



*In collaboration with*  
**Charles Shepherd**

**Date:** March 26, 2023

**Interviewer(s):** Ryan Parks

- 00:00 **Charles** Good afternoon everybody. Uh, my name is Charles Shepherd, also known as Sweet Medicine. Um, I was a bo, I was born in New York. Brooklyn, New York, 1967, December 23rd. And, um, I'm a descendant of the people here in Piney Woods. Um, this is where my mom's people are from and where we've been here documented here. Since 1584/'85.
- 00:34 **Ryan** Keep going, you should be good. I'm gonna get my backpack.
- 00:37 **Charles** It should be good?
- 00:39 **Ryan** I honestly think so.
- 00:48 **Charles** It's raining everybody on the tin roof so we have a little delay 'cause we don't know how loud it's going to be, but, um, Uh, we've been documented here since 1584/1585, uh, with the English first exploration of, of America. Um, a man named John White was part of exploration. He was the premier map maker for the English at the time. He was renowned, I guess probably throughout most of Europe for his map making abilities. And he actually documented a town called Moratak. Um, when the English first came here on their first expedition, um, and it's right down the creek. The creek is right behind us here, but down on about four miles is the mouth of the creek where it enters the Roanoke, and that's where he mapped the village Moratak. And those, that's, we have been here in this community continuously since that time. Um, Uh, we were, as I was told, uh, this is always, my grandmother told me that this has always been Indian land. Um, the Indians owned it from, and passed it down from one generation to another. And, uh, we basically,

uh, allowed, you know, well, I guess the Europe Europeans, when they came here, they, they cohabited with us, uh, you know, lived alongside of us. Um, while we were still here, of course. And, uh, that's basically our first contact. We were one of the first groups of indigenous Americans to have contact with the English, uh, our people include the people of Hatteras, Roanoke Island, um, all of the [unintelligible] region. It was named Secretin. Uh, that's what the Euros called it and, um, uh, and they documented several towns and, uh, those, uh, several of those towns, we still to this day have small pockets of families that descend from those towns, uh, who we've been intermarrying with since the 1500s. Um, Let's see. Uh, the history is very vast. Uh, we connect to a lot of history in North Carolina, and not only North Carolina, other states as well. A lot of these places are already, have state markers and things for their towns and individuals and some of the individuals and towns and places. Uh, in, uh, monumental places like churches and things like that. We also connect to, for example, in North Carolina, uh, we connect directly to the oldest Quaker meeting in the state, which is called Piney Woods, and it's in Belvedere, North Carolina. Um, and it's, they have, they still have a monthly meeting there today, and it's supposedly the oldest. Living the oldest meeting house in the state of North Carolina continuous since, I want to say 1730s. It actually went to before then, but I think they documented from like the 1730s, 1790s, something like that. And um, uh, and we connect directly to them through the Pierce family. Uh, one of the Pierces was a member of that church in the 16 hundreds. The. Mid, mid to late 1600s. Another historic place we connect directly to that is recognized is, uh, the new Bold White House, which is the oldest brick structure in existence in North Carolina. Um, and it's already, as I said, recognized, uh, we connect directly to them through the Pierce family again, through, um, the Browning family. Uh, who and, uh, what was the other one? The Pierce, the Brownings and the Fraley Fraley family. Uh, it just so happens the guy who purchased that property was named Joseph Scott. He was a Quaker.

05:28 **Ryan** I don't want your stuff to get wet.

05:29 **Charles** Yeah, we don't want that... That's good. Uh uh, so I was saying the Joseph Scott was a Quaker. His son-in-law was a man named John Pierce who was directly tied to the Piney Woods Quaker meeting house

that I mentioned earlier. Um, and then you had William Fraley, who was also a son-in-law of Joseph Scott. Um, and you had, uh, uh, a Indian named Alexander. He was a New England Indian. He was a servant, or he was actually a slave. Um, uh, John Browning was a servant of Joseph Scott, the Indian Alexander, also known as Sanders. Later he was an Indian, new England Indian slave of Joseph Scott. Now how all these things kind of connect to Piney Woods is that Sanders and Pierce are two of the surnames of our community, and the Brownings actually were one of the first European peoples that purchased land here in the community. And we still have a field by the name of Browning Field, which is directly on the property line of a branch called Hornet's Branch. Now Hart's branch comes into the picture. This is another historical, uh, connection that we have, and it comes in through the fact that there was a man named Cornelius Hark. Uh, you had Cornelius Harnett, Sr and Jr Cornelius Harnett, Sr, um, he purchased property in this community, which the branch in our community that connects Browning Field is connected to. So, and Cornelius Harnett Sr had a son, Cornelius Jr who became known as the Samuel Adams of North Carolina in New England. You had a man named Samuel Adams. He was a major, uh, player in the Sons of Liberty, the American Revolution in, uh, Boston, Massachusetts. Uh, you know, uh, he was, uh, tied in with, uh, the future president of John Adams. I think they were cousins. They were first cousins. But anyways, um, Samuel Adams is considered the Sons of Liberty, uh, revolutionary, uh, for America in, in, uh, Massachusetts. Well before he had a Boston Tea Party, we had an Edenton Tea party and Cornelius Harnett organized that. Cornelius Harnett Jr organized that. And, um, that's the significance is that Cornelius Harnett Jr was born here in this community. Right, there, uh, you know, right basically in this community. Um, so, uh, and he's, they're also the Harnett are known as being the founders of Wilmington, um, Wilmington. Uh, they have a monument for Cornelius Harnett Jr there, so these are state things, state recognized and nationally recognized monuments that tie directly to this community. Um, let's see. Uh, now let's, I'll turn now to, uh, the, uh, history of our people. And our community going to, um, dating too. I will say we'll start with slavery and issues such as that. Okay. Um, our, my grandmother told me that Piney Woods is, is in, it's the Indians' land. It's always been the Indians' land. We've held the deed for the land down from generation to generation and it was a free place. It was the only free place around.

And there were no slaves. We'd never been under any slavery here. Now this has been passed down to her. This is the, the history: there has never been any slavery in Free Union, which is why we gave it the name Free Union because we were free people. So that is what my grandmother always expressed adamantly, is that this is Indians' land. We are free people. Never been under any slavery. She's told me that, um, repeatedly, um, through my childhood whenever I talk to her. And, um, so, uh, now we have, uh, a house that's being, um, that we're trying to get recognized in Plymouth called the, the Pettiford House. Um, it's actually called the Pettiford Armstead Picket, Picket Armistead Pettiford House. And those are the three prominent owners where the three prominent owners of that house. While that house is, um, we're trying to get it recognized as an underground railroad station because the river is, Roanoke River is already currently recognized as part of the Underground Railroad. Now, when I've done some digging with the history of the Pettiford house, uh, the Pettiford is the last prominent owner of the house. Um, he ties in with Piney Woods through he married, uh, a young lady named Nancy Pettiford. Nancy Pettiford name was Nancy James before she married the Pettiford. Nancy's mother's name was, um, was a Boston, and the Boston is our primary surname where all of us in Piney Woods descend from. We descend from, first of all, from an Indian woman born, born, somewhere between 1745 to '60 named Deeki. She had a two sons that we know of. One was David and one was Robert. Her children were, she had these children by a man named Boston. No first name was ever given, or at least is not known to us today. What his first name was, it was just, it was a Deeki and a man named Boston. Her two sons name were David and Robert Boston. Now, David Boston had all, he was primarily here in the Piney Woods community. His brother Robert, lived here in down the road in an area called Williams Township. Um, and his descendants are there and here as well. Um, Robert, uh, David Boston, uh, let's see. Uh, had seven daughters and three sons. Two of his daughters married Cordens. Cordens are considered Croatin and European. Two married Brooks's. Brooks are considered Indians. There was never any, um, tribal,uh, designation for them. They were just called Indians. Um, one married a James. The Jameses are co, uh, they're considered Indians that come from the out of the islands at the mouth of Welch's Creek, where our main village was in the 1500s. They lived out there, um, and they're considered Indians. Uh, one married a Sanders. That's where the

Sanders names come back in. Which I was telling you about earlier, being tied in with the New England Indian and the Browning's and the Pierces from the, uh, Newbold White House. The oldest stand, the oldest brick house in North Carolina. So you have all those families names right here in Piney Woods. Okay, so you got Sanders and one married a Simmons. Uh, the Simmons seemed to be from around, uh, Beaufort County, the Pungo River area, um, as far as I've traced them. Um, so those are the seven children and from them for about a hundred years. David Boston, born eig1897, 1887, around 1887. And um, he died somewhere around after 1860. And, um, he, uh, his children, he owned over 1,450 acres of land documented. I have the deeds for this land between 1816, which is first documented deed for 50 acres, which he paid a hundred dollars in cash for, to a man named Francis Ward. Francis Ward was prominent in the, um, colonial government.

- 14:40 **Ryan** We can switch tables if you want. Are you getting wet?
- 14:42 **Charles** Yeah, yeah, we can switch. Yeah, my stuff's starting to get wet too.
- 14:49 **Ryan** All Right. Sorry about that.
- 14:51 **Charles** That's okay. Go... this one? This one'll work?
- 14:58 **Ryan** This one will work.
- 15:19 **Charles** I forgot where I was. I was talking about... I lost what I was talking about.
- 15:31 **Ryan** You were talking about... you re-mentioned the Sanders, where the Sanders got re, uh, and how the, the people's names were, they were referred to as Indians, not anything else.
- 15:46 **Charles** Right, the Brooks. Um, okay. David Boston's family. I was what I was talking about. Okay.
- 15:54 **Ryan** Yeah, we got it! We got it! Awesome, go for it

15:59 Charles

So we were, I was, we had to move tables, we were getting wet. So I'm gonna try to pick up where I left off. Um, so, uh, I was talking about David Boston's children and the seven daughters. And the three sons, and, uh, David, uh, from what I've been able to gather from his history. David, uh, owned over 1,450 acres of land he purchased between 1816 and 1843. When he started wheeling it off, you know, to his children, that is equivalent to 2 point, I think it's 2.2 square miles of land. So he was a very, very prominent landowner. Um, he was also David Boston. I have him on the um, Uh, war of 1812 roster has, uh, David is listed as David Bain with a a instead of with a O. But if you consider it old English Boston, Boston, is, you know, people didn't have any uniform spelling. They spelled it how it sounded, so, um, but yes, he was a war of 1812 veteran, uh, for Martin County listed in the Martin County militia. Um, uh, again, he, by 1843, he owned 200, uh, which I think is 2.27 acres, I mean square miles of land. Um, this community is also known one of its major historic accomplishments, being a free community. We were also known for our, um, church. Uh, the church is a Disciples of Christ Church. Now I've done a history on that church. Um, and what I was able to find out about the church is that the church was a Baptist church around 1830. And then these two father and son team in this man named O'Kelly, I as well came around preaching O'Kelly. I became a, was another type of, uh, um, sect of religion, um, similar to the Disciples. They shared a lot in common. The Disciples' man were Thomas, and I think it was Alexander Campbell. They were going around this area, preaching the Disciples, converting a lot of Baptist churches to Disciples, so Free Union. They came to what was then Welch's Creek Church, which is not far down the road from where we're at right now. We're at the, the new church. Um, uh, but at that time in the 1830s at Welch's Creek Church, the history states that it consisted of Whites, their slaves, and Indians. And this was in 1830, so they already had a mixed congregation of people in 1830 at the church. Um, again, it states that they were Indians. So there you have again that Indians were up the main source of, of people that were here. Going back to what my grandmother says, that this has always been Indian land, all this history is confirming, all these documents are confirming the oral history that I've been told. Um, and these documents are in, you know, Martin County history, all these different, uh, credible history books for this, for the county. Okay, so, um, the church became, by 1854, the church became all Indian and they said Free Negro, um, by

1854, that is the Civil War didn't take place until 1860/'61. So therefore, you have, before the Civil War, you have a group of people. Preaching with its own denomination called the Disciples of Christ that were organized in this community. This is considered the Mother church, and it started out as a church of mixed Whites, their slaves in Indians in 1830-36, and by '18 they said between 1845 and '54, it became all Indian and African, free African Peoples. Um, this predates almost, especially in the South, this would predate a lot of, I don't know of any other place that has a church date back that far with its own denomination where the leaders, the people who formed it were from this community, and then we branched out and went to our, I mentioned earlier, the other Indian communities around. That were still in existence. We went to them and formed churches there all the way up into New York, Long Island. We have to this, today we have churches in Long Island from Long Island, Camden, New Jersey, Philly. They're what were called Colored Disciple Churches, or now they may be called African American Disciples of Christ Churches. Any Disciples of Christ Church that is of color is stems from the foundation. Of this church right here, which was called the Mother Church even in 1836. It was called the Mother Church when it was mixed congregation with a White minister. It was the mother, they called this the Mother Church. This church here in Piney Woods was called Welch Creek. It became the mother church of the White churches as well that are around here today, and they consider us the mother church. So again, There that is a very, uh, significant piece of history that is not known throughout the country that should be known because, uh, that really is highlighting the, the uniqueness in the integrity of our community and our people and our connection with the creator. You know, um, we've always loved God, you know, and um, so that is why I wanted to stress that point about. Um, you know, the history of the church now getting back to the Underground Railroad in the Pettiford House. The Pettiford House has an oral history. The last owner was Gladys Pettiford. She was the daughter of Nancy. And, ugh, I forget, I forgot what Nancy's husband's name was, but it wasn't Alfred. It was, um, Anyways, I can't remember his name right now. I got a blank, blank on his name. But, um, Nancy was the dau, was the granddaughter. Well, the granddaughter of David Boston, the founder of Piney Woods, his granddaughter, a great granddaughter. I'm kind of getting a little foggy right now. Um, but anyways, um, she descends from David Boston, not far from David

Boston. Um, and, um, When you start talking about, people have asked me in the past, what do you think about Piney Woods being, uh, part of the Underground Railroad? And I always say, say to them, you're asking the wrong question. The question should be, how could it not be part of the Underground Railroad? Here you have a free community dating back to forever since the recording of 1854 when they recorded the village Moratak. We've been here, we've never been under slavery. How could you have a free community four miles down the creek from where a reported underground railroad house is and this community being free, not be part of helping slaves escape to freedom? I mean, the question is, shouldn't be, um, could it, could we be part of the Underground Railroad? It's like, how could we not be? So there is no question in my mind with the proximity. And I got another piece of information for you. The proximity of the community to the Pettiford house, which is right down the creek, four miles. But we also have another piece of information called the Indian Kettle. Now my grandmother. And some of the older elders who are now are gone from here told me that as a kid. My grandmother said she never went, but she said some of her, you know her, her brother and other people went and they said, let's go to the Indian cattle when they were kids. Come on. And they used to go to the Indian kittling when it was, was a big hole in the ground by the creek, on, on the creek. And it was bricked in. And you could live in there. My grandmother said you could specifically live in there. And I remember as a child, they're telling me that, yeah, we used to hide in there. We used to go and hide in there. When White people would come around, we would go and hide in there. So, um, that is one of the places that, uh, few people have interest in finding out where it was. Unfortunately, it's not on our property now and getting access to it might be a problem. But, um, it did exist and I've looked up the name word There's a word called 'ket ta' in Algonquin language, which the Moratak were an Algonquin speaking people along with the Secretin, the Hatteras. All of us were Algonquin. We spoke to Algonquin language and um, uh, I looked up the word 'ket ta' and it means ground dwelling. So the corruption of the Indian Kettle, the Indian 'ket ta' is really close. That it could be kettle, could be a corruption of the Algonquin word 'ket ta' which means ground dwelling or hole in the ground. Um, but, uh, that's another, you know, real, uh, striking piece of history. So now you have the Pettiford house, you have the Indian Kettle, and you have a free Colored community all on four miles from



the mouth of the Roanoke River or the town of Plymouth. How could we not be part of the Underground Railroad? That is the question that should be, uh, asked. Um, let's see. Uh, what else did I want to tell you about? Um, Do you have any questions?

27:14 **Ryan** No, no. So from, from that point, so from the fact that this community played an integral part in the on Underground Railroad, or how, how could, as you pose it, how, how could it not have from then till now, what do you think some important pieces of the history are that you would want to highlight?

27:36 **Charles** I would think, uh, the church, the church history is very significant because that, I mean, we went all over the world opening churches, you know, introducing, you know, um, Yahweh, you know, to the, you know, throughout the world, you know? Uh, so I think that that is a very, very significant part. Um, you know, and we've always been spiritual people, so, um, You know, there's nothing greater than being close to the Creator. So that would be number one. Uh, number two is all the historic events that we've places that are already historically recognized, like the, um, the, uh, new bold White House, the Piney Woods, uh, Quaker meeting House, uh, the, uh, Cornelius Harnett Monument down in Wilmington. And I did, I left out. We were the first peoples to go to Indiana when that opened up as territory. Um, I have censuses that show some of my people left here and they end up in 1830. They're here in Piney Woods in particular. His name was Gilford Brooks. He was listed here in Jamestown with the rest of my family in 1840. He's listed in Indiana. With a bunch of other people, some people named Lale and which are, are Lumbee kinsman and, um, uh, various other names. Roberts, the Roberts settlement, which out there to, to this very day, they have, uh, have been having a 4th of July family reunion while Mike Gilford Brooks, which is probably one of my great-great-great grandfather's brothers, he's buried in their cemetery. You know, we were part of the Great Migration and they, they highlight that in Indiana, the coming of the Free Coloreds and the Methodists and the, uh, Quakers that came and informed communities in that unsettled, what they called unsettled territory in the 1830s, they commemorate us. We are historically known in, in Indiana as coming, leaving North Carolina and going there. Not only that, we also tie in with, um, is it Liber? A man named Paul Cuffy, who is also often considered the first they call him

African American entrepreneur of, in the United States, but he actually, his mother was a Wampanoag, um, uh, uh, from, uh, Nantucket Cudi hunk, uh, up that way in Massachusetts. And, um, his father was an African Ashanti named Cuffy. So Paul Cuffy, he started the Back to Africa movement in 1860. He brought a whole bunch of people to, I believe it was, to form the, the what became Liberia. And he brought a whole bunch of them came from North Carolina again, if they, and this is all in the time period when people were leaving North Carolina due to this slavery and things such as that nature. Um, But, um, so we tie again to, and he's considered the first African American entrepreneur in this country. So we tied directly to him in the fact that he brought a lot of us to Liberia, to form Liberia. Um, so that would be another highlight. Uh, let's see. Um, what else would I like to highlight? Uh, basically we were the first, that's the other part. We were the first. We were the first people to, first people to encounter the English, have extensive contact with the English. We were the first people who had our King's head cut off. His name was W- Wingina. They took his head because a cup was stolen at one of our villages. A silver cup they say was stolen or disappeared. It was, and they were looking for it. And the English, we were looking for the silver cup and they gave the ultimatum to have the cup returned by a certain time. It didn't get returned, so the leader of the part of the English party burned that village. After he burned that village, our chief named Wingina, sent word out to watch out for the English. They're coming, they'll probably destroy your village, villages. So the word went out. So when the English started coming, doing more explorations, they found out that the Morataks, which is where I'm at now. We're at here, Piney Woods was the village, Moratak. He said he was hoping to find food to continue his journey up. The ro—this is Ralph Lane, general Governor Ralph Lane he was in charge of a military colony, which was before the lost colony. The year before the lost colony, they sent a military colony of over a hundred men, and so they burned a village because of the cup. Wingina, our chief, to watch out for the English warned us all when the English came to do explorations, we hid from 'em. And he said when he got to the village, Moraktak, that the Indians had hid all their corn and their women, went into the in mainland inland, and hid all their corn and are in the mainland with their women. And, um, uh, and then they were attacked further down the river as the, uh, English went further down the river. We attacked, we attacked them. And, um, so, uh, we were the first to get for, to have

extensive contact. The first, so after that attack, Ralph Lane went, after Wingina, they shot him. One of his soldiers went in the woods and took his head. So we were the first ones to have a village burn, the first one to have extensive contact, first people to have a village burn, first people to have one of our kings killed by the English. Okay. We were the first people to, um, manual. Manuel was the first Indian baptized by the English or Christian by the English. So we have the first Indian in America, Christian by the, in English, and given the title of Lordship, which didn't mean nothing to us, but you know, to the English, oh yeah, we're gonna make you a king anyways. Uh, so we had the first. Baptized Indian First English child, born in America, Virginia. Dare Born three days after two or three days after Mano was baptized in Christian King. Okay, uh, let's see what else we have first. Uh, uh, we were the first. We were the first that the English encountered, and that is very significant because no other group of people can say that. And we're still here. We are still here. And our other main sister community is Madam Mesquite in Hyde County. Gotta mention Madam Mesquite because that is where, uh, W's main capital was in that area. He had a house on Roanoke and he had one, uh, in the Madam Mesquite area. Um, so the Madam Mesquite, so when we, uh, Madam Mesquite were, were originally the Secotin Nation. The Moratak had their own group. The, the Secotin had their leader. Um, but anyways, um, that would be one of the main things to let the people know that we are still here. We have no type of recognition. I mean, you, you've got all these other tribes, the Naragansis, the, the Wampanoags, the Nansmen, the Nodaway, the Chicahamonee, all those guys are recognized. And they were after us. They, they got recognition, whether it be state or and or federal. We deserve that same type of respect and, and honor because we are still here. Never been conquered, never been on a reservation. We are still on our homeland never surrendered. Yet, no one knows about us. So I'm hoping that this gets out there and the people get to hear, you know, know, know more about this story. And, um, I guess that would be about all I'd have to say unless, uh, Ryan has something else to add.

36:09 **Ryan** That's awesome. All right. You nailed that. I appreciate it. All right. I'll make sure to share this with you.

36:17 **Charles** All right. After you edit it, yeah, yeah. Yeah. I hope I did good.

36:21 **Ryan** Yeah, no, you did great. Yeah.