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Interview with Harold Bower

Harold Bower

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Interview with Harold Bower by Seth Swihart on Wednesday October 28, 1998 at the Knox Soil & Water Conservation District office at 1025 Harcourt Rd.

Note: Pause button was on for first few minutes of the interview so the interview is picked up in midstream.

HB: . . .we would still have been able to be registered with the nation.

SS: Ok.

HB: I never thought a whole lot about it either because obviously I have enough white characteristics, physical characteristics that, you know, nobody would know that I am an Indian or have Indian relations unless I tell them. Then after I tell them then they say, "Oh ya, ya I can see that." But, um, being from Ohio and not having any Indian population around then basically a curiosity to the people. A lady came down from New York state actually from the area where my people used to have their lands. . .

SS: Uh huh

HB: . . .she was a wealthy land owner up there, and at the time -- Salamanca is a white town, was a railroad town, surrounded by an Indian reservation. The land cannot be sold unless the whole tribe would agree to it and the federal government would allow it, according to the treaty obligations. But they have no intentions of selling the lands, but the ninety-nine year lease that all these people had ran out in '91-'92.

SS: Mmm huh

HB: And so, the Indians are a lot more worldly wise then they were back one hundred years ago and they got their leases for a dollar for ninety-nine years. Well, now the Indians want a fair market value so they don't have to be as dependent on the federal government for support and the white people got really upset. This woman came down with her daughter who was going to marry a neighbor boy, and I just was standing, we have five children they were all friends with this boy so they were all standing around talking to this girl and her mother. And she made some mention of Seneca Lake up in New York and one of the children made the mistake of telling her that my, grandfather, my great-grandfather was a Seneca. And this woman just launched at me, and then she just started in on me. . .

SS: really?

HB: . . .ya, all the invectives about the American Indians, how they're lazy, and their dirty, and they're drunken, and they're theavin', and they're lyin' and all those things.

SS: wow.

HB: And they didn't deserve to have any lands, the government shouldn't have given them any lands. And I said, "Well", when she finally slowed down a little bit, I said, "the government didn't give them any lands", I said, "a reservation is land that the people *reserved*, they held back for themselves when they agreed to give up their land claims to the other land, to the treaty." I said, "you didn't give them that land. It's their's, it was their's in the beginning." Well that started another, she started in on me, I thought she was actually going to hit me.

SS: really?

HB: She was really gettin' (chuckle), she was really gettin' goin' and um, finally her daughter just took her by the arm, dragged her away. So, I haven't really had a lot of contact with Indian peoples per say. I have started to attend powwows, and so I do come in contact with them. I hear stories. Similar stories, I have had some friends that have worked on western reservations. They talk about the fact that Indians on the reservations will pay more for a particular utility service, than a comparable white person in the area, but not on the reservation. And, um, I thought that was somewhat strange. Sometime later I was at church -- which I wouldn't expect this to happen at church -- and there was a lady there, a real mild-mannered person, and she said to me "Well, you know, you are getting up to retirement, what do are you planning on doing?" And I said, "Well," I said "I have friends, for example out at Pine Ridge, which is an Oglala Lakota reservation in South Dakota. . ."

SS: Ok

HB: . . ."and statistically, from the standpoint of the last census, it's the poorest -- that's Shannon County -- it's the poorest county in the United States."

SS: wow.

HB: And as soon as I get that out of my mouth, she started in on those good for nothing, lazy, Indians. They don't deserve any body to help them. Oh, she just, she just went off. She goes, "You just stay away from those people, leave them alone." I thought, well that's really a strange response from a person who professes to be "Christian".

SS: yes, yes

HB: And supposed to love your fellow man as you love yourself. Those are the two outstanding circumstances I have had. I get other things. People say, "Aw, don't," they are saying it half in jest, but it is still them same, they say, "don't pay any attention to him he is just a stupid Indian." And that sort of thing. Or, "Don't expect him to do it, he is just a lazy Indian." And those are, those are, stereotypes that are established in society. Even my wife, who is a white person, and she doesn't share my enthusiasm for American Indians, and she doesn't think that they should

live on reservations, they should get out go to work and live in towns like everybody else. And I said, "Well, you know, culturally the people are different, and there is a lot of spiritual contact when you are together with your relatives."

SS: And this, your talking about like a stereotype, the stereotype you are talking about, is kind of a, you see kind of as a nation wide kind of, maybe, like a general stereotype maybe that people have of the Native American people?

HB: European people.

SS: Ok. Ok.

HB: European origins peoples. And if you go back and study the history of the people, umm -- it is interesting, Jeffery Amherst, who was a British officer and was sent to the colonies to be in charge of the military operations. He issued a formal order to give the Indians "gift blankets" from white people in the settlements who have had smallpox. These blankets were infected with the virus and of course then it would just run like a fire through gasoline and just kill all the people in a village. And it was known before that, that was commonly done, the land companies would come out and the traders would come out with whiskey or rum and get the Indians drunk and literally steal their furs from them they that they had worked all winter long to get. And they had become dependent upon the traders and they were no longer making their clothing of leather and making their clay pots, they depended on the metal pots, depended on the cloth, and the iron tools and things. And the poor guys would wake up in the morning and their furs would be all gone and they would have a headache and they would have nothing to take back to their families. And, umm, the land traders would do the same thing. In fact, they would take people who weren't even, who had no authority to even sign any documents. They just take some Indian, get him drunk, get him to mark, make a mark next to a name on a piece of paper and say, "Well, we bought this land now." And selling land was a foreign concept to the American Indian. They believed that the creator gave them that land, put them there to give them a place to live and it wasn't their's to sell. But the could share it with the Dutch people who wanted to share Manhattan Island with them and the Dutch were nice enough to give them gifts to acknowledge that sharing, not knowing that the Dutch were demanding ownership, which was a foreign concept to them.

SS: Do you see these kinds of stereotypical attitudes and ideas at all within the Knox County community? I know you mentioned the instance where you ran into that lady at church, but do you see that at all within, in any other way, within the Knox County community?

HB: Well, basically Indians in this area would be a curiosity. There is no reservation here, there is no resident population of people who are obviously American Indians. So, the people here do not grow up with, with them. I am sure the dark skinned Indians would have just as much difficulty in society as the dark skinned Africans. They don't, they are not as vocal about it, and they tend to keep to themselves. So there is a major difference in the philosophy of the peoples.

SS: Do you think that the Native American, whether they are direct decedents or through a long line, or kind of removed a little bit, do think that they like to remain somewhat invisible within the community?

HB: Well I know that when great-grandfather married a white woman he left the reservation, at that time it was probably not a good thing to be -- I have another friend who is a little bit older than I am now and he doesn't live on the reservation, he married a white woman, they never had any children so it will end right there. But, he told me he left the reservation just to make it easier on his wife because she was white. So, there is probably some prejudices or ill will, or feelings of ill will, on the reservation. It was something that if you could get away with it, and a lot of the Eastern Indian peoples, especially if they had any mixed blood, really, you know they didn't have quite the same physical appearance, face structure and all, as the Western people. So, a lot of them could pass for non-Indian people. And when the Wyandots were driven out, and the Shawnee were driven out and they went into Canada, before the Civil War, in the 1800's, early 1800's. They just slowly filtered back in and sort of kept a low profile and were light skinned enough, and they'd have, if they'd have grey eyes, or yellow eyes as the pure blood Indians refer to them, they could get away with not being Indians.

SS: Do you know roughly how many Native Americans live within this county?

HB: No, I have no idea. I know a few but. . .

SS: And so as a group is the Native American group kind of cohesive or they not really at all?

HB: No, what tends to pull you together is language and very few of the people speak the language. You know there were probably at least five hundred groups, five hundred peoples, groups of peoples they refer to as five hundred nations but there were at least five hundred peoples that were here before Christopher Columbus came. Most of those people are now gone, they have died out. Language as a cultural even is no longer practiced, although they are working on it. We've encouraged, a number of us who are interested, have encouraged the people living on the reservations to learn as much of the language and to make tape recordings and to study the language and teach it to the young people, because that is what maintains culture, is language. And, for example among the Iroquois Indians tend to be a very spiritual people, I am not saying Christian, but just spiritual. The Iroquois people, they have a saying which is "neyawa scano guyadesay" and neyawa literally means "thank you" and scano means "you are strong" and guyadesay is "friend", but it is friend in the sense that it's a constant or continual renewing everyday. So, you have a friend you is continually being renewed in your mind and your heart. And that individual is being renewed. The actual translation would be "I am thankful that you are well, my friend." But, taken in the context of the total language and the attitude of the people, that is a spiritual greeting and it's much more intense, or has much greater feeling or meaning to it than for me to say, "hey how ya doin'?", "how are ya?", "good morning", "how ya feelin' today?", whatever. It has a genuine interest in it. It has been pointed out, for example

among the Shawnee people, they come from the grandfathers who are the grandfathers of all the Algonquin speaking people, its the largest language group in North America. But, the Shawnee warriors, just out of a feeling of mutual affection for one another would literally walk together holding hands. It was not a sexual thing, it was just an affinity for one another. And the whites would make fun of them for that and, yet, you wouldn't find any more capable warriors or killing machines than the Shawnee men. They were fierce. In fact, most of the Blackfoot, they are Algonquin people, they were the most feared warriors in the plains, they were the meanest people. The Arapahos, the were Algonquin speaking people, the Cheyenne. So, language and spirituality is what draws the people together and if you don't have that around you, you know, it just doesn't. Although, one of the things some of the people have told me when they left the reservation, they miss these things. And after a period of time, maybe ten twenty years, in white society, it just became an overwhelming urge to return and go back. So, I guess that is the sort of thing that non-reservation know of or have a sense of maybe. I don't know. It's, for me, I have a greater sense of spirituality as a Christian than a lot of my Christian brothers and that maybe from my Indianess, or that may be just from my own personality, I don't know. But, I know a number of people that, they are American Indians, they are Christians, they feel very strongly about the same things that I do. And they are not necessarily, well they are not Seneca's.

SS: Are there any things that you try to do within the county to kind of bring together the Indian population at all? Or is there anything that you have tried to do to even educate the county as to the Indian population?

HB: Well, I get made fun of because whenever I have a talk as a forester, you know the woodland peoples were here very dependent upon the forest, and there was a great link between them. And so often times I interject, when I am talking about something in the forest, or the use of the forest, I'll say, "An American Indian did this or that." Of course, white people have said to me, or they'll say, "Don't ask Harold that, he will tell you all about the Indians." You know there are a lot of things you don't ever get in the history book, because they don't write them in there. I've thought about trying to get people together, but it is very difficult, they are very independent people. When they are off by themselves they generally don't come together. Some of them are embarrassed about their Indianess. Some of them, for example, at powwow, some of them will not come out and dance. They just won't do it.

SS: Is that because they are worried about what the larger community may think of them in expressing their Indian heritage? Or, just for some other reason?

HB: I don't know, they are just sensitive about it. They don't want people lookin' at them maybe, I don't know. Some of them, over a period of time I have kept encouraging them and finally they have come out and at least walked around in the circle. Powwow thought is a Western phenomenon. Powwow probably comes from a Kayawa word "paqua" which literally means "good medicine song." And powwow is a good gathering, when you have good thoughts and good things happen and you visit with your friends and your relatives. Eastern peoples didn't call it powwow, they had about seven Thanksgiving festivals a year, but they also had

woodland gatherings where they would invite people and they would come together.

SS: Does being Native American within the county, I know you said it comes across sometimes in your job, but is there any other way that affects your life within the county?

HB: I can't say, it doesn't have any positive or negative impact on me. Although my one son did say, "Why don't get us registered dad so I can go to college for free?," and I said, "Well you know we can't be registered." Well he says, "Why not?" you know he couldn't understand the matriarchal tribal system. He says, "We've got the blood." And I said, "Yes, we do have the blood, but were not accepted by our people. If our own people won't recognize us, the federal government won't recognize us." And I said, "Besides that, there are people on the reservations who really need that help, and we don't. We'll get by without it. And as long as we are a free people then were not going to be dependent on anyone else taking care of us." I said, "The thing that we need to do is see to it that our people on the reservations, we do everything we can to help them to be free. So they don't have to depend on the federal government." Because continually there are people within the federal government who want to assimilate our people. I mean just to wipe us out. In the end there will be no Indian peoples, no cultures, no historical evidence. In fact, as far as they are concerned, just get rid of these people. Sell off the reservations, put the money in the treasury and just eliminate the whole concept of American Indians. Ronald Reagan was that way.

SS: Going back a little bit, when exactly did your family arrive in Knox County? Were you the first to live in Knox County from your family? And how long have you lived here?

HB: Oh, we came here about 1970. My people, originally on my father's side came to Holmes county. And my mother's people are from Pennsylvania near where there was a chief, a war chief, last war chief. His name was Guyandawaca, or "He who plants", or as the whites called him, "Corn planter." And, a man planting corn just doesn't happen, or didn't happen back then because that was something that the women did. The women were the only ones who handled the seed. So, I don't know why the whites called him corn planter. But, nevertheless, he was given land. After the revolution, the Iroquois Confederacy signed the Canandagua Treaty which is coming up here, the anniversary is coming up November 11th. Then they didn't ever go to war again with the whites. And he and his people there in Western Pennsylvania to assist the white people who tried to dissuade the Ohio confederacy, the twelve nations, from following Tecumseh. And warring against the whites. Because of his assistance, then the commonwealth of Pennsylvania gave him a track of land of six hundred and forty acres, something like that, up near Warren. There is a creek that went through there called Kinsu creek. And, there were some big floods back in the early nineteenth century in Pennsylvania. The Corps of Engineers decided that they found a good dam site on Kinsu creek. So they took that land because it was not federally appropriated as reservation lands. Not protected, so to speak. So, in that area, he and his grandmother, great-grandmother, they live in that area, but not on the reservation. When the Corps took the land, I don't know, they probably moved on down out of that area just like everybody else. The Indians tended to go back on the reservation. Great-grandfather just moved

on down toward McKee's Gorge, or some place like that, in Western Pennsylvania.

SS: And, so you came here in 1970, and was this, what were your reasons for coming to Knox County?

HB: I was assigned this forest area, this land area, the four county area was my project. I am a forester with O.D.N.R..

SS: Umm. . .

HB: . . . And it was a good place to bring children. We have five children. We lived in Whitehall in Columbus. And at that time, the third graders, tell you about it just because our daughter, I think, was in third grade. They were third graders who were buying amphetamine pills with their lunch money.

SS: wow.

HB: And there was kind of a drug problem at the high school level. So we decided the best thing to do would be to come up here -- take this project and work up here.

SS: And you have enjoyed living in Knox county?

HB: Oh, fine place to live. Good place to raise children. Not perfect, but it is an excellent place. Kids would spend a lot of time down at the river, the Kokosing river. The two, the middle boy and the youngest boy, they learned a lot of their life's lessons by hunting and trapping and fishing on the river, and swimming, canoeing, so all the things I considered important.

SS: Do you try to, kind of, continue the Native American heritage through your children? and express to them the importance of that, and try to continue that and keep that going, keep it alive?

HB: I try to teach them the lessons of our people. I, there is a concept called the seventh generation. And it is not an unusual concept, not just specifically one recognized by the Seneca, because the Ojibwa, they also have that concept and Lakota, they teach a similar concept. But, the seventh concept is that the things we do today are going to impact the people into the future, clear I into the seventh generation and we need to think about this. So I try to teach the, my children that. Women are highly respected among the Iroquois people and I believe that is also a Christian teaching. . .

(End of side 1)

HB cont.: . . They would say, "Why are your woman here at this treaty meeting?" "Why are they coming here to the counsel house? Why are the women here?" And they'd say, "Well, we treasure their judgement. They are intelligent, just like us. They have understanding that is

different than ours, and we want them here.” The European then would try to force the Indians to send the women home. But the women literally voted, *way* before the European people ever considered such a concept. So I try to teach that women are considered very good by Creator. He has taught us that we are to respect them. That they are equal socially to the men. I try to teach that to my children. It try to teach them to respect all life, because all life comes from the same source. The life that is in the deer came from the same source as the life that is in me. And so I feel that we have a responsibility to respect all of creation and to honor all of the other creatures. Don’t elevate them up above me, but I don’t feel it is right for me to go out and [inaudible], for example and waste those creature. It just dishonors that creature and it also dishonor the Creator who has given life to that creature.

SS: Do you think that this putting these values across to your children, kind of, affects how they view their life within the county and view and deal with any of the stereotypes that may come across. And deal with -- maybe righting those stereotypes. You know, like saying, you know, people may say, “Oh, this is how Indians are” and then your children may, became they’ve learned these things from you, do you think they, they have, are conscious of that, and try to maybe get rid of some of those stereotypes whenever possible?

HB: My daughters may. They accept what I have said, more than my sons. My sons are not particularly interested in their Indian heritage. So I am not sure that it has any impact on them. Didn’t really have any impact on me until I got older.

SS: Ok.

HB: That for me was just a fact, you know. My mother told me that we were descended from the Seneca Indian, who had lived among corn planters people. And, the interesting thing about that, I’ve not been able to, or course they didn’t keep records on Indians, but I am not going to find any written records form anybody. Since my aunts had died, nobody could tell me where to go look. Where my grandmother was born. I do know that my great-grandfather and his wife had four sons and four daughters. But, where I don’t know.

SS: Do you think your interest in your Native American heritage is kind of a unique thing within the Native American population within the county here? Do you think you, that a lot of people that may know they have Native American heritage just kind of accept that and just kind of not really do much with it. Do you think your exploring that and really getting involved with it is a unique thing?

HB: It is kind of interesting if you stand around and listen, especially if you go to a powwow, the number of white people who have Cherokee ancestors. (Chuckling)Everybody and their brother has a grandmother or great-grandmother or great-aunt or somebody that was Cherokee. And, when people, generally now I just accept the fact. When people come up to me and say, “Well, I am American Indian too.” And if I ask them, “Well, what people are you descended from?”, it’s going to be Cherokee. So there is a lot of Cherokees goin’ around this country. But, some of my

friends who are aware of their Indian heritage, and can follow it or trace it, really don't say too much about it. And those who are just guessing, they will talk a lot about it. And so, you know, I guess it is fashionable in some circles to be American Indian.

SS: Why do you think, why do you think it is not pursued more? Why do you think the Indian heritage is not pursued more? At least learning about it?

HB: I am not sure. Sometimes it is an embarrassment. I don't know if you have ever been on a reservation, but sometime there is extreme poverty. And so sometimes there are painful memories. Sometimes, you know, like myself, we're far enough away from reservation life, mine is one, two three, it would be four generations removed from the reservation. There just isn't the interest or the connection. I was, basically I started out I was just curious. I just wanted to find out about these people and so I did, I made a trip up to the Allegheny Reservation were the Seneca nation has a reservation. Let's see, there is the Cataragas, which is a big reservation in comparison to the Allegheny. Cataragas is up near Buffalo. And then east of Cataragas there is the Tadowanda Reservation. These are traditional Senecas. They still have the chiefs and the leadership. Where the other, Cataragas and Allegheny have a president and vice-president and three counsel members and so on. I suppose there is a number of people that they are aware of their connection, but it just doesn't interest them too much. Or, they don't have any connection to these things. I can't tell you.

SS: So, I am assuming from that that there aren't really many organizations or even gatherings, as like a regular, semi-regular basis of any of the Native Americans within Knox County. Or. . .

HB: Well, there is the American Indian Center in Columbus. There is one up in Akron. There is one in Cleveland. There's a Miami Valley counsel, I think they might be located in Dayton. There's now a united, what they call the Shawnee, the Ohio Shawnee United Remnant Band. They literally have gone to the point of pooling money and buying, they have a tract of land south of Urbana. They bought the Zane Caverns, and they are using it as a money making enterprise. They have bought some land in Dark County -- Champaign, Dark, and maybe Union County. They are trying to reorganize to the point that they can become recognized federally. The thing of it is when you are so far removed from a reservation you are not going to marry one of your people. And that is one of the things the traditional people are concerned about. That eventually the Indians just get thinned out so much blood wise that there is no one to carry on the responsibilities of the culture. And, of course, if grandfather marries a white woman, as he did, she has no allegiance to the counsel of elders. She has no relationship to the clan mothers so really she's purely and simply an outsider. It wasn't unusual for the Iroquoian people, in fact, I think all the woodland peoples, there was a lot of adoption goin' on. When they would go out, didn't fight wars like the European concept of war, but they would go out and go to somebody and they would take prisoners and they would bring they back. Many times the children or the women would be adopted into the tribe and all of the men would be killed. And sometimes even the men would be adopted. If somebody had had a son or grandson who had died for some reason and they wanted somebody to take their place they would adopt a person. So there was a

lot of amalgamation there going on. I don't know if you say the last of the Mohicans?

SS: Yes.

HB: Magua, is an Algonquin word which literally is a term of derision. Magua was a Wyandot or a Huron, that's what the French called the Wyandots, the bushy hairs, and he was adopted into the Mohican, into Mohawk tribe. And the Mohawks are the easternmost of a confederacy of the Iroquois. Generally, when that adoption took place it was honored by the individual, they didn't turn against their adopted people. In this particular case, Cooper, James Fennimore Cooper, makes him the villain of the story. But, that was a common situation. The French, they spent a lot of time among the Indian peoples, and didn't seem to have any desires on the land. The Dutch and the English, they were just totally different. They didn't want anything to do with those dirty Indians, those stinkin' Indians, those heathen people. They were above them. Whereas the French would go live with them. So, the French were adopted into the tribes. That's why you'll see a number of French names, especially among the Ojibway or Chippewa people or the Sioux people and around the upper great lakes and Canadian peoples; a lot of French names.

SS: So in order for a Native American within Knox county to kind of get involved on a group level of kind of a higher level, they have to go outside the county to do so?

HB: Ya.

SS: Usually to Columbus? Is that kind of the most common place to go?

HB: I don't know of anybody here. I have a name, a Rosetta Chrysler, she is a Native American and there is Fran, Fran Metcalf, she is Native American. She looks, she's close enough in the blood line she looks Native American. If you were lookin' for a Native American. As far as I know those people -- there is nobody I know that makes a conscious effort to belong to any of these groups and go take part in anything. I thought about getting together a group, just put an advertisement in the newspaper. Basically, just have a sit down meal, corn soup and fry bread or something. Potluck, just have everybody come together and see what came up. I have never done it, like I said, I have a lot to do and my wife is not particularly enamored with the idea.

SS: I think that may be all the questions that I have for you. Is there anything else that you, anything else about the Native American population within Knox County, or you yourself as having Native American heritage, that we didn't discuss or you'd like to mention?

HB: Have you looked into the Census?

SS: I have looked at census data of Knox County, Professor Sacks had a 1850 census data. But that only included Western European and African American. So, as far as that, no I haven't gotten into that yet, but I'm gonna definitely. . .

HB: See, I still don't check American Indian and White. I just check White, when I am censused.

I should either do one or the other but I am not pure American Indian, I am not pure White, although I pass for White. So that is basically what I do.