

Warm Valley Historical Project - Part II
Interview with BEN FRIDAY, SR., age 87 (b. 1905)
Interviewed by Sharon Kahin and Sarah Wiles
April, 14, 1991

SK: Let's see if it works here.

BF: What was that?

SK: Well, I am just seeing if it's working—to see if we've got the volume and everything ok—And today is April the—

BF: Fourteenth, isn't it?

SK: Fourteenth, yeah. This is a conversation with Ben Friday about his early schooling. So, You were saying that you went to the school here, the government school for a couple of years?

BF: Yeah. It's like I said, you know, 1912 I went to school, the government school. 'Course I was born in 1905 and I went to school, at the government working school¹ over here at Ft. Washale.

Other woman: Ft. Washakie.

SK: Uh-huh.

BF: The Shoshones and the Arapahos stayed there, at the school.

SK: Uh-huh.

BF: And I went to school there, '12, '13', '14, '16, I think at St. Michael's was being run about 1912, About the time I went to school there, but—there was nothing but girls school there.

SK: At St. Michael's?

BF: Yeah, it was kind of a parochial, you know, mission and they had girls there. The boys went up the other way to Shoshone, uh.. school. Of course, some of the bigger girls went up that way too. Anyway, I know that Mr. Balcolm was the warden there. He was the one that started the school, the Episcopalian School.

SK: Balcolm?

BF: Episcopalian, Balcolm, B-A-L-C-O-L-M, you see, and some of the others I knew over there, Crory, old man Crory [sp?]¹—he was kind of a doctor and—when I came there in 1916, they had what they called cottages, there see, run by the church, you see, there on this side, and there was a store there and on the other

side was a cottage for girls, over there—and over there, they didn't have anything until right after they give it—that year—It used to be a boys building across there—burned out later hah?—Yeah the girl's went to school there, they went through 1912, 'til about when I went down there about 1916. I quit school up there and I came down here for one year...

SK: To St. Stephen's?²

BF: — and then 1917, then they wanted all of our schools to send their kids down to Genoa or other reservation schools in Oklahoma, California and then to Sonada [sp?], Oregon and different other Indian schools and a lot of them went to Carlisle, too. You know the [garbled] Carlisle, Pennsylvania, but we got—right here the fall of 1916, there came word that all the schools were filled up, so we had to wait. So, the only other [vacancy] they say they had was in Genoa. So that's where we went over here, in the next state, Nebraska. So, that's where I went. I signed up for four years. Four years of school. There was quite a bunch of us. Her dad before and his brother. But a lot of time—he was about three or four years older than I am—so anyway, when I got there they had already expired, see, they came back home and I went down there with another Shoshone-Arapaho kid and on the way—right there I didn't know anything³—from '16 to '21—I didn't get back 'til I was 13, so...

SK: You didn't come home during the summers?

BF: So, I didn't know all about it until when she was a kid when she went to school all the house mothers lived down there, teachers and so forth— But anyway it was a good school—they say [long about for one year?] we had some good teachers there, learned and—there wasn't hardly any female in school—'course they had soccer, you know, to kind of support the school, you know. We had cows and chickens and about like that you know.

SK: This was in Genoa or here?

BF: We took care of having to milk the cows for the kids—

SK: Here?

BF: Yeah, drink and eat and stuff like that. But most of the time, I don't know —I know they got along alright because it [the school?] lasted until about—well, when I got back in 1922—you know—it was kind of still there but not so many kids went there. I kind of—went down—It was, part of it, closed up when those other schools were open, so it was, just about as far as I know about it—I wish I new about it all the way through—. anyway—it was kind of a day school—no—boarding school to start—no it was a day school—we used to come from the [tent?] to school—walk up there down—all by that river there—all the rest of the time, well, they turned it into a boarding school and everybody stayed there, see—you know, slept there, ate there—

SK: But you went home every day?

BF: Hah?

SK: You went home during the evenings?

BF: Yeah, just at that time, yeah, but that's just as far as I know about it. But... the rest of the kids that I knew that went to school there are all gone—They're—they're all deceased, you know—just very few that I know that are still here that went to school down there. The rest of them went out to school. They either went to St. Stephen's or just Ft. Washakie or places like that, you know.

SK: Uh-huh.

BF: But as far as education's concerned, why, they had it. They had good teachers in there. They had good teachers there and anybody went [want?] out kind of a—agriculture was in that—right in that school you know—because we had to go out and take care of stock, you know, one day and then the other half day we had to go to school, just like that—so, I believe that they turned out to be pretty good. We was—you know—[garbled] went to school. Your mother⁴ and Alberta and—aunt Lena [Helena?] and—I can't remember their names—I think they're the only ones that's living too—the rest of them's all deceased.

SK: You can't think of anybody else that—can you think of anybody else that's still around that went to that school?

BF: Well, I don't know—the uh—

SK: Your generation?

BF: Some of these girls that I know they're kind of bashful, you know. They don't want to talk out, you know and—and it's just those that are living—but those that are deceased, why they were pretty good—they speak good English and all that and knew all about it and Karock—uh—mother of mine⁵, she knew—she went all the way through after she went to school for a while, she went to Rapid City... Uh-huh—Rapid city. they had an Indian School there too—and her and her mother and Alberta and then they came and I don't think they knew too much about it then because they went to school just about the time that I left so—

SK: Did you speak the English—English—did you speak English when you went to that school?

BF: Oh—yeah—just the—I don't know who would know that clear through—It's like I say, there's a lot of them that's deceased that used to go to school there...

Sarah Wiles: Did Pius go?

BF: Yeah.

SK: Pius Moss?

Sarah Wiles: Was he at St. Stephen's?

BF: Yeah. I don't know—I wish that I had went to school that way so that I would know who it was—as long as the schools would get certain—why, it was a good school too, you know. Kids got a good education out of it, so there was a lot of them that didn't go on or they went to school right there—graduated right there. They talk pretty good English and all these people that I know that used to—when I was there—they were still there for a while, but they left, you know—become teachers and house mothers and so forth, you know—

SK: But you said, when you went there that you didn't spend the night.

BF: Huh?

SK: Did you go home everyday after school or did you spend the night there?

BF: Yeah. I... I what I got up there at the boarding school up there at Ft. Washakie until I came to this school, you know, it was a—you know as they say—the only school—I didn't know a word of English up there—In them days, why they'd force you to go to school—If you didn't go to school, why your dad and your mom would go to jail [laughs] they did the pol.. the Indian Bureau policies you know, like that—the laws and stuff like that—and we weren't allowed to talk Indian, that part of it—If you talked Indian, why, you'd get punished [laughs].

SK: What did they do to you if you talked Indian?

BF: Huh?

SK: What was the punishment? Do you remember how they punished you?

BF: Oh they—put you in the guard house for a day or something like that, bread and water [laughs] like that, you know—I don't want to mention it at all, because it's just one of those, you know—and then. They—It I didn't learn another word of English, then there wouldn't be much school there. I had long hair and then—when I got there, they just cut it right off off and throwed it away, you know—but I grabbed it again, those [pig?] tails, I grabbed it and kept it until my mother came and gave it to her. I was looking for it here when my mother died—somebody took it and used it for false hair I guess, so—[laughs]—Well, I guess, you have to have school because education is, I guess, something that all people should learn and learn about, know about, you know. In regards to [garbled] education, it depends on what the man who needs it—that's all—

SK: What—

BF: I went to St. Stephen's, over there, you know, they had strict laws, yeah, and everybody had to stay at school over there. I could tell you all about that one over there. Everybody in bed by ten o'clock, no later than ten. Otherwise the [bend?]. Get up early in the morning, get up [phone rings⁶] get up and exercise and so forth until eight and things like that, you know. All kinds of rules, you know, like we were supposed to go to one of them—you know, that the school and the town was adjacent to one another, you know. You could go just inside of—just outside of school, why, you'd be in town.

SK: Uh-huh.

BF: Yeah, over there at Aztec road's over there, everybody had to go to—go to school to study if you didn't... if you didn't—if you'd get left behind they you had to go to school seven to nine years and the Arapaho language survived because we kept a talking, but I had it in my heart that I would never forget it, you know. Be four years until [garbled] come back and I still couldn't talk my English, you know, because I shouldn't talk it right, I might go to jail [laughs]. I don't know who would know—[garbled] went up to Rapid City when I came back, why, they were still going to school, you know. Your mother, Alberta, Martin Amour and some other's too—quite a few of them went down to Rapid City, uh...

SK: When you went to Genoa, did they teach you a trade? Did they teach you any special trade?

BF: Uh—no—we just—of course they had some others too—at that school—along with the schools—we went to school in the class and then the next morning, why, then you went to... carpentry—learned how to be a carpenter—just like that, you know, for about—for about thirty days, you'd study that and then go to school at the same time. Then at other times—and then—at other times you'd have what they call [work] detail, you know, change that and then you'd learn about dairy and stuff like that—and then we'd learn about gardening and—learn about [fruiting?] and all things like that—work, work out and we'd have school and then they'd have most of everything like gardening and everything, farming, agriculture and so forth, always—Oh, I got a lot of good things out of it. I learned quite a bit you know. Of course, school and farming and agriculture and everything. It was a good sized school. They had five hun—when I was there, they had 565 boys and 715 girls—so it was a pretty good sized school and I [stayed?] where ever I want to [too?].

SK: When you went to Genoa, did you come back here—back here for the summer?

BF: Yeah—yeah—it was a good school, but we had a hard time, you know, because everybody had to eat just one meal. No seconds, you know, they gave you only one.

SK: No seconds?

BF: Yeah—second time to get something to eat, you couldn't get that, as I just said. The government was trying to save money, you know. Just feed us once and that's all—World War One—Old German Kaiser—No I—I don't know—don't you [garbled ...did he say something in Arapaho, a name perhaps?] She was about three or four years older than I am. She went to school down there but she got—she went out earlier because she was older.

SK: Uh-huh.

BF: —I don't know.

SK: Do you know why they cut your hair?

BF: Huh?

SK: Do you know why they cut your braids?

BF: Let's see—

[tape off and on]

BF: They're all gone—all the [colors?] are gone—all the whites are gone [Arapaho names?]. Jesse Honadona, down there, ought to know, but I don't know if you can get anything out of him, he's kind of hard of hearing too, you know—'Bout Jesse Honadona—he's kind of hard of hearing—Yeah—it's pretty hard to get back some of the old things like that when all the people are gone that know—why these young ones, they don't know nothing—I don't know who to refer you to—So Landis[?] living here, but last year she died. She knew all about it and she'd tell you all about it right now, but she's dead [chuckles].

SK: Who was that?

BF: Frances Whiteplume. [garbled].

SK: When—

BF: All of them have died from the school down there. They didn't have no history of the—school—like they had in the schools?

SK: Nh-huh.

BF: Did you inquire about that?

SK: Yeah.

BF: Over to the mission? Whether they had any of the history?

SK: Yeah, they don't have any.

BF: They don't? They should have—but I don't know—I know Napuh [?] has. You could just go over there and get a book and it'd tell when it start and just about all the school and what they took up and everything. St. Michael's the same way—but I don't know whether it—there's a book here someplace—it's here someplace, I don't know—It was an Episcopalian mission, anyway. I went to church. We learned about catechism and all that. It went along with that, they—learned how to pray—learned how to sing the christmas carols and all that—Oh, I was a good singer [laughs]. Yeah—I'm real sorry that I didn't go to school there enough. I know the school all right, but that's like—the [garbled].

SK: Do you remember your first day of school there?

BF: No, I don't. I don't remember that and all the—there used to be one lady that used to go out there with you—on your mother's side. Cottage by the church. It was Paul Hizes[?] wife. She was there all the way through 'til there at the end, she got married to Paul Hize and then—she's gone on now, too. Yeah, she's gone now too. And all those old teachers that I used to—just heard about them, see, they're all dead too.

SK: Uh-huh.

BF: I don't know—unless they have—they should have it someplace—I don't know if people thought about these big books⁷ of the mission one—I know when they ceased, why they—school was let out and no more school after that—I was—when I came back home then—

SK: Did you ever get put in the guard house, Ben?

BF: Yeah.

SK: What was it like?

BF: Yeah... it was—I don't know—Yeah, I—I—if I just tell you about it, I'd be telling you a lie [laughs]. Be sorry I didn't stay there, 'til the finish when I off to school—⁸

SK: Well, thank you...

BF: Huh?

SK: Thank you for giving us the information—that you do remember.

BF: Yeah. Well if I know somebody, well the I—

[tape off and on—some time later?]

BF: —asked if they had any books, you know, from back there, you know.

SK: Yeah?

BF: They—I know they should have—all the kids that went to school there and...

Sarah Wiles: We want to know about your family.

BF: Yeah?

SW: Your mother and your dad—what was your mother and dad's names?

BF: Huh?

SW: What's your folks' names. We want to just a you about your family... your mother and dad, who were they?

BF: Two ladies?

SW: Nh-huh—no. Your mother and your dad.

BF: Oh... I don't know, like I said, I just don't know because some of them—some of them that went to school, when to school for a little while and then went down to St. Stephen's, just like that, you know, they—

SW: Where did you live? You said that you lived along the river?

BF: Huh?

SW: Did you live along the river, you said?

BF: Oh yeah—Well—winter time, we'd camp along the river on account of walking to school see, when I took to boarding school, why, we stayed right there, close up to the water 'cause we had no water works or anything—used to get the water out of the river—wood and stuff like that, so—when I got back, why, they had houses like [little ants?] you know. There's quite a difference four years—there was a school, alright, of course they had cars, then too, you know, old model-T Fords [laughs]. Yeah. woman Did you live in a tent then or did you live in a house?

BF: Huh?

SW: Did you live in a tent or did you live in a house?

BF: House.

SW: Oh, you had a house, oh—

BF: Yeah, we had a house, down there—Old place, down there—So, I'll try to find out who went to school there and stuff like that and see if they got any old papers—old books and I'll give it to you and you can give it to her.

SW: Ok, all right.

BF: There should be some—of course, I didn't stay long enough to see those books or anything like that, that they have for the school, you know, when I left, well, I just left.

SK: Yeah—Ben, when you were very small, do you remember seeing any tipis still here? Was anybody still living in a tipi when you were small?

BF: Well, some of these that went to school, they [garbled]—I'm—ah—I'll be going on 87 now—some of those that went to school after I went to school there, why, they're all gone. So, there might be some that went to school after I left—I just heard about them—Well, when I came back, after I went to school, well, there were some younger ones that were going to school then—

SK: Uh-huh. [tape off and on]

BF: Take these younger kids now, not a word of Arapaho they learned. They all English talkers just about as soon as they're about two years old they start to talk English. I wasn't that-a-way. I was twelve years old, I still talk Indian, you know. I had a hard time learning English. then I had a hard time forgetting my language [laughs]. So—your dad's the same way—he always spoke good Shoshone. I remember [Chief Crying Elk?]-well, they're all gone too. They're good people, yeah—well, I did the best I can.

SK: Well, thank you.

END OF TAPE

¹Industrial school?

²Mr. Friday is apparently quite hard of hearing. Sometimes he seems not to hear the interviewer's questions and his answers are a continuation of his previous response.

³Does he mean he doesn't know anything about the schools in the area because he was gone during this time?

⁴Speaking to someone else in the room?

⁵A clan aunt? Is there a taboo against using names of deceased relatives?

⁶Transcription becomes difficult because of phone ringing and subsequent conversation in the

background.

⁷Yearbooks?

⁸It is apparent from Mr. Friday's tone of voice here and his reluctance to discuss the guard house that he was hurt very much by this experience.