

Memo

Fr: Jerry Reynolds

To: Buckland Preservation Society

re: Chief Jim Eagle interviews

Date: November 30, 2009

On July 8, 2009, I spoke by telephone with Chief Jim Eagle, hereditary chief of the Cherokee (he is also Ojibwe). I was in Fredericksburg, Virginia; Chief Eagle was on Sandy Bay Reserve, near Amaranth, Manitoba Province, Canada.

In our conversation, Chief Eagle provided details of his visit to Buckland in 1955 with Chief Chupche, an uncle of his; friends Simon Broken Shoulder and Solomon Broken Shoulder; and another uncle, Ralph Campbell. Chief Eagle, now eighty-four, was the youngest of the group, and all but he are deceased now.

They met a man named "Cy" Butler or Simon. He looked Native American himself and he showed them around. He pointed out two mounds, one with a house on it. They also saw what may have been ritual pits. "We knew they were ceremonial grounds of some kind." Of the pits: "They could have been underground ceremonial areas." There were two different types of pits. The stone rims of some pits were of Native American workmanship, but the pits had partially filled in with underbrush and leaves.

They visited a family of Indians, named possibly Butler or Brewster. "There were Indian families around there. They said they knew these were ceremonial grounds but they didn't know what for. ... Some of the older people told us about the ceremonial grounds. So they sent around to see Cy Butler" -- who appeared to Chief Eagle to be in his sixties or seventies then.

They also encountered objects that were very old and unquestionably of Native American workmanship.

They would have stayed longer but they were running out of money and had to get back to Ohio. They would have taken pictures, but they had a camera and no film. Chief Eagle said he made sketches of the Buckland site in a notebook, and still had them until he mailed them to one David Michael Wolfe, but what became of them after the mailing is uncertain. Chief Eagle did not make copies.

Of the 1955 trip to Virginia: "The reason we went there is ... we had talked to the major councils, the Mataponi, the Catawba, the Pamunkey, in Virginia." They wanted to prove Cherokee presence in the past, at Buckland and elsewhere, whereas the federal government was trying to limit them. A vast trade system existed in the Southeast, all the way up to Maine. The Mobilian peoples originally controlled it.

"It wasn't only a trade center. ... It was one of many centers where tribes met that belonged to the Confederation." From fear of settlers, other tribes tended to attach themselves to the Cherokee or other large tribes, such as the Chickasaw, Choctaw and Creek.

Tribes had trade specialties in those days, and the Cherokee were known for "Indian copper" hair pipes that were worn hanging from the side of the head. "That's why Buckland County was very important to us. It was a trade center, not the trade center but a trade center, and it was a ceremonial center for many tribes where they could gather without fear because we [Cherokee] controlled it, not totally but we did."

Chief Eagle confirmed that he had been in Virginia, at Buckland, in 1955, at the behest of the Chickamauga Grand Council Confederation, which he said has functioned traditionally since its founding in 1776 by Dragging Canoe and Raven. He said the Confederation still has the original pipe commissioned for the occasion by Dragging Canoe.

Based on our conversation of July 8, I set up a telephone conference call between Chief Eagle, David Blake and myself on July 24, 2009. Chief Eagle spoke from the Sandy Bay Reserve in Canada, David Blake from Buckland in Virginia, and I from Fredericksburg. Below is a substantial transcription, by Jerry Reynolds, of the July 24 conference call between Chief Jim Eagle, David Blake and Jerry Reynolds:

Jerry Reynolds: ... What we'd like to do to bring a little structure here, Chief Eagle -- you remember the talk you and I had. ... There was a lot of information there. I know you said you weren't sure you remembered things enough, but by the time we were through it was clear that you remembered quite a lot. And what I would like to do is ask you -- let's try and get a beginning, a middle, and an end to your visit to Buckland in 1955, and then David will be able to come in and kind of place where you were at that time. ... Okay June 10th then, 1955, and what brought you -- I know that you told me that the reason for your visit was that there were some Native American families in the area that you wanted to visit. But was there a reason beyond that that you were there in the first place?

Chief Jim Eagle: Well, yes, it wasn't just that they were there. There's been a dispute for oh, well, at least a hundred years, maybe dating back further, on whether the Cherokee had people there, a group of people there. And they had always claimed there was another tribe that was actually non-existent anymore. They had been, well I wouldn't say extinct but absorbed by other Native groups. And we were there because ... they were there and if they were Cherokee, then how long they had been there, and then there was a dispute over ... the fact that there were earthworks there, and some were saying they were prehistoric, some were saying they were Cherokee *katua* grounds ... because of the step mound. That is definitely a *katua* grounds. But then that's not to say that the other cultures didn't have it.

Jerry Reynolds: But that was your impression at the time, right, in 1955? That these were definitely *katua* grounds?

Chief Jim Eagle: Yes. ...

Jerry Reynolds: Okay. Well that's great. And you mentioned that you went there, and there was a Butler. And was there a Brewster as well?

Chief Jim Eagle: Yes. I don't recall the Brewsters very well, but yes there was a Brewster there and also, I recalled after our conversation [of July 8], Websters. Now Websters were Native, they were definitely -- they were Native but they were mixed.

Jerry Reynolds: ... Okay. Well that's great. And because what you told me, and I found this very interesting, is that you visited at a house and the older people knew about the *katua* grounds, ceremonial grounds, whatever you would call them, but they weren't sure what they were for, and at that point I believe you began to get in touch with a Cy Butler, or something like this, and I wonder at this point if David could step in and just help kind of fix where you were on the geography of Buckland, and perhaps you could see if you could possibly guide David through your trip, so that he has a very good understanding of the land there at Buckland.

Chief Jim Eagle: Well, yeah, I could. I have a system that might help even more so. Not remembering which township, because I wasn't familiar with that part of the state. ... I could try to tell you distance, not exactly by direction but distance, where the three regular round mounds were. They're probably not there anymore. There had been more, but they had been hauled down, you know, worked down. And also the pits, the round depressions. ... they were perfect. They were exactly the same distance across, by eyeballing it. We didn't take our, we didn't have a tape or anything like that to measure with, but give or take just from eyeball.

David Blake: ... The last time we spoke on the telephone, you know, with your direction, we went down where you were describing and we

found it -- photographed eight of these pits, and we called you when we found them. There are eight still surviving down there today.

Chief Jim Eagle: Yeah, I didn't see that many myself. I think there was three. ... But then we didn't have much time.

David Blake: Right, right. We took the whole day and went through this, you know it's pretty dense woods down in there now. That hasn't been disturbed or anything since you've been here. So we were able to locate eight of them and some of them are pretty broad. Very large.

Chief Jim Eagle: ... You'll find one that was ... at the time I seen it was [inaudible].

David Blake: Well what they have today, they sort of have an earthen lip around the edge, and then there's stones inside. But it had a lot of leaves. We didn't do any digging in it. It was very wet. ... You can definitely see the depression there, and it's still probably, oh I don't know, three feet deep, but it's silted in with leaves and debris. ...

Chief Jim Eagle: ... Most likely it's deeper because I recall it as being maybe four to four-and-a-half, five-foot deep. ...

David Blake: Okay. Well they're about three feet deep now, so that makes sense. ...

Chief Jim Eagle: ... A century makes quite a difference on a landscape.

David Blake: It's just so exciting to me that they're still there, and that you all knew that they were there. And what do you reckon they were? Do you have any idea? Because we're puzzled by this.

Chief Jim Eagle: Well like I said we didn't spend much time there, but on the way back home we talked about it because several of us had worked as advisors -- or well, not advisors, but as field men with

archaeological expeditions before. They could have been earth lodges that caved in, they could have been underground or partially underground ceremonial places. It's hard to say. Maybe they were even clay pits. One of my uncles said well, maybe they dug clay there. ... The only way to prove that is to dig in a little ways and see if there's clay there. ...

David Blake: ... All eight of these pits, or whatever we want to call them, they seem to be perfectly round.

Chief Jim Eagle: Absolutely. They're man-made. They're not natural.

David Blake: Right. And they're not made with a machine or anything. And they're not oblong or -- they really are perfectly round. Which I thought -- pretty unusual.

Jerry Reynolds: Chief ... you had said to me something about ... you said something to me about the handiwork, and the age of some of the objects or some of the workmanship.

Chief Jim Eagle: ... We lucked out. We found several wash-outs ... where we picked up flint tools, and one of them, I don't remember which one, had a small stone hammer, the type they crush chokecherries with, you know, or break bones to get marrow out. We had about five, I don't recall exactly but I know there was at least five artifacts that we just picked up off the ground. I mean in an area. As much as we walked, that's quite a bit. ... On the trail that we walked back in to either see -- I'm not sure whether it was the step mound, or the pits and the three mounds that we were able to just look at. It was on one of those trails but I don't recall exactly right now which one it was.

Jerry Reynolds: ... Sure. And do you recall what became of those objects?

Chief Jim Eagle: Oh my goodness no. Because they all had children, I would imagine they just give 'em to their kids then. But Butler said that years before when he was younger, they used to go after a field with plows and rake it you know and then dry it out. ... His father had bushel baskets full. And they sold them to a collector that came through there years later.

Jerry Reynolds: Simon said that. Now, these kids that they may have given them to, are they still alive, or do you know?

Chief Jim Eagle: Let's see -- Henry is. ...

David Blake: ... Now the mound that I think is the most prominent one of the three, it's a place where there was a house built on top of it.

Chief Jim Eagle: Right. Right.

David Blake: And the man you met by the name of Mr. Brewster lived there?

Chief Jim Eagle: That's correct.

David Blake: Okay. And then these pools or these pits, whatever we want to call them, are downstream from that.

Chief Jim Eagle: Correct. But I don't know, I don't recall the name of the -- I don't know if it was even named toward the thing itself.

David Blake: It's Broad Run is what it's called. ...

Chief Jim Eagle: Uh-huh. I don't recall that, no, no. I don't think it was even mentioned.

David Blake: Right. Now in relation to the one mound we know, were the other mounds upstream or downstream? Do you remember that?

Chief Jim Eagle: It seems to me that one was one place and one the other. One was downstream, actually not that far. Maybe it was more than a mile. I don't recall. One mile, it could have been up to four miles because we were in a hurry and we were, all we were watching was our time to make sure we got going on time you know. And we were low on cash, you know to -- I mean they were feeding us down there but you know, to get back to -- we were going up near Columbus there, and Fort Wayne, Indiana. I lived in the Upper Pen -- northern part of the lower peninsula of Michigan at that time.

David Blake: ... I'm sorry to say that most everything has been developed around us. So if it was as far as four miles down the stream, I'm afraid we've probably lost the other mounds.

Chief Jim Eagle: Well, yeah, in fact the mounds that, the round mounds that we seen, there was three. There was a stone fence and a field there, and there was one on one field, more toward the fence, and then there was two across in another man's field. And a lot of them, he said there was many more, maybe twenty, that had been just taken down.

Jerry Reynolds: Who said that, who was the man who said that?

Chief Jim Eagle: That was Butler.

Jerry Reynolds: Cy Butler, okay.

Chief Jim Eagle: Yeah, and the man called Webster, I don't recall just -- I think his first name was Solomon. I think they called him Saul, or Sol. He confirmed it. He said yeah, they destroyed those other mounds to work the fields and then they abandoned them after that. They only worked the fields for a couple of years and abandoned them. So I don't know what the reasoning was on that. I, you know, who knows. You know people were switching farms and land, and land was cheap even in 1955. Land was fairly cheap. ...

David Blake: ... Was it your understanding when you were there that there was in addition to the mound, or the mounds, also a Native American town here? The early records are saying that -- even, even the town charter usually calls the town Buck Land. ... And in the same sentence then they call it Buckland. Buckland, you know. I think everybody, the Europeans and you know the later people, all call it Buckland. But I think there's a chance that there's an earlier town here called Buck Land.

Chief Jim Eagle: Well our understanding from Brewster and Butler both -- not Brewster, Webster and Butler both was that in the old language it was called the land of deer. Or the land of plenty of deer. So if it was interpreted Buck Land you know, that's, you know -- I don't know, I'm not an expert, and I don't know for sure what they were doing back then.

David Blake: ... Well that's helpful just knowing that, because --

Chief Jim Eagle: But we did prove, we did prove that there was lots of people of Cherokee blood there. And that at one time they had had a settlement, not too far from where the platform mounds, the step mounds were. There's quite a difference between a mound and a step mound, because a step mound is only used for one thing, and that's *katua* grounds. A ceremonial dance grounds. There was ceremonies take place, and there was arbors made there, and there was -- to do that is very complex. There've been very few and Mike [Michael David Wolfe] and I are probably the only two that really understand how they were built and how they were totally used.

David Blake: So then would it be fair to say that the step mound, we know where that is, the other mounds that you saw surrounding this, are those -- those were not step mounds, those were? --

Chief Jim Eagle: Oh no, those were round mounds height. And this morning when I, early this morning, when I was up before, I got to thinking about this conversation and I was estimating in my mind if I

remember. The round mounds were probably twenty-five, thirty foot across, and no more than ten foot, maybe ten or twelve foot tall. Ten foot I would estimate. So that's a fair-sized mound but just what these were used for, probably burial or whatever, God only knows. I know it's the type the pot-hunters dig into, you know, to get artifacts.

David Blake: ... So we could have as many as twenty around this step mound is what you're telling me.

Chief Jim Eagle: Yes. ... I talked to my uncles about it years later ... It seems logical to us to -- we know our people was there, the Cherokee were there. But we believe that possibly they came in and took over different mounds and different -- that area, after the mound people left. You know, dispersed into other tribes or whatever they did. ... See those date back four, five thousand years, those people. And we only date back in that area probably a couple of hundred years, maybe three.

David Blake: ... We're finding just below the step mound, sort of downstream but within clear view, we're finding a concentration of settlement-related artifacts right there. And it's very -- it's right in the same area where the pits are.

Chief Jim Eagle: Right. Well along the banks of those rivers ... that's where they would find artifacts you know, as the land washes away. ... You know that's a pot-hunter's dream.

David Blake: ... David [Michael] Wolfe is saying that he believes there was a settlement on both sides of this creek below the step mound.

Chief Jim Eagle: I have to agree.

Jerry Reynolds: Why is that Chief? ... Why do you agree?

Chief Jim Eagle: Well, because of past history. This happens in any area, not just Buckland County. In other areas that is exactly the way

things -- even where my ancestral group came from ... that happens. You usually have a settlement on each side of the break or the river.

Jerry Reynolds: ... I wonder, is it the case in Cherokee or other Native cultures that when you have a ceremonial ground, you want to have running water right there, close by?

Chief Jim Eagle: Oh absolutely ... for many reasons, not just for consumption but for trade routes. ... There's been very little study about trade routes, pre-contact trade routes in the United States, especially east of the Mississippi. It was, it was constant. Clear from Lake Superior clear to the tip of Florida, clear to the keys. And from the mountains ...

Jerry Reynolds: ... Isn't it the case though that also when it's a ceremonial ground, running water is important for ritual and cleansing and things like this? Is that the case in Cherokee or Native American culture too?

Chief Jim Eagle: All Cherokee and the others -- there's of course a water ceremony. It's very complicated, it's a real complex ceremony. It's so important. And it's not just from a river. Usually you use a stream or a creek or a brook, or whatever they call them. It's a very complex ceremony.

Jerry Reynolds: ... You've mentioned pits and mounds and artifacts. We've discussed those. How about -- is med, is medicine circles, are they something separate that you saw?

Chief Jim Eagle: Medicine circles, no. We didn't see any of that. ...

David Blake: Chief Eagle, this is David Blake again. One other thing that the historical writings about the region here state clearly is that right along Buckland is the old, what is called the Susquehanna Plain Path.

Chief Jim Eagle: Yes.

David Blake: Were you all aware of that when you were here?

Chief Jim Eagle: Yes, we were well aware of that years before.

David Blake: Okay. Well, the artifacts that we found, I took down to our department of historic resources, trying to learn more about them. And they seem to think that -- well they told us that the artifacts themselves, the stones used in them, are coming as far away from Connecticut, and as far away as Georgia. The different types of rock. They were saying that the fact that Buckland is right along this Susquehanna Plain Path -- you know they think it must have been some kind of a trade route here, and that it might even have been a trade center. ...

Chief Jim Eagle: We believe that it was part of the Mobilion trade route. You know they had their own language too, the Mobilion. It was a type of language. It was, it was a combination of many languages that are very -- maybe nobody even speaks that today.

David Blake: Now, where was that? Was that -- I mean this trade route you're talking about. Is this that trade route that's down in Louisiana?

Chief Jim Eagle: Oh yes, that was all part of it, that's not separate, that's a part of it. They would have gone clear up to New York state, like I said Lake Superior. They brought copper down. It was common. ... We know probably a fraction of it.

Jerry Reynolds: ... Chief, tell me, the artifacts that you saw, and the workmanship. Just your sort of immediate sense of things at the time. I know it's going back a long way, but you mentioned to me that it was just clearly Native American to you. Native workmanship. ...

Chief Jim Eagle: Oh absolutely, because I'm a flint-worker myself.

Jerry Reynolds: Ah. Were you a flint-worker in 1955?

Chief Jim Eagle: I've been a flint-worker since I was about fourteen.

Jerry Reynolds: ... As far as the workmanship itself, you as a Native American flint-worker yourself, was there any other possibility than that it was Native American workmanship?

Chief Jim Eagle: ... No. No.

Jerry Reynolds: Okay. And some of the -- I think some of the objects, you mentioned to me, struck you as absolutely, as old, you said very old or something like that. Is that? --

Chief Jim Eagle: Very very old. Because as soon as contact came, as soon as there was Europeans, there was -- flint-work went down the drain. ...

Jerry Reynolds: ... For this conversation, I guess the emphasis should be that you know this trip was part of a ... it's part of what you are to make a trip like this. It wasn't sort of some strategic plan or some sort of whimsical instinct to go out and ...

Chief Jim Eagle: No, no no. It was a definite, it was a definite purpose.

Jerry Reynolds: Definite and long-standing.

Chief Jim Eagle: Oh yes.

Jerry Reynolds: Great.

David Blake: When you were here in Virginia, what other sites did you visit?

Chief Jim Eagle: I -- I wish I had that old journal with me, my old notes. That book. I gave it to another man. And today, I have no idea where

it's at. But we had -- there was quite a few places we -- settlements,  
Indian settlements -- that we visited. Quite a few different tribes in fact.

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