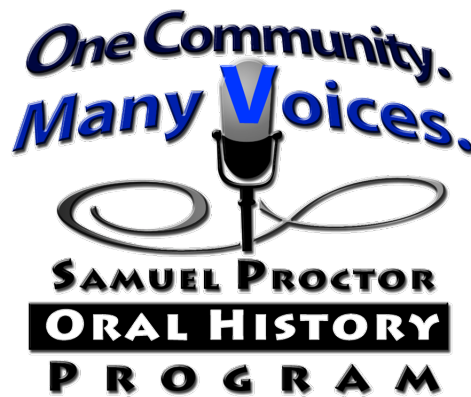


Lee Bacon

**Southeastern Indian Oral History Project
MISS CHOC-061**

Interview by:

Melvin and Melford



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MISS CHOC 061 Lee R. Bacon
Southeastern Indian Oral History Project (SIOHP)
Interviewed by Melvin and Melford
42 minutes | 17 pages

Abstract: Lee Bacon describes his time as a Boy Scout troop leader. He started as a troop leader in Chilocco, Oklahoma, before moving to Mississippi and leading Troop 61. He discusses the basics of the Boy Scout organization structure, how to advance to Eagle Scout, and the trip to the National Jamboree his troop went on. He explains how the Tribe has been supportive of all the troops on the reservation, discusses what their weekly meetings looks like, and describes attending the National Indian Seminar on Scouting in Pine Ridge, South Dakota.

Note: Interviewers are distinguished on the transcript as MV (Melvin) and MF (Melford).

Keywords: [Mississippi Band of Choctaw Indians; Mississippi--Choctaw; Education; Meetings]

SAMUEL PROCTOR
ORAL HISTORY

P R O G R A M
University of Florida

MISS CHOC 061

Interviewee: Lee R. Bacon

Interviewer: Melvin and Melford

Date of Interview: Unknown

B: Lee Bacon, of the Boy Scout Troop 61 [inaudible 0:09]

MV: Where were you born?

B: I was born in Antlers, Oklahoma, that's down in the southeastern part of Oklahoma.

MV: Where did you start Scouting?

B: I started Scouting at the Chilocco Indian School back in about [19]45, from about 1945.

MV: Can you tell us how it was organized?

B: Well, it was a little different than it was today. Most of the responsibility was with the institution that sponsored the Scouts. And there wasn't any district offices and this kind of thing. Most of it was done at the state office.

MV: How many were in the troop?

B: Oh, I'd say we had probably, maybe forty boys in the troop. And all at least were Indian boys from all over the country. The Chilocco helps them from eighty-some Tribes there, **they were schooled there**. They really were on a national Indian Boy Scout troop.

MV: Was there an age limit?

B: They always have had offered an age limit to Scouting. For Scouts, it runs about ten and a half or fifth grade or eighteen. And of course, there's explore Scouting once you get beyond eighteen, where you can always go to explores. And explores are a unit of Scouting that involves a specialty. Like, for example, the

one we have on the Choctaw reservation is the law and order post. So, they specialize in the study of law and order.

MV: What was the troop number?

B: Well, our troop number was forty-nine, at Chilocco. The reason we chose that number is that the—way back in the time the pioneers were going to California for the Gold Rush—well, we felt like number forty-nine was a pretty good number, so our troop was forty-nine.

MV: You going to keep on Scouting?

B: Well, I feel like it's an important thing to be involved in Scouting, and it does give you an opportunity to help young boys and young men out. And I think it's one of the real worthwhile things that one can get out of life in terms of helping boys to become men and to be able to use some of the skills they have in Scouting, so it's really a worthwhile thing. I'll probably stay on for a while longer. I've had about six years in Scouting, so it's been worthwhile.

MV: Has the style of dressing in Scouting changed?

B: No, it hasn't, it's always been the khaki type clothes and—basically Scouting has changed some, but not the dress. This is pretty much as it was back in the [19]40s, so, now that's something that really hasn't changed too often much. Now Scouting itself has made a drastic change in that we used to be that boys would have to learn signaling, Morse code, and they'd have to learn tracking and all of this kind of thing. And for the past five years, these were some of the things they took out of Scouting, but they're coming more back to that again, because they found that boys like to learn to track, like going out and tracking down an animal,

or boys tracking each other. Certain kinds of like three rocks leaned together, well, that meant that they went a certain way, or if you seen a stick broken over, well, that meant that the person that you were tracking had gone a certain direction. So, they got away from that for a while, but they are going back to it, and one of the requirements getting back into the new Scouting program—well, I guess it's really the old Scouting program—is signaling, where that you take two flags and have to send a message with these two flags. And so, the requirement now will be that a boy will need to send so many words per minute through the Morse code.

MV: Did the Morse code have to be used **in the directions**?

B: Well, Morse code would almost help in the Navy certainly, because it would take—and you'd already know it—and there are signalmen, signalmen in the Navy, and they use the Morse code. So, it would be applicable to some jobs that you—forestry people use Morse codes. And of course, there's the international Morse code where that different countries use in Morse code, so it is a very practical thing.

MV: What ranking are you in the Scouts?

B: Melvin, I got to life, and I've always been sorry that I didn't finish up, because of the fact that I think being an Eagle Scout is really important to an individual. You take a boy that's been through the eagle ranks, and he applies for a job and another one applies, and they have equal qualifications, well then, an employer will nine times out of ten take the Eagle Scout over the other one that did not

have an Eagle Scout rank. But that's one thing I've always regretted is that I didn't finish up.

MV: Were you a Scoutmaster, or a Cub Scoutmaster?

B: Yes, Melvin, I was both a Scoutmaster and a explore advisor when I worked at Chilocco. Then when I moved to Ardmore, Oklahoma, well, then I became the Cubmaster for the First Christian Church in Ardmore, which had a pack of about eighty boys, which would mean about ten dens in this pack. So, it was a fantastic experience because the parent really got involved in the Cub Scout program at Ardmore. And this is basically what Cub Scouting is all about, is the parent and the boy being involved. Now it's not so much the case when you get to be a Boy Scout. You can do a lot of things on your own, even though it still involves, you know, parents, but at the same time it's a more than independent program. Whereas Cub Scouting, you can't even get a promotion in Cub Scouting unless your parents have signed off on it. So, Cub Scouting is a parent-Scout activity.

MV: What year did you come to Mississippi?

B: I came to Mississippi in 1968, and I was around about three or four months before I got involved in Scouting, and then one day Cecil Farmer asked me if I'd be interested in being in the Scout troop and helping them out. And the odd thing about it is after I was there about a month, well, Cecil said, "Would you take over the troop?" And so, I took over the troop and I've had Troop 61 ever since.

MV: How many boys were in—**did you start with in 1968?**

B: I think we had about fourteen boys. And of course, if you really work at it, it's a program that will attract young boys from ten-and-a-half to—especially, up to

about fifteen. So, we've had as high as, you know, twenty-four to twenty-five boys in a troop depending on the time. In fact, when we went to the 1973 National Jamboree, we had twenty-four boys in our troop at that time and we took them. In fact, we earned the money to take the twenty-four boys to the jamboree. And it's real exciting to do this, because you have to know that you've got that much money, and you have to be sure that each boy has physicals and ready to go, and then we were gone for about sixteen days to the—

[Break in recording]

B: And of course, at the National Jamboree you'd see a city spring up overnight, because at the Farragut State Park the year that Troop 61 went, we got there, and we just set up a city overnight of about fifty thousand boys. And of course, you know there was maybe two hundred telephones near our camp and all kinds of activities. It really was exciting, in that we met boys from all over the country and seven foreign countries. The Choctaw boys had the most fun with the Chinese Scouts that was from Taiwan. And we got acquainted with them, and they shared in some of their Chinese food. We just really had a good time with the Chinese Scouts. And I think this is an exciting thing about boys going out and meeting other boys from different parts of the country, then they can share each other's experiences, and sometimes you get experiences that really are enjoyable, and we really did enjoy the Chinese Scouts.

MF: Is your Scout troop **going to go to** another jamboree?

B: Melford, I'm not really sure, because the year-and-a-half we worked to raise the money, I hardly saw my family, because we were doing something almost every

night. And the boys didn't get to see their families to much either, because we were either selling someplace or just having wrestling or we was having a movie or anything that we could get to do, washing cars or whatever, anybody wanted us to do that would pay us for it and we'd do it. So almost every night. Melvin was very much involved in this, and he knows that it takes a lot of work, and we don't mind work. We worked for about a year-and-a-half before we got enough money to really go. And it takes a lot of preparation in terms of equipment and every Scout needs at least two uniforms, and we even helped buy some of those. It's really an exciting thing to do, but really a lot of hard work. So, I'm not sure whether we'll do that or not, but we have had enough money at times to send individual Scouts to jamboree. In 1977, Melvin went to the National Jamboree at Moran State Park in Pennsylvania. But it is a very difficult task to raise money in a rural area like this. Because I recall that we had wrestling and had some pretty good wrestling names on our card, but we maybe had less than sixty-five people to show up. So, you never really know whether you're going to make any money out of it or not. And I guess the most exciting time in raising money, we had Dorothy Moore, a singer that is now very popular throughout the country, and we had her to give a concert, and she gave up her time and she gave a concert without charge to the troop, and we thought that was really an exciting time. And I guess we made the most money when we had Dorothy Moore. So, it really does involve a lot of work. So as far as working, we don't mind that, but you have to plan a year-and-a-half, two years in advance that you're going to do this. And in

1981 will be the next National Jamboree. So, who knows, we might do something about it—

MV: [inaudible 15:06]

B: The National Jamboree is sponsored by the Boy Scouts of America, and ordinarily would have only Scouts from this country there, but they do invite Scouts from other countries to be there, but the World Jamboree involves Scouts from all the countries of the world. And of course, we were invited and had plans of several of us going to the World Jamboree in Iran until, you know, the country fell apart, and they cancelled the World Jamboree. So, we didn't get to go and were very disappointed that we didn't. I guess the situation in Iran at that time warranted cancelling the World Jamboree.

MV: How many boys were going to the World Jamboree?

B: There was three, three boys and myself from Choctaw. That's how many we'd planned, and we were going to connect up with the southeast region, and this then would make a council group. So, we had this all worked out and it just didn't work out because of the situation in Iran, and they did finally cancel the World Jamboree.

MV: How old does a boy have to be to be Scout?

B: Ten-and-a-half, or fifth grade, up to eighteen. Now if you're going out for an Eagle Scout you need to have all your requirements and everything finished before you're eighteen. If you can have it all finished and checked out and everything, and the day you're eighteen, you can still receive it, but after that, well, they

probably would send everything back to you. But eighteen—they're pretty fussy about that, of making eighteen the age of cutting off of getting the eagle award.

MV: Have you gone on any camping trips lately?

B: Yes, we have gone on a number of camping trips just on our own, and we have won the national camping award several times. This means that you camp two weeks—fourteen days and nights—out of the year, and we've done this a number of times, it really is good. I think the boys like camping about as much as anything in Scouting. And at camping, they can earn more badges, merit badges, than they can at any other time and especially at summer camp. This is why we always try to encourage boys to go to summer camp, because it's a time they can earn merit badges that they can't earn back home. Especially, you know, the ones like the aquatic merit badges and water merit badges, swimming and boating, and canoeing, and swimming a mile and these kinds of things. It's pretty hard to earn those back in your home community, so if a boy goes to camp, then he has an opportunity to earn all those kinds of merit badges.

MV: Where do they hold these kinds of camps?

B: At Binachi. Binachi is a camp owned by the Choctaw area Scouting council, and it's about thirteen miles east of Meridian, truly a beautiful setting. And this camp was donated by Wilkshire Dairies. And it has about five hundred acres in it, and it is a very exciting time. And we've always gone, we've always tried to hike all the trails. They have five trails and they're ranging from five miles to twenty, isn't it? About twenty miles. So, we've tried to really hike all the trails as a troop. You get a trail hiking award for doing this. We've done that a couple of times, and it's

really good to hike the trails because you see so many different things of nature. In hiking the trails at Camp Binachi, we've seen rattlesnakes and deer and 'coons, squirrels, and rabbits, all of those kinds of things, and all kinds of birds. It is a real fine camp, and we would certainly encourage every Scout to have an opportunity to go. And one last thing about the Choctaw Tribe, they really probably spent more on Scouting than they have any of the other youth programs. Because many times they have sent us to camp and, well, the Bureau of Indian Affairs too has been very helpful in finding money to send boys to camp. And we really appreciate the support of the community and the council in finding funds for boys that can't provide funds for themselves to go to camp.

MV: Where is the location of Camp Binachi?

B: The location is about—

[Break in recording]

MV: How many Eagle Scouts do you have in your troop?

B: Melvin, since I've been here, we've had one Eagle Scout, and of course, that was the second one that we'd had on the reservation, so I thought, I felt pretty proud that we did. We have got one Eagle Scout out of our troop. Since we've had the troop, we've always got, you know, like a lot of first class and a lot of second class, but it's not an easy task to get a boy to be an eagle. It's really something that the boy wants to do, and it takes a lot of extra work. Of course, an Eagle Scout has to do a community project, and this takes time, and he has to write it up and tell exactly what he done and how he helped people and this kind of stuff. Once you get to an Eagle Scout you know that you've done a lot of different

things. You've earned something like twenty-four merit badges, and you've had a community project and you've probably been senior patrol leader and all the officers that your troop has. An Eagle Scout is well rounded once he has reached the rank of eagle.

MV: How do the Scouts help the communities?

B: What's that?

MV: How does an Eagle Scout help the communities?

B: Well, the Scouts—first of all, has to be a good citizen before he can be a Scout. And the Scout oath really says that he has to be a very good citizen in order to be in Scouting. So that's one way and then certainly that's an important way, is being a good citizen of the community. And of course, our troop has had what they call cleanup day, and gone out and cleaned up the roadsides and varied other places on the reservation. A Scout does help his community in many different ways and certainly, as we pointed out, being a good citizen is helping the community.

MV: What is the Scout law?

B: The Scout laws? A Scout is trustworthy, loyal, helpful, friendly, courteous, kind, obedient, thrifty, clean and reverent. That's the Scout laws, and if a Scout lives up to each one of those laws then you know that he's going to be a good citizen.

B: And so, you just couldn't help from being a good citizen if you lived up to the Scout law.

MV: Who sponsors the troops in Choctaw?

B: On the Choctaw reservation—the Tribe, several years back, maybe three or four years back, decided that they'd like to sponsor all the troops on the reservation. So, the Tribe is the current sponsor of every troop on the reservation. And I want to commend the Tribe for doing a good job. They've never turned us down when we had asked for, you know, money or for them to do something for us, they've always been very good. I think they are doing a good job. As we make them aware of Scouts and Scouters then they even want to do a better job, because many times you take people out of the community, doesn't really know too much about Scouting, and it is the responsibility then of Scouts and Scouters to have an awareness program that they tell people about Scouting.

MV: [inaudible 25:41]

B: Yes, the Bogue Homa may be the only one that doesn't have one. I'm not sure about that, but each of the six communities in this vicinity down in Newton County and Kemper County, and the troops here in Neshoba County, or the communities here in Neshoba County—each of them have some kind of Scouting activity. Like this community has an explore post and they have Scouts, and they have cubbing. And some communities even have Girl Scouts. So, I think we do have a sufficient Scouting in our communities, but we just need to make people more aware of **what we do in Scouting**.

MV: What is the highest Scout progress award?

B: Highest what?

MV: Progress award, Scout progress award.

MF: What is the highest Scout, Scout progress award?

B: Progress award?

MF: Mmhm.

B: The highest progress award would really be the Eagle Scout, that'd be the highest Scouting award. And of course, there's all kinds of awards for Scout leaders. And this is something that's rewarding for a Scout leader. Melvin, you're a young Scout leader yourself, and as you go up the ladder in helping boys and helping in Scouting, well, then there'll be all kinds of awards for you as a leader. And one of the things that I enjoy doing is giving the Scout training award. It's called the Scouter's Key, and as you complete various stages of Scout training, well, then when you complete all the stages you get a Scouter's Key. And then, of course, the highest award for a Scouter in the council level is the Silver Beaver award, and it's a very high honor to receive the Silver Beaver award. And then of course an award that is very covenant and very desirable is the Silver Buffalo award, and that's awarded at the national level, and very few men have ever received this award because it is a national award. We have two to three men in our council receiving the Silver Beaver award every year. But it's a highly coveted award for the council.

MV: Do you have a meeting every Monday and Tuesday?

B: We try to hold our meetings every Monday at 6:30, and if we have it at 6:30, we try to have the parents to be aware that we'll be through by 8:00 and that we want the parents then to pick the boys up at 8:00. So, we very seldom ever run over the 8:00 period, from 6:30 to 8:00.

MF: What do you do at these meetings?

B: Well, we do varied kinds of things, Melford. For example, last Monday night we organized our troop and got new officers, and then we had games. A lot of times you'll work on the Scouting skills such as knot tying, the Scout laws, and the Scout oath, and just varied kinds of activities. We try to make it where we don't do the same thing all the time. And this is important to young boys who that are in Scouting. If they [inaudible 30:14] we never really do the same thing all the time. The way we do this is that all the officers, which is called the leadership council, works out the program for each week. And it may be that we'll have a knot tying contest. Another time we may have, you know, a first aid contest. So, it really does vary each time, it's not the same every week. And then sometimes we have a merit badge that all of us work on together such as the citizenship merit badge. So maybe you'll all work that merit badge together, and that's just part of the meeting. Maybe we'll have a half hour just working on that particular merit badge. Now, there is a requirement for merit badges. There's twelve merit badges that's required, the first aid, the swimming, and the emergency preparedness, and then the others are kind of like in school. You select certain courses that you want to take, or the state requires that you take certain other courses. There are a certain number of merit badges that you have that is required and must be—

[Break in recording]

MV: And do you have any Scout council meetings?

B: Yes, Melvin, we do have a council meeting once a month called the Council Roundtable. And this is also where you go to get additional training, and they'll

help you out for activities and suggestions for meetings for a month, and then the next month you go back and there's another roundtable. And of course, there are a number of us on the district council meeting, so we meet once a month at the district level. So, there are meetings that you need to attend in order to have a good Scouting program.

MF: Do you think the things you learn in Scouting will help you out in [inaudible 32:54]

B: Yes, I do, Melford. I think that the things that you learn in Scouting such as citizenship and community—there is a merit badge on the community, merit badges on kind of a national level such as the world citizenship and the U.S. citizenship and the local community citizenship. I think it does help you out in that you know something about the world besides just the immediate community in which you live. So, I think it's good in that way, that it's kind an international program where that you learn more than just things that are local. And local things that you learn are important too, but you have a more of an international outlook in Scouting than you do if you are not in Scouting.

MV: What kind of an award here have you got?

B: Melvin, I've received several awards as an adult Scouter. I've received the Scouter's Key, and I've received the Silver Beaver award, and I've received the National Indian Scouting award called the Francis X. Guardipee award, and this is an award that is given to Indian people that has had fifteen or more years' experience work in an Indian community with Indian Scouts. So, it's a very nice award. It's something that I'm very proud to have.

MV: Where did you get this Francis Guardipee award?

B: I got the Francis X. Guardipee when they held the national Indian seminar on Scouting at Pearl River here in 1977. And this is an organization made up of Indian people and Indian Scouters across the country and Indian Scouts, and they meet once a year, and basically you come together to work out, you know, different kinds of problems that Indian communities are having with Scouts. And then, of course, the exciting thing is that you meet Scouts from all over the country and you get to know them, and it's kind of a lifetime friendship, just getting to know the Scouts from other parts of the country. And these would be Indian Scouts from almost every reservation in the country. And this past year we went to the National Indian Seminar on Scouting at Pine Ridge, South Dakota. And of course, the 1980 one is going to be held at [inaudible 36:12] Oklahoma and I'm gonna be fortunate enough to be the chairman of this seminar and I'll be chairing the 1980 seminar at [inaudible 36:27]

MV: How many boys went to South Dakota?

B: Well, we had both boys and girls go, Melvin. Girl Scouts involved in the National Indian Seminar also, and from here we had fourteen Scouts and six adults, and of course, we had Girl Scouts and Boy Scouts and explorers go along with us. So, our reservation was well represented at the National Indian Seminar on Scouting, and we are fortunate that we have a Tribe that does and is concerned about the young people having experiences that a lot of young people don't get that live on an Indian reservation.

MF: [inaudible 37:25] are there any other Scouts in other countries?

B: Yeah, almost every country in the world, Melford, has Scouting. They even had Philippino Scouts at this one jamboree, and they have Russian Scouts. So virtually every country of the world has Scouts. Now it may be called, you know, something besides Scouts, but it'll have the same kind of training and everything as Scouting has. Like the Canadian Scouts are called Trailblazers, but they're still Scouts. We know them as Canadian Scouts, but their national title is Trailblazers. And of course, the Girl Scouts have an international flavor too. But Scouting got started back in 1908 by Lord Clinton Powell. And what happened was that—

[Break in recording]

MV: Who founded Scouts, Boy Scouts of America?

B: Lord Clinton Powell of England. The reason he founded Scouting more than seventy-five years ago is that he saw one night an elderly—it was a very bad time in England, raining and cold winter—saw this young man helping an elderly person across the street, and so this started the Scout movement and it's more than seventy-five years old.

MV: I've heard somewhere that [inaudible 39:28]

B: That is the Scout mantra: "Do a good deed daily." So if all of us, whether we were a Scout or not, did a good deed daily then the world would be better.

MV: Would you encourage the boys and girls into being Boy Scouts and Girl Scouts?

B: Yes, I would, Melvin. I think that you know the movement is a great youth organization. It's one of the largest youth movements in the world, and it does have a national flavor and an international flavor, so there's kids all over the

world that belongs to Scouting units, and whether they're, you know, Chinese or Black or White or whatever color they are, it kind of falls away when you're a Scout because you really don't—as a Scout, brother in Scouting, you don't really see that color whether a person's an Indian or Chinese or Japanese or whatever he is. And I think it really makes it worthwhile because this summer we had a beautiful time with the Canadian Scouts. They were at the National Indian Seminar on Scouting, and they just showed us a lot of their customs, and the way they lived and this kind of thing that we couldn't have got anywhere else. It was an exciting time and we met somebody from a country that even we know very little about in terms, even though they're neighbors up north, well we sometimes know very little about Canada.

MV: [inaudible 41:28]

B: Well, I think that Scouting is here to stay, and I think that it'll be around a long time. As long as there's a boy willing to be a Scout and a man willing to have boys under him, I think there will be Scouting for a long time to come. And it is a good organization to be in.

MV: Thank you, Mr. Bacon.

B: Thank you.

[End of interview]

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