So the work that Frances does, she's a federal employee?

B: She's a federal employee.

P: Who pays the light bill, for instance, in this recreation building?

B: Well, fortunately, we have—in our budget for the CETA program—we have money for the rent and for power and lights. It's just fortunate enough that we had the building, and we use that for our CETA program. And of course, the CETA program pays rent to the Tribe for using the building, and we in turn use that money to pay the light bill that Frances uses.

P: She has a girl working with her.

B: Yeah, she has one paid employee—a secretary that drives a truck—as well.

P: And that's federal money too?

B: That's still a federal program, yeah. The Tribe pays none of this. It comes from the federal and state government.

P: This school that you were telling me about that y'all had rehabilitated—what about that? Where did the supplies and materials come from?

B: That's a church. The Tribe gave that land and those buildings. We deeded that over to the church long years ago, and that materials that were put into renovating that building were bought by the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. The people of the community, of course, involved in it because many of the Indian people belong to the Mormon Church. We ourselves furnished all the labor, and all the material was bought from money that came from the church headquarters in Salt Lake City.

P: But the labor was all volunteer.

B: The labor was all volunteer. Nobody charged anything for any labor. That included everything from plumbing to electrical to roofing to flooring to building the cabinets and the kitchens and everything.

P: And y'all maintained the building on a volunteer basis, I presume?

B: Right, that's correct.

P: You don't get any funding from the Mormon Church for the Tribe?

B: No. I'm an ordained minister in the Mormon Church, and I travel a lot in church-related callings. In fact, I like to dispense that I went to Salisbury, North Carolina, last Sunday to—as a leader there—to instruct and teach. And of course, I don't get paid for that. We are lay ministers, and there is no paid minister in the Mormon Church. We preach and teach and have our regular job, as well.

P: Who takes care of the roads and garbage collection and that kind of thing on the reservation?

B: The county takes care of that.

P: And you pay for that as individuals just like the citizens of Rock Hill?

B: We pay for it through our regular county tax on automobiles or things of that nature. We don't pay taxes on the land, or we don't pay taxes on the house that we build on that land. But on automobiles and boats and things like that, we have to pay taxes.

P: Where do your kids go to school?

B: Well, I have two that goes to Rock Hill High, and another goes to one of the secondary schools.

P: What I really want to know is how do they get to school? The school bus?

B: They ride the school buses.

P: The school bus does come out and pick up the Indian children?

B: Oh, yes.

P: What about medical care?

B: Medical care is paid for individually just like other people. At one time, when we were in that short span with the federal government, there was a doctor set aside in Rock Hill that we went to, and the federal government in turn paid him, but that of course is gone now.

P: There's no clinic, no nurse that comes out and takes care of the Indian people, no burial, no kind of set-up like that.

B: No. That would become a reality, of course, later on under federal recognition, but it isn't so at the present.

P: Are you optimistic about the future?

B: Oh, yeah. I don't have really any doubts that we will get a settlement. I don't know if it will be in the area that I would like for it to be, but I'm sure that it will be a worthwhile thing. It's just something gonna be—it's just something you can't rush. When you start dealing with the federal courts and the federal governments, there's just no way you're going to rush it. I don't care what you do or say, you have to wait and let it follow its course.

P: There should be some court decision, however, by the end of this year.

B: Oh, yeah. There will be several decisions before then. Within the next two months, there will be one concerning our legality as a Tribe. And then, of course, there will be an appeal one way or the other probably, and then we will go on to

the next case. But yeah, before this year, there'll be several decisions made. The people in the community will be able to see kind of where we're at and who's on top, so to speak, and where we're at at that time.

P: So you think the next time you and I sit down like this talking, and we've got the tape recorder going, we'll be able to pick up with what's happened from now until then?

B: Oh, yeah.

P: We'll have the court decision in hand by then.

B: And with that in mind, if I don't go home—[Laughter]

P: What's gonna happen? [Laughter]

[End of interview]

Transcribed by: Lauren King, December 5, 2021

Audit-edited by: Sabina Boddupalli, March 18, 2022

Final edited by: Indica Mattson, July 26, 2022