

Warm Valley Historical Project - Part II
Interview with TOMMY BROWN, d.o.b. December 28, 1908
Interviewer: not identified on tape - Sharon Kahin went with Sarah Wiles
March 20, 1991
Tape 1, Side 1

TB: That was a—boarding school.

I: Yeah. Let me just see if this working—Today is March 20, 1991 This is a conversation with Tommy Brown about what it was like to go to St. Stephen's

TB: Yeah.

I: Do you remember how old you were when you went there?

TB: Huh?

I: How old were you when you went to the school?

TB: I must have been about—like eighteen years old—nineteen.

I: So, you were a teenager when you went there?

TB: Yeah, I was about—when I went to school—I must have been pretty small—maybe nine years old—when I went to school—It was, just off and on, you know. Them days. It was boarding school, I know I went to school there for about—three weeks, something. Yeah about three weeks

I: About three weeks?

TB: Huh?

discussion with someone else in room:

Thank you.

TB: Yeah, years—about seven years. I know I was—I can't quite remember it—But I know I went to school there—I went to school, I don't know, 1918. Somewhere around in there.

I: And you were nine years old when you first went?

TB: Something like that, yeah. I was—small. I couldn't talk the English—little bitty—I used to go along in out native language, you know, Arapaho language. Well I went to school and I finally caught on to talking English. [garbled]. 'Round about '26,

'27, '28. Then I begun, you know [garbled]¹ to speak the English language but all in all—I wasn't educated good—Those ladies at the school..were more likely was for—um—church membership. I mean, go to church all the time. More of that, every morning—every morning go to church. Then we go to the classroom. But all-in-all—I wasn't taught right from Dunkin. You know, no kind of [garbled]' we didn't learn how to operate machinery, anything like that.

I didn't have much education—. I went back out of school and it seemed like I didn't learn nothing. We talking through the church. That's what I learned—but other wise—I didn't have no kind of carpentry or something like that—I didn't have any of that—Like today, all the chance you get for education like today. There are three of us still living, like my age—we never learned—. It seems to me like we never learned too much. We didn't have any kind of trade like today. Seems like you have all kinds of ways that you can get by with an education— I didn't learn too much—. I never had no position—. Like when I grew up—position like on the council or anything like that you know. I never had that—. Not enough education. I don't know, right now, I guess—I'm just getting by—

Uh—I would kind of attribute to the Indians what I've learned. I mean, outside of the schooling—In those days—we used to live in tents. There wasn't no houses like today. Lot of Indians used to live in tents. All on their own—Now I lived in a tent, like this—in a tent. Then we came to have houses. They—another thing was the wagon days, you know, travel on wagons. Used to travel on wagons. Once in a while you'd see a car on the road in them days—. I don't know—seems like I am—. If I's went to high school, I'd probably be in better shape. No, I never knew about all this [several sentences badly garbled]. Wagon days, yeah. Now we go in cars [chuckles] well, those were the—the good old days. Everything was cheap! Groceries, go to [Bi-Lo's?]² and get a big bunch of groceries in those days. Now—Now, I don't know what else you wanted to know.

I: Well, I was wondering if you could kind of describe a day at St. Stephen's Boarding School. Do you remember how those days went, what you had to do when? You said that you went to church in the mornings and—

TB That's about all—I didn't like that—. We didn't have any trades or anything like that. they never taught us anything, no. They didn't teach us any trades—. They never taught us nothing.

I: Did you work on the farm at all?

¹Transcriber's note: Mr. Brown has a very deep voice and has a tendency to mumble. It seems that the microphone was placed rather far away from him. It was possible to make this transcription only by replaying passages several times, readjusting the volume and tone each time. Despite my best efforts, I simply could not make out many passages.

²This is the name a supermarket chain I recognize from North Carolina. Is there one near Mr. Brown's home or am I misinterpreting him? Passage difficult to understand.

TB: No there was no farm there. There was a man—a farmer you might say. He took care of the milk cows, you know, like that... But that was his job, but we never used to go over there and touch them cows... those cute little cows. Now, now, they used to clean the cages for the winter [garbled], they had some hogs, mutton... That's about all I learned.

I: Did you have any chores or jobs when you went there?

TB: No.

I: They didn't ask you to help in the gardens or anything?

TB: If you've [garbled] I never learned nothing.

I: Well, tell me, what was it like to learn English? Was that difficult for you and your friends?

TB: Yeah, well, as we went along we learned how to talk English that's one [garbled] They didn't want us to talk our language, the Arapaho language—all English words—Got into trouble one Christmas. They didn't want us to talk Arapaho, see, well this—There wasn't much to the school—Right now, today, you go to these high schools now all these children, they go to high school and learn a lot of things. But I didn't—didn't learn anything. Right today—High Schools up here, kids learn how to paint and typewrite—everything—That's one thing I never learned.

I: Did you have classes in English and History and that kind of thing?

TB: Yeah, yeah, we had those classes—

I: But you never learned a trade?

TB: No, we didn't learn no trade—No kind! No kind of trade.

I: Well, when you graduated, when you left the school, what did you learn there to help you to get a job or to do anything?

TB: All I learned—just farm labor—That's all I learned—Stacked hay, cut hay—You know like that—about all. Building highway, That I learned. If I'd learned some kind of trade I'd been somewhere. But I don't know no trade, no kind.

I: Did you ever use what they taught you about farming? Did you ever farm your self?

TB: No. Oh, there's a few of them that used to try to farm. A few this old [garbled]—alright for me. Educated, education—I wish I had that so I'd—That's what I need.

Them days—used to walk to school at that time. There was no buses those days.
No buses.

I: Where were you living?

TB: I used to live 'bout couple miles northeast [or "you know east"] same street as here, down the other way. Used to walk through there. Load of ice. Go to school—

I: Did you used to board at the school or did you walk every day?

TB: What? George and me used to walk. You know, most of the time—Boys' school—Nah.

I: Do you remember, if you spoke your own language, if you spoke Arapaho, were there rules against that? Did you get punished in any way?

TB: Oh yeah. Once they caught you talking Arapaho, they'd give you... you know, five marks [laughs]. Five marks and you don't go home Sundays. Yeah, they's punish us. You couldn't talk Arapaho. Didn't want you to... Now Miss Patches here—Teachin Arapaho—Teaching how to talk Arapaho—In them days, they'd shut you down, yeah.

I: Do you remember if people ever got, you know, hit with a ruler or anything like that for punishment at the mission?

TB: Not that, but, you know, on the shoes like that, they'd give you some marks—five marks, but they didn't punish you. Least, from what I know, they never did.

I: Did you have to wear a special uniform or special clothes when you went to St. Stephen's?

TB: I had such shabby clothes, you know... that was, I don't know about those clothes Schools Well, I think that's about all I can relate—

I: OK. Tell me, when you were born, can you tell me what year?

TB: December 28, 1908.

I: 1908?

TB: Yeah. I'm getting old. No good now.

I: Oh...

TB: Can't walk. Can't see.

Other woman: Oh, Tommy, I have a question. When you went to school at

St. Stephen's, did your parents make you go? Or did you want to go or did the mission make you go?

TB: Well, the mission, the ranch come to school—[garbled] there weren't no busses—so we went to school on horse back.

Other woman: He didn't have any parents

I: Who raised you Tommy? Did your grandparents raise you?

TB:I had my mom and my foster dad—I used to call him Dad. He's the one that raised me, yeah.

I: Who was that? What was his name?

TB: August Brown.

I: August Brown, huh?

TB: Yeah, August Brown, yeah. Long hair... Used to call him [bone?] bill—I don't know—government changed names later on—You know, different people changed names.

I: Do you remember if the Government made the boys that went to the school cut their hair? Did you have to have your hair cut when you went there?

TB: Oh, yeah.

[Knock at the door and squeak as door opens]

Women's voices, "Hi, Sue," "Hi, Janet!"

[tape turned off and then back on as Tommy Brown is speaking]

TB: —In that show—see that picture there in the corner? I knew him.

Woman: This is his dad.

I: Really?

TB: I knew him, in the corner.

Woman: This is his dad.

I: Which show were you in? In one of the movies?

TB: Yeah.

Woman: There's George.

Other woman: Oh, yeah, George Brown.

TB: He's no—he's no relation—That man there.

Woman: Uh-huh.

I: He didn't raise you?

TB: He didn't raise me—that's August Brown—He's just like my dad.

I: Yeah?

TB: I used to call him dad—I don't know how he got to raise me, I was too small, I guess, when he walked away from us and [Long Bow?], This August Brown raised me.

I: So how did you happen to be in one of Tim McCoy's films?

TB: Well, they had that film taken over there at this canyon up this mountain. Where that c)'~a y is—There wasn't no dairy there, no—That's where they had that—That film —That show—Yeah, I knowed Tim McCoy.

I: How old were you then?

TB: I was long about 17, 18 years old when that film took place up here. Yeah, I knowed him.

Other woman: Begins talking to Tommy in Arapaho and leaves... something about an invitation to dinner at 6:30.

I: A few more questions. What kind of person was Tim McCoy? Could you describe him?

TB: I really didn't know him good, but I seen him. Tim McCoy be amongst the Arapahos. Uh-huh. Tim McCoy—You know he was an actor—He be acting at California and someplaces and—Tim McCoy, yeah.

I: When you were in the film, what was your part? What did you do in the film?

TB: Well, just like fighting, you know, a whole bunch of us Indians, on horse backs—We used to chase this Tim McCoy just like—I don't recall anything about the show—And there'd be that man there that shoot like that...

Other woman: Camera.

TB: Right, front, please, pass, right through. We used to shoot him, you know. Of course—it's blank shells... We used to shoot him and he'd fall out. Fall off the horse, just like we killed him. [laughs] I killed one white man—I know it! [laughs] That was good, you know—We used to get two dollars a day.

I: That must have been pretty good money in those days, wasn't it?

TB: You betcha, lot of money, yeah. Anything you eat, like that [garbled], everything like that was cheep them days—groceries, and five dollars worth of groceries was a big bunch of them—

I: So the man standing behind Tim McCoy in that picture was your father, was that right?

Woman: George Roaring Bull.

TB: George Roaring Bull.

I: I liked the end.

TB: Supposed to have been my dad this 'un—But he walked away from us when I was small—I didn't know my father—I was too small-

I: Did you act in more than one film or just the one film.

TB: What??

I: When you were acting—When you were riding and shooting people—did you just do that one time?

TB: No, did that several times. Roaring Bull was again—Lots of movies—Horses running, Chasing—teasing Tim McCoy.

I: It sounds like fun.

Woman: Who fell through the window?

TB: Huh?

Woman: Who fell through that window? Did somebody do that in the movie?

TB: What'd she say?

I: In the movie.

END SIDE ONE

BEGINNING SIDE TWO

TB: —They just shooting Indians and he'd jump off his horse and run and went through the window. I don't know whether it was glass or—I don't know—He just jumped right through, Right like that it was—He jumped right through, I don't know—I never got close to it. I don't know whether it was glass or whatever it was—He jumped right through the window. 'Course, we'd turned back—we was shooting at him.

I: Do you remember the name of the movie?

TB: I don't know nothing about it—I don't know, what you call it—I don't know the title...

Woman: War Paint.³

I: War Paint. That's one we couldn't find.

Woman: Oh, really?

I: Thank you, Tommy for letting us come and ask you questions. we appreciate it.

[recorder turned off and then on again]

I: Did you talk sign language with Tim McCoy?

TB: Yeah. Not Tim McCoy, but any body, you know—Yeah 'bout—I don't know—I was just about the only one around here who knew sign language.

I: Do you still...

TB: I know Ben [being?] Friday—Maybe some Friday—if you come back I can tell you some more. I mean about how the Indians used to live, not school but, you know, how they camped and how they used to live—all right.

I: Thank you Tommy.

END OF TAPE

³1926 Tim McCoy film?