

T-430

FOREST D. OLDS, MIAMI

INTERVIEWED BY: PEGGY DYCUS

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GENERAL SUBJECT: TRIBAL HISTORY OF MIAMI TRIBE

TOPICS DISCUSSED:

EARLY HISTORY OF MIAMI TRIBE
LITTLE TURTLE AS MILITARY LEADER
JOHN BAPTISTE RICHARDVILLE
MOVEMENT OF MIAMIS TO OKLAHOMA
NUMBER OF MIAMIS

BACKGROUND OF INFORMANT:

Forest Olds was born March 5, 1911, on the old Miami Reservation in Ottawa County. Mr. Olds is chief of the Miami Tribe at the present time. He has a very good memory of the history of the Miami Tribe and is a descendant of the original chief, Little Turtle. His Indian name is Metekyah.

EARLY HISTORY OF THE MIAMI TRIBE

My name is Forest D. Olds. I am chief of the Miami tribe. My Indian name is Metekyah, M-E-T-E-K-Y-A-H. I was born March the fifth, 1911, on the old Miami reservation in Ottawa County, Oklahoma. Going back some three hundred years now, because the year of 1968 was the three hundredth anniversary of the French discovering the Miami tribe up around the west side of Lake Michigan. And at that time, the French called them the "Twightwees" because they made a noise as they were hunting in the timber like the bird the Twightwee, and so they called them the Twightwees. Later on, in about five years later then, they discovered another branch of the same tribe on the southern tip of Lake Michigan, near where Detroit is today; and they called them the Umineck. And where the Miami came from, I'm at a loss because I've done a great deal of research on Miami, how the tribe was named Miami finally, but I haven't run across the answer to that one yet. The French fur traders, of course, became better acquainted with the Miamis and traded with them. And they settled. Certain of the French fur traders settled with the Miami. They picked out their-- fell in love with the beautiful Miami Indian maidens and stayed there, and lived their lives out and raised their families. So the Miami blood lines started thinning out nearly some three hundred years ago. The French were very good to the Miamis for, oh, probably, better than a hundred years. Then, the English started crowding in, and they were both vying for the fur trade with the Miamis. The colonies, of course, were expanding and moving westward constantly, and they were wanting the rich lands of the Miamis in Indiana and Ohio. And so trouble began for the Miamis with the white settlers. Actually, the Miamis had had trouble with the Iroquois.

The Iroquois were coming down around the Great Lakes. They were looking for territory too. If I recall correctly, history says that the Miamis and the Iroquois fought a thirty battle that nearly--or a thirty year war that nearly decimated the Miamis. History says that they started in as a really powerful--as one of the most powerful inland tribes in America when they were first discovered. Then, when George Washington was president, there was a federation of tribes: the Miamis, the Delawares, the Peorias, the Piankashaw, the Kaskaskia, the Weas, and the Shawnees. Little Turtle was chosen to lead these tribal--these tribes against the armies of the United States. They whipped General Harmar and General Sinclair. One of the battles was Fallen Timbers where a cyclone had run across the native--the large native forest in that country, and the timber was twisted and down. And they waited until they got the United States Army in this bunch of timber, and then they just flat run them off. I think history will bear me out that it is said that that caused one of the first Senate investigations there was, although it wasn't called a Senate investigation in that day. They dragged these generals up on the floor before the Senate of the United States, and the President, and wanted to know, "Why? How come you let those Indians just completely run you out of the country?" And, anyway, they send General Anthony Wayne up there and he started building forts, and, actually, he started preparing for a long hard campaign. And Little Turtle wouldn't fight him after he had been in the area for some while, and the Indian spies were watching to see what was being done and how it was carried out. Little Turtle quit. He says, "He's the man that never sleeps." And he wouldn't fight him. Of course, the tribes called Little Turtle an old woman which was, oh, about the worst insult the Indian

could hand down to a famous chief. But then he was vindicated because Anthony Wayne did whip the Indians, and Little Turtle was brought back. His prestige was--what did I want to say there? Anyway, he regained his prestige and looked upon as a great and powerful leader. Then, in the Treaty of 1795 at Greenville, Ohio, with Anthony Wayne after he'd whipped all the tribes, that was the first cession of land by the Miamis. That cost the Miamis several hundred thousand acres of land. The Miamis had a portage business with the fur traders on the Eel River to the North, the Wabash, the Salimonie and the Mississinewa. Actually, these rivers were about ten to fifteen miles apart, nearly all running straight west towards the Ohio on into the Mississippi. They would make a hundred dollars a day portage fees carrying canoes and bundles of fur across from one river to another trying to get to Detroit or Chicago. And Little Turtle, in the treaty, was holding out for half of it because to the Indians, that was just an enormous amount of money, a hundred dollars a day. Little Turtle was holding out for half of that. He told Anthony Wayne, he said, "We'll give you fifty dollars, and we'll take fifty dollars, and we'll both be rich." (laughter) But Anthony Wayne was real contrary, and he held out and gained most of the things he was asking for: land, all of the portage business. He just flat set the Miamis out along with some of the other tribes. Then, to leave this area--

LITTLE TURTLE AS MILITARY LEADER

Oh, Little Turtle died then in 1814, and at that time was said to be one of the most looked up to, one of the smartest military men in the world. I believe that history says. Now, you wonder about this because there has been some other very wise Indians from the standpoint of leading his warriors in battle, but they were the Plains Indians and they were a hundred years later, so that Little Turtle has passed on into oblivion almost by

the time that the ones we know so much about, oh, Sitting Bull, Geronimo, oh, and all of the Plains great tribal war chiefs. Little Turtle, of course, is lost way back a hundred years earlier. Like I say, he died in 1814.

JOHN BAPTISTE RICHARDVILLE

Then John Baptiste Richardville, who was a son of Little Turtle's sister, Tecumwah, who I am descended from, became the chief of the Miamis about 1814 to 1846 when he died. He was more or less a civil chief. He made-- he signed all the treaties from 1814 on through till the 1840 treaty which brought my portion of the tribe to Kansas. But Richardville was a pretty wise chief. He gained many things in treaties, later treaties between the United States and the Miami tribe, generally watching out for Richardville, of course. (Laughter)

MOVEMENT OF MIAMIS TO OKLAHOMA

The 1840 treaty that brought my portion of the tribe to Kansas gave that portion of the tribe five years to prepare to leave Indiana, and they were supposed to be in Kansas by 1845. However, they were no nearer ready at the expiration date than they were five years earlier when the treaty was signed. So in October of 1846, the United States Army loaded the Miamis, some 800, on canal boats at Peru, Indiana. It is said that the Miamis would break and run. They had been to visit the graves of their loved ones, and they were carrying a clod of dirt or small stone that they had picked off the graves. And you must remember, a lot of these people were half-bloods. But they loaded them like cattle on canal boats and brought them down the Wabash to the Ohio, on down to the Mississippi and back up to Missouri and Kansas City. They arrived--they were just exactly a month on the rivers coming from Peru to Kansas City. Then, they marched them

overland about 60 miles south and a little bit west of Kansas City on Sugar Creek on the Marais de Cygnes River in Kansas in what was later known as Miami County, Kansas, and Linn County, Kansas. The Miamis had quite an acreage in those two counties. The Miamis lived there for some twenty-four years, if I can recall correctly. The white man then discovered the rich lands of the Miamis in Kansas and just prior to the Civil War, the white men started moving in on the reservation, the Great Reserve, building permanent installations, homes, houses, barns, setting out orchards, and the Miami business committee was in constant communication with the Commissioner's office trying to work out some way to get the white settlers off of the Great Reserve. They were cutting the timber, taking the best farm land and in, I believe, '54, the United States sent the Army down to remove these settlers in the dead of the winter. It was a severe winter, and I have a document out home where the old chief says, "We are human. It is not our wish or our desire to put these people out of their homes in the dead of winter without shelter or any place to go to, and they asked that the Army hold off until spring when it had warmed up. And they never did get the Army back to take the settlers out. I guess probably the Indian was too kind hearted. Eventually, then, they did make a deal to send the Miamis to Indian Territory, what is not Oklahoma. There were--the government came up with a deal whereby the Miamis could take a cash settlement and become citizen Miamis. They relinquished all rights and all claims to any future claims that the Miamis might or judgment that the Miamis might win. And there was 37, I believe, Miamis. Thirty-two Miamis took a cash settlement and became citizens Miamis. Sixty-seven Miamis came from Kansas to Indian Territory. They settled,

the Quapaws, the Peorias, and the tribes that came here prior to the Miamis coming were all friendly tribes and let the Miamis sort of move in anywhere they so wished for a little while until they could get straightened out and a tract of land be arranged for. And that was finally done. They bought the west end of the Peoria reservation, and 17,083 acres, and it cost, I believe, \$15,600. By the way, the Miamis were--had money. It was a matter only of changing from the Miami fund over to the Peoria fund, and they could not get this done. I've read many letters where the Miamis were writing to get the money changed over to the Peorias so their land would be paid for. By the way, ten years later, this was not done and the Miamis were being charged ten per cent interest. When the money was finally changed over, the Miamis had had all the time and wanting to pay for the land. It cost them \$23,000 and a few hundred dollars. (laughter)

NUMBER OF MIAMIS

And I've read a letter also where the agent here in what is presently Ottawa County. Indian agent wrote to the commissioner and said, "Well, three or four more generations and we can write the Miamis off. They will be an extinct tribe." This is definitely not so because today 1969, there are nearly some 900 western Miamis or Miami Tribe of Oklahoma on the roll. and when they allotted, there were 67 original allotments, and when they run out of land, there was finally 72 allotments. And they had a little land, some fractions here and there and one thing and another. And they were all lumped together and sold to a man that lived in Fort Scott, Kansas, and then he parceled it out to the settlers within the area. And then the long hard battle of just having a chief--mostly and making a living and educating their children and up until just prior to World War I, the Miamis

were losing their land pretty fast anyway because as the young allottees became young men and began to think about looking for a life partner, he needed transportation; and many forty acres of land of the Miami young folk--young men went for a \$29 buggy. And here at Miami, Oklahoma, the county seat of Ottawa County, the town was named after the Miami tribe. So in 1916, restrictions were removed from all Miamis. There are no restricted land in the Miami today. Then later on, some of the folks became interested in claims that my great-grandfather David Jebo, former chief of the Miamis, had worked on for about the last fifteen years of his life. Because many of those treaties going back to Indiana land treaties, it was agreed the Indians made the government agree that they would sell the land to the white settlers for the cost from the Indian plus the actual handling of the land, but the government didn't see fit to do that. They were buying this land for way less than \$1.00 an acre and in many cases it sold through the land agent for twelve and fifteen dollars an acre which was a breach of promise, agreement with the Indians. The government started making money off of it right from the very beginning. So, there was some talk, of course, with the commissioner and one thing and another, and the government agreed at that time that they owed the Miami more money. We are getting it or hopeful of getting it presently. Actually, the cession of land that was made in 1795 at Greenville, Ohio, we were awarded judgment on some five years ago. It amounted to \$4,667,667 and some cents, whole bunch of 6's and 7's anyway. (laughter) Actually, the group of Miami back in Indiana that received special consideration in 1840 treaty will share in this payment today. They and their ancestors, of course--not ancestors, but descendants, is that right? So presently, ~~it looks like a payroll for this money that there will be 4,292 people~~

'share in it with 816 Western Miami or Miami tribe of Oklahoma sharing. So, a large portion of the people are still the Indiana Miami that received special consideration so many years ago. We have just been awarded three claims. Two, the twelfth of December, 1968, and one, oh, the fore part of January, 1969. One is 1,373,000. One that's sixty-six thousand and a few dollars, and one that's \$10,000. The \$10,000 is the tail end of Docket 251 and is known as Docket 251A, being a tag end; and it belongs to the Western Miamis by theirselves. It will be distributed among the Western Miamis only. The other two will be shared between the Indiana Miamis and the Oklahoma Miamis.

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