Listening to Indians

CHARLES McGESHICK, Sokaogon - Chippewa
ALBERT McGESHICK, Sokaogon - Chippewa
RICHARD POLER, Sokaogon - Chippewa
August 29, 1975
Mole Lake, Wisconsin

This transcript is one of a series of interviews with American Indian people throughout much of the United States by S. I. Myers of the History Department of St. Louis Community College at Florissant Valley, St. Louis, Missouri, 63135.

The purpose of these interviews is to bring the Indian peoples' own comments to students in classrooms, and to foster greater understanding among the peoples of the United States by providing Indians the opportunity to express their ideas and opinions to a wider audience.

This transcript has been edited for clarity and ease of reading, but every effort has been made to preserve the original feeling. Conversations and opinions were encouraged on any subject of interest to interviewees; questions and responses do not necessarily reflect the viewpoint of the interviewer, the National Endowment for the Humanities, or St. Louis Community College.

This transcript series was made possible by a grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities, and by support from St. Louis Community College.

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Glen Rock, New Jersey
Microfilming Corporation of America
1978
Sam Myers:

We are up in northeastern Wisconsin, talking with Charles McGeshick. He is the chairman of the tribal council here, and, Chuck, I would like to ask you, what band of Indians, what tribe of Indians is this?

Charles McGeshick:

The band of Great Lakes Superior Tribe.

SM: Great Lakes Superior Tribe of the Chippewas? And you have a name here, Sokaogon. Is it a small group?

CM: We're of the same bands, but at the time of that treaty in 1854, our treaty somehow got lost, and we became known as the Lost Tribe, along with the St. Croix. There are six bands in the state of Wisconsin of Chippewas, but there's ten tribes. Six are Chippewas, and there's two lost tribes, and we're one of them.

SM: It started out with a treaty getting lost?

CM: Yeah. Gettin' lost, and we ended up with this little area here. We got this through that reorganization act of 1933, Indian Reorganization Act.

SM: Well, Chuck, were you born here on the reservation?

CM: I was born right on the reservation, and I'm still livin' in the same house that I was born in twenty-nine years ago.

SM: And you went to school here too?

CM: I went to school here, we have a local school here. At the time I was goin' to school it was one through eight, now it's runnin' K to six. From eighth grade here I went to Crandon, the high school is in Crandon.
SM: What do you call the school here?

CM: This is the Mole Lake elementary school.

SM: Where does this "Mole" word come from?

CM: I believe it's just the animal, the mole.

SM: That's what it's spelled like. So you went to school there, then you went to Crandon for high school?

CM: Yes.

SM: And Crandon is just eight miles north of here?

CM: On a map you look at the national parks, and so forth, we're within the heart of the Nicolet National Forest. It's spelled with l-e-t on the end of it.

SM: Oh, do you say "Nicolay" around here?

CM: Yeah, that's the way we pronounce it, Nicolay, as in Chevrolet.

SM: In Minneapolis they say Nicolet. Well, then, you went to school after that somewhere?

CM: I went to school in quite a few different places, such as Brigham, Utah.

SM: Brigham Young University?

CM: No, not Brigham Young University, Intermountain School. It's an Indian school out there. I was at Fort Collins, Colorado, I got my
degree for teaching. I don't know if it's a degree, it's a diploma to teach basic education to adults. Adult basic education. And I also spent three years in River Falls University in Wisconsin.

SM: And then you have a B.A. degree?

CM: I have no degree, the only degree I have is Indian degree. (laughter)

SM: You have no degrees, but you have lots of years in school?

CM: Yeah. A degree in Indian is about all I have.

SM: But then you came back here and lived on the reservation after finishing these sessions at school?

CM: Yeah, but I also have a trade. I started out to be a beautician, then I went to a bricklayer, then to a barber.

SM: So you were going to be a beautician, or a hair dresser?

CM: I was one. I also was a bricklayer.

SM: You were a bricklayer and a barber. And now?

CM: I'm a chairman.

SM: This is a full-time job for you, Chuck?

CM: I spend about 120% of my time working with it. Just listen to a lot of problems and try to solve them.

SM: Well, anyway, now you've been elected chairman of the tribal council. How long ago?
CM: January. I was 28 years old then.

SM: You're one of the youngest tribal council chairmen around?

CM: Right now I'm probably the youngest one in the United States.

SM: How big an area do you have up here in Mole Lake?

CM: Well, at one time it was 12 miles square, which is about 166 square miles, and that was tore off and right now we have approximately 1,996.4 acres, that's an additional 300 acres that was boughten by HUD.

SM: So you have added to this area lately then through HUD, and you have a housing project going. Quite a few new houses.

CM: Oh, there's only 14 new homes. It took nine years to get those.

SM: Are some of them that old, nine years?

CM: No. I think they moved into them in '72. Yeah, three years old.

SM: We just heard another voice there. Would you introduce me?

CM: This is Albert McGeshick, a brother of mine.

SM: Is he on the council here?

CM: No, he works with the elderly programs here, and such things as Head Start programs, representative for Head Start.

SM: Do you have something planned for today here in the building, Albert?
Albert McGeshick:

Well, this afternoon we serve dinner at 12:00 o'clock, and we run it five days a week from Monday to Friday, and we've been in this program for about five years now, and I've been working in it goin' on my second year, and I work with youth, and we're organizin' certain things for our youth here, areas we take 'em on campin' trips, ball games, baseball games, rapids rides.

SM: I noticed this driving up here. There were several places that said, "Raft Rentals."

AM: That's on Wolf River.

SM: And you rent rafts and ride down the river on them?

AM: Yeah.

SM: It's a rapid-flowing river, isn't it?

AM: It is, yeah.

SM: Lots of stones, rocks in it.

AM: Right. This year there was one person, a 23-year-old man, he drowned on the river. The water was so high and he slid out under his life-jacket. They found him down by Keshena where you just came from. Well, the dam right there, that's where they found him, and that was about 20 miles.

SM: This river starts up here some place.

CM: Well, we call it the Wolf River Valley up here.
SM: And it flows on south, sort of southeasterly?

CM: Southwest.

SM: Down through Keshena and Shawano?

CM: It goes right up the Mississippi.

SM: All the way to the Mississippi River?

CM: I believe it does. I have a map here somewhere.

SM: If it's a major river in the area, it's big enough and fast enough to interest people who want to float down a rapid river, I guess.

CM: Oh, it's beautiful, if anybody'd care to take a trip on it.

SM: There are pretty spots all the way along--it's a beautiful drive up here.

CM: Well, the Menominee Indians, now that they're restored back to the reservation status, they have been paid by the state not to build on the river for that 28-mile stretch there. Flows right straight through the reservation.

SM: Does it flow through yours too?

CM: No, it doesn't. At one time it used to be part of our reservation too, but then. . . .

SM: But then when the reservation got chipped away and shrunk, you lost the river?
CM: Yeah, we lost that.

SM: Any hope of getting it back?

CM: We're tryin' to find monies right now to expand our reservation, so we can develop it.

SM: This is true around the country, like the Menominees have added quite a few lots they have purchased with money they've raised to add to the land they had, and then you hope to do the same?

CM: Well, we don't want to add to our land problem, because in this area we have a lot of friends, non-Indians. They've been livin' here for the last hundred years, maybe.

SM: So you don't want to disturb them either?

CM: No.

SM: Everything is going along rather peacefully right now?

CM: Oh, peaceful enough, but we don't want to cause any hard feelings with them, we're neighbors with them, we got to live with each other.

SM: Well, you have a nice housing project started, and you have a nice school.

CM: It's been added to.

SM: Over at the Pine Point school in Minnesota, on the White Earth Reservation, they're teaching the Chippewa language. Do you teach it here now?
CM: We're just getting into that part of education now, for Indians. It's under Title IV, Part E of the Indian Education Act. We're workin' with A, B and C of the act, but Part E is primarily to deal with the culture and the history of the Indians, and so forth. We don't like to get into religion, because throughout the Indian nation, nobody wants to . . . it's a sacred religion, and it's hard to really deal with that. It takes about 15 years till you can become part of that religion. We're developing our course in Indian culture and history right from Mole Lake. And there's another tribe east of us called the Potawatomi Tribe, they're an arm of the tribe from the Kansas prairie.

SM: Does their reservation touch yours?

CM: No. We're workin' in conjunction with them in developing courses for the school. We started this last year, and we're continuing it this year.

SM: How many people do you have on your reservation?

CM: Nine hundred and sixty two people.

SM: And the Potawatomis have a similar size?

CM: Approximately 600. And this is the tribal secretary, Richard Poler, who just walked in here. This is Sam Myers, he's one of Dede's relations from the university.

SM: He's the secretary of the tribal council?

CM: Yes, he is. He's workin' under our Manpower program, tribal secretary, jack of all trades, I believe.
SM: We've been talking a little bit about the whole situation here, hoping to get greater understanding all the way around on the part of everybody. Are you making any progress here, do you think?

CM: Very little, but we're working towards it.

SM: You didn't go through that termination-restoration thing like the Menominees, did you?

CM: No, no. The Menominees are the only ones in the state of Wisconsin that terminated. Did you get to talk with Ada Deer?

SM: Yes I did.

CM: She's a nice woman.

SM: She's very personable. Now, then, what current projects are you engaged in?

CM: Primarily I'm workin' quite hard tryin' to develop a resort and reservation.

SM: A resort here?

CM: A resort and a trailer court, campgrounds, wild rice processing plant.

SM: Do people harvest a lot of wild rice around the area?

CM: We're just started today. That's why I was hopin' you'd come so we coulda let you watch them harvest.

SM: Is wild rice harvesting open to everyone, Indians and non-Indians alike?
CM: It became a state thing in 1970, I believe.

SM: It became open?

CM: Yeah, and I think it ruined it.

SM: Before that it was only for Indians, wasn't it?

CM: No, it wasn't only for Indians. It was that Indians were the only ones that picked it and harvested it and processed it.

SM: Oh, I thought it was law over in Minnesota that only Indians could harvest wild rice, up until the 1950's.

CM: No. It was part of our treaty, but then, as you know, all treaties have been . . . broken. They only kept one portion of that treaty--they promised to take our land and they did it.

SM: And that's a quotation from?

CM: I think it was from Chief Joseph.

SM: Chief Joseph of the Nez Perce?

CM: I'm not sure, but it could be from . . . there's so many quotes.

SM: Well, many of the Indians were quite capable orators, and they were the masters of the effective, pungent phrase, because the storytelling was important, and they developed this ability. You mentioned something about the chief who was here when you started the reorganization.

CM: Yeah, that's Chief Willard Leroy Ackley.
AM: Well, Chief Ackley was our chief until he passed away in 1970, and he's our uncle on our mother's side.

SM: The office isn't hereditary?

AM: No. He was appointed by the people of our tribe. Is that right, Chuck?

CM: Yeah, and I don't know who'd actually be the chief now if we went back to find out. I think that took place in 1927. Primarily it was carried down through the family.

SM: It was sort of hereditary, with the approval of the whole tribe, I suppose.

CM: Yeah, and then nobody wanted to take over as the chief, and they elected Chief Ackley then.

AM: That was 1928 when he became chief.

SM: And he served quite a while?

AM: Yes.

SM: And when did you start working with the tribal council?

CM: 1934.

SM: And was he chief then?

CM: Chief and chairman at the same time.

SM: And after his death you haven't had a chief as such?
CM: No, we haven't.

SM: So you carried on then without a chief as a leader, but the chairman as the executive officer?

CM: Right.

SM: These changes are kind of vague, and they're different in different areas too, but your explanation makes that clear here.

AM: We would like to have a chief really—an appointed one—for the reservation. I think we should have one.

SM: Well, now, the chief would be someone who could be the same as chairman, but he could be separate also.

AM: Right.

CM: According to the treaty the chiefs are the only one... that is, they work directly with the President.

SM: The President of the United States?

CM: Chairman just works at the lower level, such as I'm doing now.

SM: Then if you had a chief you would have an officer who would deal directly with the President?

CM: Yes, deal directly with the United States government. We still claim we have our sovereignty, but the federal government probably says we don't. I feel that we're still a nation within a nation.

SM: Well, there are some places where I think this is literally true, like
the Red Lake Reservation in northern Minnesota, which never has been ceded by any treaty to the United States, so it's still like a land within a land, a sovereignty within a sovereignty, or whatever. It's a closed reservation, where they make their own laws, their own ordinances, have their own law officers, and so on.

CM: That's another problem that we're havin'. The 83rd Congress met, and they passed Public Law 280, that reverted us to state laws, without contacting the Indian people themselves. They wrote a law and they shoved it through Congress and they passed it, and we were under the state criminal justice.

SM: And just moved you back under the jurisdiction of the state laws?

CM: Yeah, without telling us or asking us, and then when we try to contest it, it's hard to do.

SM: This Indians Claims Court that's been set up recently, are you familiar with that?

CM: It's been set up for quite a few years.

SM: For a long time, but it's more active recently?

CM: I don't even know if it's more active or not--they're holdin' up their jobs just like everybody else. The longer they hold back your claims, the longer they have a job.

SM: Well, has the Indian Claims Court been coming out favorable to the Indian people, or not?

CM: No way. We just settled Docket 18-T & C Claims in court, and we won our case, but we only got $10,000,000 out of it and that has to be
divided between 11 reservations.

SM: Not just your own, Mole Lake Reservation?

CM: About 70,000 Indians. It totals up to maybe about $200 apiece.

SM: Well, that isn't going to change things very drastically.

CM: No. They give us our price. I think it's about three cents an acre.

SM: Based on the price of...?

CM: At the time of 1837, I believe. So, at today's prices, we're losin' a lot, running up around $300 a running foot for lake frontage.

SM: That's what it's worth?

CM: Right now.

SM: Which is a very high price, isn't it?

CM: Yeah. I think if I went to court I'd settle for something like a billion dollars.

SM: A billion would be about fair if you based it on current values?

CM: Based on the fact that they give us land ceded us from Prairie du Chien up to Green Bay and north of that, covered northern Michigan, and half of Minnesota, northern part of Minnesota.

SM: The Chippewa band tribes?
CM: Right. That was ceded to us and we had the huntin' and fishin' rights and everything.

SM: Do you remember which treaty that was?

CM: 1854.

SM: The 1854 treaty was the one that ceded all this land from Prairie du Chien all the way to Green Bay?

CM: And north of it.

SM: That's 500 miles?

CM: To the St. Croix River. Yeah, it went to the St. Croix River, and then it went west again.

SM: And then a great part of the northern part of Minnesota?

CM: Yeah, I think it went to the St. Croix River and then went west of that to Bismarck.

SM: That's bigger than any one of these states now.

CM: They took that away without contacting the Indians again, in 1854. You know, a lot of these people around here, how they got their names, and I think that's how we lost our land, was they were all deserters from the Cavalry. You see they got tired of fightin' and killing and slaughtering Indians and . . . .

SM: They would desert, and join the Indians, marry, and move in?

CM: They would join the Indians because they got tired of it and they. . . .
SM: Like your name, McGeshick?

CM: I don't know if that's an Irish Indian name. I think it was on my grandmother's side, she's a big, tall, red-headed Irish woman. That's where the "Mc" came from. I'm not gonna quote anybody, but I think Jimageshick is the original name, such as the ruler of the skies, the eagle.

SM: How do you say that now?

CM: I think it's Jimageshick. Maybe my dad could pronounce it better than me.

SM: I've heard this word "geshick" before in Chippewa.

AM: There is Geshicks, really. Take off the "Mc" and it's Geshick.

CM: And then you break it off. See, we don't spell our words in one, such as, if you spell "following," we'd put fol, and then break it off, and then low and then end with ing.

SM: You break the syllables into separate parts?

AM: Right. Like you was doin' there.

SM: Like I do phonetically?

AM: That's the way they really pronounced all their stuff. The new languages, all words, like "Sokaogon" really is spelled different than it is, the way they have it spelled now.

SM: Yes. Because when you look at the word, you wouldn't come up with Suh-kaw-gon.
CM: They called it different things.

SM: When you straightened me out there it was Suh-kaw-gon, and that makes it easy to say. Now the young man over in Minnesota who teaches the Chippewa language over there, or Ojibway... am I saying that right?

AM: I think the Ojibway and Chippewa, that's different. We discussed that at Nicolet College there a month ago, but that Ojibway language is a little different than the Chippewa. In fact, even the Chippewa language that's spoken in the states here, the six tribes, varies.

SM: I'm sure it would. Just like Boston's people talk differently than Dallas, Texas, people.

CM: Right.

SM: The basic language, Algonquin, is a linguistic group, but they have split up. It sounds so difficult to me, but he said the kids seem to learn it very quickly, but the older people have trouble.

CM: Well, the young kids can really pick it up. I don't even know Indian that well. I know a few words. I understand it. I can sing in Indian and drum and everything.

AM: Well, see, our parents don't use Indian language in our homes. When I first started school I couldn't hardly speak English until about the second grade, and I was havin' a tough time learnin'.

SM: Then you started out speaking Chippewa?

AM: Yeah. I used to live with my grandpa. I used to run away from home all the time from my mother and dad, and I used to stay at my grandpa's
and I stayed with 'im about six years before I went to school. I was eight years old when I went to school.

SM: Did you ever speak the native Chippewa language, Richard?

CM: Richard was quite involved because of Jim Whitehead.

SM: Jim Whitehead?

Richard Poler:
Yeah, they never spoke English, they always spoke Chippewa.

SM: Is that correct now to say, "spoke Chippewa?"

CM: Well, we'll just leave it at Chippewa, I don't want to get into the technicalities of it, Chippewa, Ojibway, and all that. We're part of the Algonquin Nation, so we'll just leave it at that. The French couldn't pronounce Ojibway, so they cut it short saying Jibwa, that's a French word.

SM: But then, now your grandparents still speak it, Al, don't they?

AM: Right, but, well, my grandparents are dead now, but it's kind of embarrassin' when we go to have our ceremony dances sometimes, powwows, you can get feelin' embarrassed when some of the older Indians say, "What kind of Indian are you? You don't understand what I'm sayin'." And it is that way, and I'd like to sometimes really understand it myself, and I don't.

SM: Richard, you did . . . do you still speak Chippewa?

RP: No, not really.
SM: It's hard now because you don't get a chance to use it enough.

RP: I've been away quite a while, away from it.

SM: And, Al, you did when you were a child. Can you still speak it?

AM: No, I don't speak hardly. The only thing I remember is Richard's name. They call him Bish-shon-i-quin. I don't know what that meant.

RP: Blue sky.

AM: Bish-shon-i-quin. 'Cause I used to see your grandma holler, she lived way back in the woods, we were about a half mile away, and when dinner time was comin' she'd holler, you know, and Richard'd take off playin' and he'd have to run to dinner.

CM: You could hear it a long ways though. The voices 'round here carries good. I don't know what makes it. I think maybe 'cause we're in a hollow or something. You could hear Mrs. Randall used to go to the edge of the woods, and she'd holler Sandy's name, and, boy, he'd be a mile away, but he could hear his name plain.

SM: And he would come?

AM: And we used to hold our powwows down next to the river there, and my grandfather used to have a wigwam and stuff there, and we used to hold our ceremonial dances there, and you could be a mile, two miles away, and the drum was good then, and it would echo and you could hear it a long ways. Today now we got the same drum yet, but it don't have the sound, the same tone.

SM: Does it lose the tone with age?
AM: I don't think it loses the tone with age. It just kept gettin' lower and lower, maybe because the Indian heritage is dying out too, maybe it's dying with the drum, I don't know.

SM: The Sioux people say that of themselves, that as the Sun Dance died out, the people lost their strength. But, Chuck, you mentioned some time ago here that you might go to Portland for a meeting? What kind of meeting?

CM: National Congress of American Indians. It's the oldest Indian organization.

SM: Your tribe sends you as a representative?

CM: Right.

SM: When is that going to be?

CM: It's going to be in Portland, Oregon, November 10th to 14th.

SM: Are you going alone?

CM: I'd like to take another person with me, but it depends on the funds.

SM: You have to get the funds voted?

CM: It's quite hard for us to send anybody out there. It's all paid for by yourselves and the tribe. We're looking for funds. In fact, I'd like to take at least six people out there, 'cause it's meetings within meetings within meetings.

SM: And you can't be at all of them?
CM: Right. About seven, eight meetings going on at once, and you want to be at all of them, and you can't make it.

SM: Does this organization tend to consolidate all the Indian groups in the country?

CM: Right. And we try to write our own laws. It's to better the Indians throughout the country, laws and whatever, health and education. It's primarily steered towards that and working to development, tribal development, trying to run a better organized . . . community.

SM: Probably it would be worthwhile to take several people if you could find funds someplace, so that you could go out there and bring back all the experience of all the other people. Ada Deer's experience has been something that everyone can learn something from, although everyone hasn't been through termination.

CM: We learn to stay away from it now. It is real valuable, because about six tribes in the United States were terminated without their consent.

SM: And some of them have just disappeared, I guess.

CM: Right. The Colville Indians out there where Chief Joseph came from. They were terminated.

SM: Colville, Washington?

CM: Right. I enjoyed watchin' that movie. "I Will Fight No More Forever." That was a very touching movie and brought tears to my eyes.

SM: Yes, and I couldn't find much of anything in it that was inaccurate historically, except that they left out some of the best parts. You know, like some of the military strategy they used was almost unbelievable, and they didn't put all that in.
CM: No, but did he really out-smart the Army like that?

SM: There's another detail there. He's always been given credit for being the military leader, but recently someone said that he was the tribal leader, and his military strategists were his war chiefs.

CM: Right. That's what they had their councils for at the time, you know. They'd all sit on 'em, they'd discuss it and bring up all the problems they'd encounter, the chief then would tell the whole community as a spokesman.

SM: Yes, he would head up the group. In other words, then you would agree he wasn't necessarily the sole military strategist himself?

CM: No, I don't think so, but I'd just like to recognize him as being the sole one, because if they take everything away from us, they might as well take that away too.

SM: No, he's quite a hero to . . . well, everybody who believes in fairness, because he probably got one of the worst deals of anybody. He is a very famous figure, and that speech of his, "I will fight no more forever," is famous too.

CM: I got friends out there. Mel Sampson out there, is one of his relatives. He's quite interesting.

AM: Well, I was gonna say somethin' too. We was talkin' about our wild rice. Startin' today . . . four years when Chuck started a program we do every year now, it's called our Wild Rice Festival, and we have it every year. This year we had it for three days, and Chuck got the money out of his own pocket to start this program, and it seems to be workin' out real well, and we have a lot of people comin' in this area, you know.
SM: They come for the festival?

AM: Yeah.

CM: I think we had about 5,000 this year.

SM: Do you mean the wild rice beginning today, that means the harvesting begins today?

CM: Right.

SM: Is it ripe now?

CM: It shoulda started...

RP: Ten days ago.

SM: Oh, was it ripe already then?

CM: Yeah, but the state wants ... you know they got these little, bitty laws.

SM: Oh, you don't set the time yourself?

CM: No, the state does now. The one time when we ran it rice was good, and when the state took over it went from good to bad.

SM: That would be one project to work on where you could control your own area and adjust the time to the ripeness of the rice itself.

AM: Well, the lake we have now, we kind of set the date on that ourselves, 'cause they asked us to go out and test the rice, what you think it's ripe, ready to pick, and we do, and that's when we set the date, but we have to...
CM: Yeah, but it's 48-hour notice.

AM: Yeah, but that still ain't good though.

CM: See, because the day you go out there it may be ripe, and then if you give 48 hours, like yesterday and a couple days ago it rained like crazy.

SM: You do have some control over this one lake?

AM: Some of it, but we'd like to get 100%.

SM: What's the price of wild rice now?

CM: Oh, I was goin' to say about that. What's happened is when the price got so high, all the white people, they started comin' in, they started takin' vacation on our rice-pickin' time, and they over-crowded our lakes. They learned from us how to do it. That's a shame, we lose a lot of this stuff by showing people how we do it, and they take it away from us.

CM: They do it for profit, we did it for livelihood and everything else, but when we showed them then they took it to profit. They killed everything again.

SM: I remember when wild rice, green, was worth 25¢ or 30¢ a pound.

CM: Less than that--5¢, 10¢.

SM: Now what is it?

CM: $1.00 green. Different grades of ready made rice runs from $5.00 to $10.00 a pound.
SM: After it's cured and in stores for retail use. Well, of course, it's not fair to compare that with the old 10¢ price, I suppose, but still, it's about $1.00 green now, and it's $7.00 and $10.00 a pound in the retail stores?

AM: Five or ten years ago a guy could make $150 to $200 a day. That's what really drewed a lot of people.

CM: That's when the price went up to $2.00 a pound, green.

SM: I remember a man who came back one time and said he'd made $1,000 in about a week, and of course, that attracted other people.

AM: Yeah, and another thing we have, what we do, and I think we're the only tribe in Wisconsin that really does it, we make the birch bark canoes, the small ones, you know, to sell for souvenirs. We only have one family does it now. We sell those.

CM: We make canoes, baskets. We make baskets out of birch bark, baskets for the sap for making maple sugar, for the storing, they used it for everything. In fact when they put that road through down in Pickeral when they plowed up this [body of] I think they called him "One-eyed Jack" . . . no, "Curly Jack," they had wrapped him in that bark. I'll be damned, when they uncovered him he still had some hair, and his eyes, his pants was still intact, the birch bark preserved him.

SM: It's a wrapping for a body?

AM: Well, animals, they never did bother that birch bark. When you cover something the animals wouldn't dig through the bark. They only buried our people two feet in the ground, and they built little sheds over the top of that, put the birch bark on and threw dirt on top of that.
The animals would dig, and when he hits the birch bark.

SM: Then he would stop?

AM: Yeah, that's why they never dug up the shallow graves.

SM: The idea of the little house?

AM: Well, that's what we used to cover our wigwams with, birch bark, you know.

CM: I think he's talkin' about the little houses over the graves.

SM: Yes, you mentioned them. I was wondering if there's an explanation for them.

CM: There was. To give 'em a house after they leave us.

SM: When they leave this world they have a house for the next world?

CM: Yes, and all the stuff, things that they needed to go with them in the new world such as arrow, bow and arrow hunting equipment, shoes.

SM: That wouldn't be unlike the provisions in the pyramids.

CM: Right. It's about the same. And then you give 'em food, they give them tobacco, to help.

SM: Do you have training and education and effort made here among the people to preserve the old traditions or reteach them?

CM: That's just what I was talkin' about earlier. Under Title IV, Part E, we're trying to develop it, but the district is giving us a rough go of it, the school district. They've gone along with it for the
money reasons, they let us work with it and develop at our own pace a culture and history of the actual Indian people, past and present. It's real hard for me to work with the school in that kind of manner, because the people just won't talk to 'em, the elderly people just won't talk to a tape and develop somethin' for the school.

SM: Now the school here is a regular public school?

CM: Right.

SM: It's not run by the Indians for themselves?

CM: No. We've donated the land to 'em, we've donated lumber and we've donated just about everything.

SM: For the school over in the town?

CM: Well, the point I was gettin' to, we've donated everything, and we've given the land and it's tax-free, and so forth. We cut all the timber on our land to build a new gym, and helped develop and put this school together. They promised us that we could use it any time that we wanted to. Again, they took it all back!

RP: They reneged on it now.

SM: You can't use the school like you wanted to?

RP: We shoulda had it down in writing, it was a verbal agreement.

SM: This was with the state of Wisconsin?

CM: No, the school. It was one of those verbal things. We took their word, and didn't put it down, and then when we went back to try to
use the school a little bit, they said, "Do you have it in writing?"
Like I said, you need everything in writing.

SM: Well, who controls the school?

CM: The Crandon School Board.

SM: This Pine Point school over on the White Earth Reservation in Minnesota has been through a unique experience. They call it still an experimental school. Jerry Buckanaga is the director of it.

CM: Yeah, I know Jerry.

SM: Well, he could tell you quite a bit about the whole struggle they went through, and they're running their own school now.

CM: We got one here in Wisconsin, too—the Lac Court Oreilles. They're workin' on developin' their own school.

SM: Where is that?

CM: It's up in Sawyer County, about 200 miles north and west.

SM: Well, if you were interested in how they did it, you know, then you could check with Jerry.

CM: No, we're not interested in developing our own school. It's taken us too long to even get into a public school.

SM: What you just want to do is use the building facilities sometimes?

CM: Yeah, we're gettin' a little bit of cooperation now—we get in twice a week.
SM: What other major programs or problems do you have up here now that you're working on?

CM: Our major problem is money.

SM: Do you mean money for people to live on, or money to do public programs?

CM: No, money to develop public programs.

SM: Yes, and the source for that is the federal government.

CM: Right. And it's quite hard to work with them. They make a big splash of it in the newspapers, you know. Every once in a while you see that in all your newspapers throughout the country, that Indians get $10,000,000 for development. There's only one thing that the white man reads that, you know, "Jeez, we're giving $10,000,000 to the Indians." They forget there's a million Indians, and if you give us $10,000,000, that's a dollar apiece. But then there's 357 tribes in the United States, that's excluding Alaska and the Hawaiians. Three hundred fifty seven tribes and tryin' to divide that up into a development, you know, to do any kind of business, it'll take damned near $2,500,000 to develop anything.

SM: In each one?

CM: Yeah, in each reservation, or each program. So when you're talking $10,000,000 for development, you're talkin' about approximately three projects.

SM: What would be the main area of development up here?

CM: Tourism, probably, now the resorts.
SM: Like you were saying, the campgrounds, recreation, this sort of thing. You certainly have beautiful country for it, if you can get it going.

CM: I'm doin' a study on it now, and if it turns out right, we may be able to try to develop something.

SM: You have a lake near here, Mole Lake.

CM: We're surrounded by lakes here. Mole Lake on this side, Oak Lake on the other side, Sand Lake, then we got Rice Lake here, all around us, so we're in the middle.

SM: Lots of beautiful pines and good fishing?

CM: Very good fishing. There's only one problem, when they give us the land they give us nothin' but swamp.

SM: Instead of those lakes, you mean?

CM: Yeah. They took all the good land and give us the swamps. Now they pulled, I think, a little copper, some kind of mineral out, now they want to take that from us, but we're gonna hold up. No, they ain't gonna touch it, not while I'm livin' anyway.

SM: Well ... what else is going on that we should get in here now before we conclude this? We're getting down towards the end of it.

CM: The housing.

SM: The housing project here?

CM: Yeah. I was just tryin' to get into that earlier. When we started
we was, along with the rest of the Indians, getting in on the bandwagon, you know, housing. Took us nine years to get it, and maybe longer than that to even get the housing. Everybody else was gettin' housing, we were the last ones in the United States to get housing.

SM: The last ones?

CM: Right. And we were the second one to submit the proposal in for additional homes, and the way the bureaucratic system works in housing . . . HUD, get your papers and work in time, you know, we'll get you the home. We got ours in, they didn't give us any of the homes of the 200 that was allocated to the Indians in the state of Wisconsin.

SM: That isn't very many, is it?

CM: No, that ain't very many considering there's about 5,000 to 8,000 individual families.

SM: In the state?

CM: Yeah, but there's some 20,000 Indians live in this state of Wisconsin.

AM: There's more than that, there's 32,000.

SM: That's roughly about the number in Minnesota, isn't it?

CM: Yeah, Minnesota's about the same, and Michigan's about the same also. And the housing, getting back to it, when we did all this, and HUD, you know, they make up their own political world, to keep their jobs they'll give it any way they want. They ask for Indian input, we put Indian board together, we hired an Indian to work in HUD, they never even told our liason man up there what they were going to do with the homes. They distributed them, and they said,
"Oh, I forgot all about it, we distributed homes there." Actually, the ones that got 'em were the ones that sent their applications in the last day of the closing date. They got theirs, but they were bigger kind and so forth. They got all the homes, some even didn't have land. They give 60 homes to a tribe that doesn't even have land to put the homes on, so what HUD is doing, is building up, I think, one of these land grab things where they . . . such as this one . . . they bought this land, 300 acres.

SM: HUD bought this land?

CM: Right. If it doesn't work out right then everything goes back to HUD, and I think it's a sort of little empire that they've built.

SM: Who did HUD buy the land from? A private person around here?

CM: Yeah.

SM: And then built these homes on it for some of the people of the reservation?

CM: Right. There are only 14 units. The construction on 'em are pretty good, but the way they designed them! Like they put doors north, and when the wind blows it rips the doors right out. They got both exits in the same room. They talk about federal rules, supposed to be fairly standard buildings, supposed to be the same design, why, hell, they got two doors in the living room, front door and the exit, in case of a fire. The windows are about 10 x 24, and they're roll-up types, and if fire ever broke out in one of those in the living room, and you're in the bedroom sleepin', if you'd go through the window you'd get all cut up. You can't get through the window, because it only opens about that far. If you busted them, it's gonna be the same problem, you're gonna get burnt in there and
cut up and everything. Then down in the basement there's not even an exit, the windows are about that big, so if anything happens, you know, you might as well hang it up. Death traps.

SM: The design left a lot to be desired?

CM: And I talk to a lot of white people, and when I go to meetings they like to go there and bug the Indians, I suppose, "Hey man, we're givin' you this and we gave you that and we give you this," you know. "Ain't you ever goin' to be satisfied?" They ought to come here and see what they gave us. If I gave them that kind of land to live on and that kind of an area to live within, I betcha they'da died the first year there. We survived all these years.

SM: And, in fact, hasn't the Indian population increased?

CM: It's finally comin' back. Here it went down to 200,000 Indians, now it's up to around 1,000,000 of them. I think it went down to 200,000 in the late '40's.

SM: Was it that recently? I thought it was around the turn of the century?

CM: No. There was 20,000,000 Indians at the time Columbus landed.

SM: Twenty million, really?

CM: We just weren't immune to such things as small-pox, chicken-pox, measles, mumps, and all that. England, would that be west? No, that's be eastern world.

SM: From the coast? Yes, they're coming from the east.
CM: And they damn near wiped our tribe out with chicken-pox. My father lost most of his family.

SM: Right here, this tribe here?

CM: Wiped out a good half of the Indians at one crack.

SM: With chicken-pox, which is a rather mild disease?

CM: No, we ended up with chicken-pox, measles or somethin'.

SM: Well, small-pox was more deadly.

CM: Probably was small-pox. It's just that our bodies weren't ... we never had those things. We never had tuberculosis either, or bugs such as what you call head lice and body lice. We never had that before. We never had a lot of things around here that's brought over now, such as ... even animals, different animals. Rats, we never had a rat problem, not up here we didn't, because this was all virgin timber at one time, and, you know, rats can't live in it, and deer, they can't live around big timber. That's primarily why the Indians lived by the lakes such as your "pople" and your birch trees. That's where your deer live, in brush areas.

SM: In brushy areas where they have more to eat.

CM: And if they have all big timber such as the government is tryin' to do now to preserve nature, I don't even know if they realize what they're doing. They've driven most of the deer herds south.

SM: You have these programs that you're working on on the reservation here?
CM: Yeah, we have approximately 21 different programs here, but it's only employing 21 people—not even that—16 people on our reservation.

SM: You have 16 people working in the tribal government, as it were?

CM: We're giving them technical assistance to the families, that's all we're givin'. I wish we could give 'em more, but that's all we're allowed to give 'em. The federal laws, they give you a program, they don't give you nothin' to work with the program. They give you enough money to fund it, the administration, the people to work with it. Take health for instance, they'll fund you to a position, but they won't fund you to . . . for health needs as dental, glasses, and so forth. Very limited to work with. We have a health officer. . . .

SM: Do you have a HEW official out here?

CM: No. We're our own officials.

SM: Some of the tribes have HEW officials that do quite a bit in the health area with the people. Well, gentlemen, it's been interesting talking to you. I've learned things. Finding you here was interesting, because I wasn't even aware of the Sokaogon Chippewa, so I appreciate all that you did.

CM: Well, it was interesting talking to you, and we could talk for hours and days.

SM: I do thank you very much for your time, gentlemen.