

**Addendum to
Muscogee Nation of Florida (Petitioner #32)
Response to Office of Indian Affairs
Technical Assistance Letter
dated 11 April 1996**

compiled by

James M. McClurken, Ph.D.
and
Heather Howard, Ph.D.

James M. McClurken & Associates
1120 Keystone Avenue
Lansing, Michigan 48911

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Rationale

On 11 April 1996, the Muscogee Nation of Florida (formerly Florida Tribe of Eastern Creek Indians, petitioner #32 submitted in 1995, hereafter Muscogee Nation) received, from the Bureau of Indian Affairs Branch of Acknowledgment and Research (now the Office of Federal Acknowledgment, hereafter OFA), a technical assistance review of their petition for federal acknowledgment.¹ In 2002, the Muscogee Nation responded to this technical assistance review with a 106-page narrative accompanied by three volumes of exhibits.² Receipt of this response was acknowledged by the Bureau of Indian Affairs with a preliminary inventory of the response compiled by OFA staffperson Virginia Easley DeMarce, 8-9 April 2002.³ The following narrative is an addendum to the Muscogee Nation's initial response to deficiencies raised in the

¹ Harry A. Rainbolt to John C. B. Thomas, 11 April 1996, Muscogee Nation of Florida, Bruce Office [Hereafter MNOF-Bruce].

² Muscogee Nation of Florida, Petitioner No. 32, TA Review Letter Response, 14 March 2002, MNOF-Bruce.

³ Preliminary Inventory, 8-9 April 2002, MNOF-MNOF-Bruce; R. Lee Fleming to Anne D. Tucker, 11 April 2002, MNOF-Bruce.

technical assistance review. The narrative follows the order of “specific concerns” and “general comments,” raised in the 1996 review and provides information that is supplementary to the Muscogee Nation’s 2002 response.

Specific Concerns

1. OFA requested clarification of the apparent similarities between the documentation supporting the Muscogee Nation’s petition and that of two other petitioners, the Lower Muskogee Creek, and the Principal Creek Nation, both of whom were denied federal acknowledgment.

Several points of clarification are needed on the history and composition of the various organizations the OFA has identified as representing Creek people in West Florida.

The Muscogee Nation of Florida (a.k.a. Florida Tribe of Eastern Creek Indians)

This petitioner (#32), the Muscogee Nation of Florida, was formerly known under only one other name, the Florida Tribe of Eastern Creek Indians (hereafter, Florida Tribe). The Florida Tribe, centered at Bruce, Florida, formally organized in 1978.⁴ At that time, representatives from the Bruce community were providing leadership to the Governor-appointed Northwest Florida Creek Indian Council, discussed below. The formal establishment of the Florida Tribe followed a succession of informal leadership present in the Bruce community since its founding in the mid to late nineteenth century. This leadership had been provided primarily by members of the Ward family through institutions such as the Bruce School (founded in 1895) and the Bruce Methodist Church (founded in 1912).⁵ The Florida Tribe had an administrative

⁴ “Smoke Signals by the Northwest Florida Creek Indian Council,” item from unidentified newspaper, 1978, MNOF-Bruce.

⁵ Church Register of the Bruce Methodist Episcopal Church, South, 1912-1922, MNOF-Bruce; Appendix A, “Bruce Area Schools Information.”

relationship with the Northwest Florida Creek Indian Council through a corporation called the Florida Tribe of Eastern Creek Indians, Inc., a non-profit organization.⁶ In 1986, the State of Florida recognized the Florida Tribe as a governing entity.⁷

While the majority of Florida Tribe members concentrated at Bruce, a number of other Creek Indian people who lived in other parts of Northwest Florida were accepted as members by the Florida Tribe. In 2001, the Florida Tribe formally changed its name to the Muscogee Nation of Florida (MNOF).⁸ Since that time, the Muscogee Nation has made modifications to its membership eligibility requirements, which have resulted in reducing the overall membership numbers to include only those individuals with a direct and specific affiliation with the community concentrated at Bruce.

The Northwest Florida Creek Indian Council

The Northwest Florida Creek Indian Council was created in 1975 by Florida House of Representatives Bill 2306.⁹ The purpose of the Council was to enable Creek Indians and their descendants in Northwest Florida to take advantage of state, local, and federal programs for their

⁶ Articles of Incorporation of Florida Tribe of Eastern Creek Indians, Inc., 16 May 1981, MNOF-Bruce.

⁷ Resolution 1146, Recognizing and Honoring the Florida Tribe of Eastern Creek Indians, 30 May 1986, NARA-DC, RG279, Closed Docketed Case Files 1947-1982, Docket 21, Box 319, file: N/A, Bound Volume; A Concurrent Resolution Recognizing the Florida Tribe of Eastern Creek Indians, 22 April 1986, NARA-DC, RG279, Closed Docketed Case Files 1947-1982, Docket 21, Box 319, file: N/A, Bound Volume.

⁸ Constitution of the Muscogee Nation of Florida, 21 January 2001, Muscogee Nation of Florida, Blountstown Office [Hereafter MNOF-Blountstown].

⁹ "An Act relating to Native Americans, creating the Northwest Florida Creek Indian Council, providing for membership and method of appointment, providing for the duties and power of the Council, providing for severability, providing for an effective date," Chapter 75-370, Florida House Bill No. 2306, ca. 1 July 1975, MNOF-Bruce.

economic, cultural, and social advancement.¹⁰ This Council originally consisted of nine members appointed by the Governor, seven of whom were required to be Creek Indians, and who were. The Council's members were drawn from the counties across West Florida. Representatives from the Bruce community worked actively in this Council. In 1978, the Council facilitated the formation of the Florida Tribe of Eastern Creek Indians, Inc., as a vehicle for grant and funding efforts, and served as the administrator for this non-profit organization, which was centered at Bruce, Florida.¹¹ Subsequent to state recognition of the Florida Tribe by resolution of the Florida State Legislature in 1986, the Northwest Florida Creek Indian Council had little or no relationship with the Muscogee Nation.

The Lower Muskogee Creek

As detailed in the Muscogee Nation's initial response to the OFA's technical assistance review, until the OFA drew the Muscogee Nation's attention to the failed petition of the Lower Muskogee Creek, the Muscogee Nation had no knowledge that this petition existed.¹² Upon reviewing the Lower Muskogee petition documents that the OFA provided to the Muscogee Nation, it was discovered that one Muscogee Nation member had been implicated without his

¹⁰ History of Northwest Florida Creek Indian Council, ca. 1979, MNOF-Bruce; "An Act relating to Native Americans, creating the Northwest Florida Creek Indian Council, providing for membership and method of appointment, providing for the duties and power of the Council, providing for severability, providing for an effective date," Chapter 75-370, Florida House Bill No. 2306, ca. 1 July 1975, MNOF-Bruce.

¹¹ Muscogee Nation of Florida, Petitioner No. 32, TA Review Letter Response, 14 March 2002, MNOF-Bruce, p. 7.

¹² Muscogee Nation of Florida, Petitioner No. 32, TA Review Letter Response, 14 March 2002, MNOF-Bruce, pp. 3-13. The Muscogee Nation has no association with this group, and because the Muscogee Nation has little knowledge about the Lower Muskogee Creek group, researchers cannot describe it with any authority, and reserve their response to information about them that they can draw from Muscogee Nation records.

knowledge in the documentation supporting the Lower Muskogee Creek group's petition. Dr. Andrew Ramsey, a member of the Muscogee Nation and a scholar of Creek history and culture, provided informal technical assistance to Wesley Thomley, who represented himself as the "Vice-Chief of the Lower Creek Muskogee Tribe."¹³ Dr. Ramsey had no intention that his assistance be translated into membership in a tribe other than the Muscogee Nation. Wesley Thomley was known to the Muscogee Nation briefly in the late 1970s when he was an appointed member of the Northwest Florida Creek Indian Council. There, he represented himself as a leader of Muskogee Creeks, an assertion which could not be verified by the Muscogee Nation at that time. The Muscogee Nation, however, re-emphasizes that Mr. Thomley was never a member or representative of the Muscogee Nation.¹⁴

In addition to Wesley Thomley, the OFA identified W. V. Williams as a member of both the Lower Muskogee group and of the Muscogee Nation. W. V. Williams was at one time a member of the Muscogee Nation, but relinquished his membership to join the Poarch Band of Creek Indians.¹⁵ Williams was an appointed member of the Northwest Florida Creek Indian Council, and used that position to unlawfully alter the charter of the Florida Tribe of Eastern Creek Indians Inc.¹⁶ This action was redressed through district court action in 1990, which

¹³ Petition for Federal Acknowledgement [sic] of the Lower Creek Muskogee Tribe East of the Mississippi as an Indian Tribe, April 1979, United States Department of the Interior, Office of Federal Acknowledgment (Washington, D.C.).

¹⁴ A more detailed explanation of these events was outlined in the Muscogee Nation's initial response to the OFA technical assistance review; Muscogee Nation of Florida, Petitioner No. 32, TA Review Letter Response, 14 March 2002, MNOF-Bruce, pp. 3-13.

¹⁵ Muscogee Nation of Florida, Petitioner No. 32, TA Review Letter Response, 14 March 2002, MNOF-Bruce, p. 3.

¹⁶ Muscogee Nation of Florida, Petitioner No. 32, TA Review Letter Response, 14 March 2002, MNOF-Bruce, p. 5.

recognized the Florida Tribe of Eastern Creek Indians as a sovereign.¹⁷

Regarding the similarity in documents supporting both the Muscogee Nation petition and the Lower Muskogee Creek's petition, the Muscogee Nation did not supply any of these documents to the Lower Muskogee Creek, and was unaware of their use, or how they were obtained. Some were in the public domain, and others may have been supplied by individuals who are not members of the Muscogee Nation but who may nonetheless share family histories with some Muscogee Nation members.¹⁸

Principal Creek Nation

As the Muscogee Nation stated in its initial response to the OFA, the tribe was familiar with the activities of a man named Arthur Turner who, in the 1970s, was involved in the activities of a group called the Principal Creek Nation.¹⁹ As with the Lower Muskogee Creek, the Muscogee Nation has had no formal association with the Principal Creek Nation.²⁰ To the knowledge of the Muscogee Nation, the Principal Creek Nation was not a tribal group with a community or clearly defined membership, but consisted of a small collection of possible Creek

¹⁷ *Florida Tribe of Eastern Creek Indians and Florida Tribe of Eastern Creek Indians, Inc. v. W. V. Williams et al.*, Notice of Hearing, 23 October 1990, MNOF-Bruce; *Florida Tribe of Eastern Creek Indians and Florida Tribe of Eastern Creek Indians, Inc. v. W. V. Williams et al.*, Answer to Counterclaim for Declaratory Relief and Injunction, rec. 16 November 1990, MNOF-Bruce.

¹⁸ Muscogee Nation of Florida, Petitioner No. 32, TA Review Letter Response, 14 March 2002, MNOF-Bruce, p. 6.

¹⁹ Muscogee Nation of Florida, Petitioner No. 32, TA Review Letter Response, 14 March 2002, MNOF-Bruce, p. 8.

²⁰ Muscogee Nation of Florida, Petitioner No. 32, TA Review Letter Response, 14 March 2002, MNOF-Bruce, p. 8.

descendants across Florida and Alabama.²¹ The Muscogee Nation has known the person calling himself the leader of the Principal Creek Nation, Arthur Turner, primarily as a Walton County employee.²² Turner did not obtain any documentation to support his petition through the council or members of the Muscogee Nation, although this may not have prevented him from obtaining his evidence by means outside the control of the Muscogee Nation. As stated in the Muscogee Nation's initial response, the Muscogee Nation "cannot be held responsible for historical data that other people have submitted without our knowledge or consent or for data that others have subsequently misrepresented to OFA."²³

2. OFA interpreted a letter of intent to petition for federal acknowledgment received from the "Apalachicola Band of Creek Indians" as a "split" in the Muscogee Nation and requested further explanation of these circumstances and its impact on Muscogee Nation membership.

Summarizing the Muscogee Nation's 2002 response, the "Apalachicola Band of Creek Indians" was unknown to the Muscogee Nation before it was informed by the OFA that the Apalachicola Band had submitted a letter of intent to petition for federal acknowledgment in 1995.²⁴ The leader of the Apalachicola Band, "Mary Blount" was known to the Muscogee Nation, as Mary Lou Blunt Morris. The Muscogee Nation first met Blunt Morris in 1984 when

²¹ Muscogee Nation of Florida, Petitioner No. 32, TA Review Letter Response, 14 March 2002, MNOF-Bruce, p. 8.

²² Muscogee Nation of Florida, Petitioner No. 32, TA Review Letter Response, 14 March 2002, MNOF-Bruce, pp. 3, 8.

²³ Muscogee Nation of Florida, Petitioner No. 32, TA Review Letter Response, 14 March 2002, MNOF-Bruce, p. 11.

²⁴ Muscogee Nation of Florida, Petitioner No. 32, TA Review Letter Response, 14 March 2002, MNOF-Bruce, pp. 13-14.

she requested assistance with her personal genealogical research.²⁵ Blunt Morris was accepted as a Muscogee Nation member in 1990, however, she was disenrolled when Muscogee Nation discovered she claimed membership in another “tribe,” in violation of the Muscogee Nation membership policy.²⁶

Mary Lou Blunt Morris appears to have changed her name to Blount and laid claim through hereditary lines to the historic Creek Reservation at Blountstown, in Calhoun County, Florida. Blountstown is near Bruce and some Muscogee Nation members, including Dr. Andrew Ramsey, reside there. The Calhoun County Board of Commissioners has recognized the Muscogee Nation by resolution, and to the knowledge of the Muscogee Nation, has not recognized any other Creek tribe. This would indicate that there is no local acknowledgment of the “Apalachicola Band.”²⁷ The Muscogee Nation believes that Dr. Ramsey’s reputation as an authority on Creek history and culture was again used without his permission in support of the intention to petition conveyed by Mary Blount to OFA.²⁸ Dr. Ramsey’s personal ancestry is known by many in the area, and it was incorporated by Ms. Blunt Morris/Blount as evidence in support of the Apalachicola Band membership roll which the Muscogee Nation believes was constructed from a sign-in sheet for a meeting held in Blountstown.²⁹ It is the understanding of

²⁵ Muscogee Nation of Florida, Petitioner No. 32, TA Review Letter Response, 14 March 2002, MNOF-Bruce, p. 15.

²⁶ Muscogee Nation of Florida, Petitioner No. 32, TA Review Letter Response, 14 March 2002, MNOF-Bruce, pp. 16-17.

²⁷ Resolution - 17, A resolution honoring the Florida Tribe of Eastern Creek Indians, 15 August 2000, MNOF-Bruce.

²⁸ Muscogee Nation of Florida, Petitioner No. 32, TA Review Letter Response, 14 March 2002, MNOF-Bruce, p. 18.

²⁹ Muscogee Nation of Florida, Petitioner No. 32, TA Review Letter Response, 14 March 2002, MNOF-Bruce, p. 18.

the Muscogee Nation that those individuals who signed the attendance sheet did not know that their names would be used as a membership roll in the “Apalachicola Band of Creek Indians.”³⁰

The actions of the “Apalachicola Band of Creek Indians,” therefore, do not necessarily indicate a split in the Muscogee Nation of Florida, but rather represent the efforts by one individual, disenrolled from the Muscogee Nation almost fifteen years ago, to pursue federal acknowledgment by means that the Muscogee Nation deems unethical. The correspondence between the “Apalachicola Band” and the OFA does not constitute a form of additional information to the Muscogee Nation petition files, yet the OFA assigned the same petition number (32) to the “Apalachicola Band of Creek Indians” file. The Muscogee Nation restates its request that this be corrected.

General Comments:

3. Where missing, photocopies of all sources cited in the original petition were requested, including oral history interviews and the title pages of books and articles.

The three volumes of exhibits submitted with the Muscogee Nation’s 2002 response addressed this concern.³¹ However, in her 8-9 April 2002 preliminary inventory of these exhibits, OFA staffperson Virginia DeMarce noted that some documents were submitted out of sequence or were missing pages. It is not possible for researchers to complete the final compilation of these exhibits to reflect all necessary corrections because many of the documents were manuscripts or partial documents for which no citation can be ascertained. Where possible,

³⁰ Muscogee Nation of Florida, Petitioner No. 32, TA Review Letter Response, 14 March 2002, MNOF-Bruce, p. 18.

³¹ Muscogee Nation of Florida, Petitioner No. 32, TA Review Letter Response, 14 March 2002, MNOF-Bruce.

researchers have identified sources to remedy these omissions and errors. Supplementary documents which may be of assistance are enclosed. The specific actions that the researchers recommend to the Muscogee Nation to complete the reply to the TA review on this point can be found in Appendix B.

In her inventory, OFA staffperson Virginia DeMarce also noted that official documents submitted with the Muscogee Nation's initial response required official signatures. The Muscogee Nation addressed this concern in May of 2002.³² Additional supporting documents included with this submission pertain to the present narrative and its accompanying exhibits.

4. In relation to Criterion 83.7(a), OFA asked that Muscogee Nation:

i) address the omission of external identifications of the group as a body of Creek Indians between 1900 and 1970, and;

ii) clarify the specific relationship between Muscogee Nation and the Creek Nation East of the Mississippi between the 1950s and 1970s.

i) Florida state laws implemented after the American Civil War served as a catalyst for the formation of Creek Indian Communities in Alabama and Florida and as a bar to their overt identity as Indians between 1852 and the 1940s. The Florida legislature passed legislation in 1852 designed to remove all Indians from within its borders. This law specifically stated that,

It shall be unlawful for any Indian or Indians to remain within the limits of this State, and any Indian or Indians that may remain, or may be found within the limits of this State, shall be captured and sent west of the Mississippi; provided that Indians and half-breeds residing among the whites shall not be included in this section.³³

³² Ann D. Tucker to Mr. Fleming, 11 May 2002, MNOF-Bruce.

³³ "An Act to provide for the Final Removal of the Indians of this State, and for other purposes," 1852, Florida Statutes, Ch. 555, No. 76, Section 1, p. 133.

After the passage of the 1852 laws, Indians all but ceased to exist in Florida records for nearly one hundred years. Creek descendants who resided in the state were not identified as Indians in any federal or state censuses produced during the second half of the nineteenth and first half of the twentieth centuries. Analysis of Florida law shows that from 1852 forward, “Indian people would be designated as Negro, if their skin was dark, Mulatto if they appeared to be lighter skin, or white if they could pass.”³⁴ Further,

Application of racial terminology in Florida appears arbitrary over time, based simply on subjective standards of the recorder rather than upon historical and genealogical information. The number of cases for violation of the State’s fornication laws show that where an individual is identified as Negro in one instance might be identified as Mulatto or even white in another. Visual recognition was the basis for racial designation, but nonetheless Indian was not an option.³⁵

Anti-miscegenation laws designed to separate races and assign dark skinned people an inferior social status assured that as many Creeks who could identify themselves as “whites” did so. Indians remained silent about their identity to avoid violence and sanctions against their persons and their families. They formed communities in isolated regions of Florida where they could live free of discrimination and violence accorded to racial minorities – threats that remained real for Creek Indians until passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964.³⁶

ii) The Muscogee Nation is a community of Creek Indians who have lived at and around Bruce, Florida, from the mid-nineteenth century to the present, as discussed below in the

³⁴ Memorandum from Joseph L. Kitto to Chairwoman Tucker and the Muscogee Nation of Florida Tribal Council, 30 July 2004, MNOF-Bruce.

³⁵ Memorandum from Joseph L. Kitto to Chairwoman Tucker and the Muscogee Nation of Florida Tribal Council, 30 July 2004, MNOF-Bruce.

³⁶ Memorandum from Joseph L. Kitto to Chairwoman Tucker and the Muscogee Nation of Florida Tribal Council, 30 July 2004, MNOF-Bruce.

section titled, "In relation to Criterion 83.7(b), 5." Evidence indicates that the Bruce, Florida, population descends from several Creek ancestors, who were either identified on the 1832 Parsons and Abbott Creek Census, identified as "Indian" on a census or other nineteenth century record, were collateral or lineal relatives of these individuals, or were persons accepted as Creek ancestors for the purpose of Indian Claims Commission Dockets 21, 272, or 275.³⁷ Like the members of the Poarch Band of Creek Indians who were federally recognized in 1984, Muscogee Nation members also descend from individuals identified as Creeks in the nineteenth century, including:

Mary Polly Bailey
Sarah Cochran
Eliza Danneley
Nimrod Doyle
James Earle
Elizabeth English
Mariah Padgett
Isaac Simmons
Arthur Sizemore
William Tarvin
Richard Taylor
Daniel David Ward
James B. Ward
Elijah Ward
Joshua Wiggins
Lydia Wright

Researchers have assembled sixteen family history charts which begin with each of these ancestors (usually during the eighteenth century) and chart their relationships to their Muscogee Nation descendants in the twentieth century. They are included with this narrative as "Muscogee Nation Creek Indian Ancestry," presented in Appendix C.³⁸

³⁷ Eastern Creek Number List, n.d. #889, MNOF-Bruce.

³⁸ Vital records have not been gathered to complete family trees linking all Muscogee Nation members to specific Creek ancestors. Circumstantial evidence, however, points to lineal and collateral links between

Descendants of these historic Creeks congregated along the Choctawhatchee River in Walton County, Florida by the mid to late nineteenth century. A study of Creek demographic patterns in the Bruce area, using federal census data and Muscogee Nation genealogies, shows that Muscogee Nation ancestors began to congregate near Bruce, Florida, by 1900. Maps in Appendix D show the distribution of Muscogee Nation households within a fifty mile radius of Bruce. The majority of Muscogee Nation households had congregated at Bruce proper by 1900. The second largest grouping was located at Freeport, some ten miles west of Bruce.³⁹ By 1910, the number of Bruce households had almost doubled as families moved from Freeport to the tribe's center.⁴⁰ The number of Bruce households remained relatively constant in 1920 and in 1930, the last year for which federal census data is available for analysis.⁴¹

Muscogee Nation members and Creeks who lived in Alabama where ancestors of the Poarch Creeks also once lived. Researchers may not be able to complete these charts because vital records that would establish positive links and complete the evidence may not exist. Very few vital records were kept until the late nineteenth century. Where records were kept, they most often show the identity of men rather than women. Since many of the ancestral links between the modern Muscogee Nation membership and the historic Creek population from which they descend are women, researchers may never be able to finalize the picture of Muscogee Nation family linages. 25 CFR Part 83.6 (e) makes provisions for instances where evidence is demonstrably limited:

Evaluation of petitions shall take into account historical situations and time periods for which evidence is demonstrably limited or not available. The limitations inherent in demonstrating the historical existence of community and political influence or authority shall also be taken into account. Existence of community and political influence or authority shall be demonstrated on a substantially continuous basis, but this demonstration does not require meeting these criteria at every point in time. Fluctuations in tribal activity during various years shall not in themselves be a cause for denial of acknowledgment under these criteria.

The absence of Muscogee Nation genealogical evidence should be evaluated in light of this regulation.

³⁹ Appendix D, Map entitled "1900 Demographics." A list of households accompanies each of the maps in Appendix D.

⁴⁰ Appendix D, Map entitled "1910 Demographics."

⁴¹ Appendix D, Maps entitled "1920 Demographics" and "1930 Demographics."

Information on file in the Muscogee Nation office allowed for the reconstruction of household patterns for the years between 1955 and 1965, and for the modern Muscogee Nation membership.⁴² The number of Muscogee Nation households had substantially increased by mid-twentieth century but residency patterns remained the same. The majority of tribe members lived at Bruce, Florida, with a second smaller concentration of households at Freeport. Muscogee Nation members and their ancestors were the majority population at Bruce, Florida, through at least the first sixty-five years of the twentieth century. The Muscogee Nation population has continued to grow, but a majority of their numbers still reside within a fifty mile radius of Bruce, Florida.⁴³ The continuity and growth of the Muscogee Nation population centered at Bruce during the twentieth century is a mark of the community's vitality.

While Florida state government systematically discriminated against Indians between 1852 and 1964, Walton County officers made allowances for their Indian constituents who lived at and around Bruce. County tax assessors recognized the distinctly Indian population at Bruce and made exceptions in tax collection practices. Patrick Pilcher, Walton County Property Appraiser, wrote,

As evidenced in the public records of Walton County and From Walton County tax rolls of prior years, the early residents of the community of Bruce, Florida paid minimal or no property taxes prior to the 1980's [sic]. Many residences existed on lands not owner occupied.

A vast majority of the family names appearing on the early records of the Bruce community appear on today's records as well. Among the names are Ward, Bishop, Burnham, Bozeman, Burke, and Infinger.

⁴² Appendix D, Maps entitled "1955-1965 Demographics" and "Current Demographics."

⁴³ Appendix D, Map entitled "Current Demographics."

Bruce has always been known as a Creek Indian community. . . .⁴⁴

This special treatment of Muscogee Nation members and their ancestors by Walton County officers is demonstration of recognition of the Creeks at Bruce as an entity throughout the twentieth century.

Muscogee Nation members and their ancestors who lived in Walton County openly reasserted their Creek Indian identity during the 1940s. The first published recognition of a Muscogee Nation entity by others appeared in the DeFuniak Springs, *The Breeze*, on 25 August 1949, noting that,

A delegation of Creek Indians for this County met informally with the Walton County Commissioners Tuesday morning in an effort to elicit assistance from the Commissioners in Uniting the Indians of Walton County into a federally recognized group.⁴⁵

Bruce School Superintendent and Muscogee Nation ancestor Lamar Ward spoke for the group informing the County Commissioners that, “We are not here to argue or debate. We are not here to put you under duress. . . . The Government will not recognize splinter groups. We are trying to form us a Council for the Government to recognize us.”⁴⁶

The council to which Lamar Ward referred in his 1949 speech before the Walton County Commissioners was the newly formed organization named Creek Nation East of the Mississippi. *The Breeze* reported that the Indians had come before the council earlier that year “seeking approval to unite Walton County with Okaloosa, Santa Rosa, and Escambia Counties, plus all of the counties in Northwest Florida, west of the Appalachicola [sic] River.”⁴⁷ Mazie Rossell,

⁴⁴ Patrick P. Pilcher to Whom It May Concern, 30 September 2004, MNOF-Bruce.

⁴⁵ “Creek Indians Delegation Seek Commissioners Aid,” *The Breeze*, 25 August 1949, MNOF-Bruce.

⁴⁶ “Creek Indians Delegation Seek Commissioners Aid,” *The Breeze*, 25 August 1949, MNOF-Bruce.

⁴⁷ “Creek Indians Delegation Seek Commissioners Aid,” *The Breeze*, 25 August 1949, MNOF-Bruce.

daughter of Bruce Community leader J. J. Ward, explained why Creek Indians of Bruce sought to join the organization, saying that “The blacks got where they are by uniting.”⁴⁸ No document available today records the response of Walton County Commissioners to the Creeks of Bruce or to their unique request. Subsequent documentation, however, indicates that community leaders embraced the goals of the Creek Nation East of the Mississippi and worked toward furthering the group’s mission.

Muscogee Nation leader J. J. Ward worked with other members of the Creek Nation East of the Mississippi, particularly with Calvin McGhee of the Poarch Creek community, to compile evidence that his community members were eligible to participate in cash distributions generated by Indian Claims Commission proceedings. J. J. Ward, his family, and other Bruce residents compiled genealogical charts linking Muscogee Nation members of their generation to Creek ancestors of the treaty era. J. J. Ward, who was active in Democratic Party politics of Walton County, used his political ties to lead a Bruce-centered action toward completion of ICC Docket 21.⁴⁹ The Creek Nation East of the Mississippi, through their attorney, Claude Pepper, joined in a legal debate over whether the Florida and Alabama applicants constituted a “tribe, band or other identifiable group.”⁵⁰ After lengthy discussion, the Indian Claims Commissioners found

⁴⁸ “Creek Indians Delegation Seek Commissioners Aid,” *The Breeze*, 25 August 1949, MNOF-Bruce.

⁴⁹ Julia McHugh to J. Lamar Ward, 18 October 1955, MNOF-Bruce; Claude Pepper to J. J. Ward, 6 December 1955, MNOF-Bruce; Merrill Winslett to J. J. Ward, 13 February 1956, MNOF-Bruce; Commissioner to J. J. Ward, 29 February 1956, MNOF-Bruce; Bob Sikes to My Dear Friend, ca. April 1956, MNOF-Bruce; Glenn Emmons to Robert Sikes, 17 April 1956, MNOF-Bruce; Homer B. Jenkins to Maude Ward, 2 October 1956, MNOF-Bruce; Press Release Regarding Claim of Wards, Bay Minette, Ala., ca. 1957, MNOF-Bruce; J. J. Ward to Bob Sikes, 24 June 1957, MNOF-Bruce; Thomas M. Reid to John Sparkman, 11 July 1957, MNOF-Bruce.

⁵⁰ *The Creek Nation vs. the United States*, Motion filed before the Indian Claims Commission, 15 May 1951, NARA-DC, RG279, Closed Docketed Case Files 1947-1982, Docket 21, Box 319, file: N/A, Bound Volume.

that,

the foregoing legislative history makes it clear that your applicants, having a common claim of a group character, are a group entitled to sue. Their historical identity as Creeks and their present geographical identity bring them well within the definition of groups entitled to be heard before this Commission.⁵¹

Muscogee Nation members at Bruce, along with their relatives in western Florida and Alabama who had united as the Creek Nation East of the Mississippi, won recognition of their Creek “group” status from the United States. This group had retained an identity that was objective or had physical reality and distinctiveness of character – a separate existence sufficient to distinguish members of the group from the surrounding people. It had met the standard definition of an “entity.”⁵²

The Creek residents of Walton County, centered at Bruce, continued to work with the Poarch Creek Community and with descendants living scattered throughout the Florida panhandle during the 1950s and 1960s. Pursuit of Indian Claims Commission Dockets 272, and 275 also served as a catalyst for joining these interested parties to organize a single political entity charged with calling attention to the long ignored civil rights of Florida Indian groups. The Florida legislature, in 1975, created the Northwest Florida Indian Council, later the Governor’s Council on Indian Affairs, to serve as a political subdivision of the state, and to examine Creek Indians’ issues.⁵³ Walton County Commissioners continued to take the opinion

⁵¹ *The Creek Nation vs. the United States*, Motion filed before the Indian Claims Commission, 15 May 1951, NARA-DC, RG279, Closed Docketed Case Files 1947-1982, Docket 21, Box 319, file: N/A, Bound Volume.

⁵² *Websters Third New International Dictionary*, 4th ed., s.v. “entity.”

⁵³ Florida Governors Council on Indian Affairs, Inc., Executive Summary, accessed 15 October 2004, <<http://www.fgcia.com/council.html>>; Bill Kaczor, “Indian Bill Changed,” *The Pensacola (Fla.) Journal*, 24 May 1975, MNOF-Bruce; Bill Kaczor, “Panel Okays Warrington Referendum,” *The Pensacola (Fla.) Journal*, 28 May 1975, MNOF-Bruce; Bill Kaczor, “House Passes Indian Council, Homeowner Exemption Bills,” *Gulfcoast*, 30 May 1975, MNOF-Bruce; “An Act relating to Native Americans,

of their Creek residents seriously, and opposed passage of the legislation to establish the Council, until they had an opportunity to hear testimony from their local Indians, about 100 hundred of whom were known to live in the county.⁵⁴ The legislation passed and Mazie Rossell, daughter of J. J. Ward, was installed as the Walton County representative.⁵⁵

The Muscogee Nation, under the name Florida Tribe of Eastern Creek Indians, began the pursuit of federal acknowledgment for its members in December 1978.⁵⁶ Branch of Acknowledgment and Research Chief John “Bud” Shapard visited the tribal office at Bruce, Florida, in May of 1986. Tribal elders and leaders met with Shapard for several hours showing him the town. The delegates dined with Shapard at the Bruce Café, an establishment operated by tribe members, by that time, for nearly forty years. Muscogee Nation leaders believed that the meeting had gone well and that Shapard was impressed with their community.⁵⁷ That same year, the Muscogee Nation as the Florida Tribe of Eastern Creek Indians obtained recognition of their tribal government by a resolution of the Florida legislature, a document that hangs on the wall of the Bruce Council House today.

Florida House of Representatives Resolution 1146, A Resolution Recognizing and Honoring the Florida Tribe of Eastern Creek Indians, passed in 1986, offers strong evidence that Florida recognized the tribe as a governmental “entity.” The resolution specifically recognized

creating the Northwest Florida Creek Indian Council, providing for membership and method of appointment, providing for the duties and power of the Council, providing for severability, providing for an effective date,” Chapter 75-370, Florida House Bill No. 2306, ca. 1 July 1975, MNOF-Bruce.

⁵⁴ “Commissioners Oppose Creek Indian Council,” *The Herald*, 23 March 1978, MNOF-Bruce.

⁵⁵ Juanita Steadham Felter to Mazie T. Rossell, 4 May 1978, MNOF-Bruce.

⁵⁶ John Shapard to James E. Waite, 5 December 1978, MNOF-Bruce.

⁵⁷ Summary of Minutes, 18 May 1986, MNOF-Bruce.

the Florida Tribe's governance of its members saying, "*WHEREAS, the Florida Tribe of Eastern Creek Indians continues to govern the Creek Indians in Florida. . . .*"⁵⁸ The Muscogee Nation constitution of 2001 recognizes the Muscogee Nation of Florida as the successor to the Florida Tribe of Eastern Creek Indians and specifically states that, "[n]othing in this name change shall be construed as to deprive us or deny us the right of retaining the name, Florida Tribe of Eastern Creek Indians, official copyright, rights, and properties owned by said tribe." State recognition obtained via the 1986 resolution transferred to the Muscogee Nation.⁵⁹ The Muscogee Nation tribal council cites this resolution as a basis of governmental authority in its governmental resolutions.⁶⁰

Subsequent events show that this recognition by the State of Florida conveyed to the tribe a status which allowed the tribe to bring suit in state courts as a "sovereign." A dispute arose in 1990 between the original founders of the Florida Tribe of Eastern Creek Indians, Inc., who resided in Pensacola, and the Florida Tribe/Muscogee Nation tribal government seated at the Council House at Bruce, with both groups claiming governmental rights and prerogatives. The Muscogee Nation tribal council successfully brought suit in Florida courts to prevent usurpation of its tribal identity and properties.⁶¹ The title of the suit reads,

⁵⁸ A Concurrent Resolution Recognizing the Florida Tribe of Eastern Creek Indians, 22 April 1986, NARA-DC, RG279, Closed Docketed Case Files 1947-1982, Docket 21, Box 319, file: N/A, Bound Volume.

⁵⁹ Draft: Constitution of the Muscogee (Creek) Nation of Florida, 15 December 2000, MNOF-Blountstown.

⁶⁰ Resolution No. 2000-5, ca. 2000, MNOF-Bruce; Resolution No. 2000-8, 20 February 2000, MNOF-Bruce; Resolution No. 2000-6, 8 April 2000, MNOF-Bruce; Resolution No. 2001-4, 17 February 2001, MNOF-Bruce.

⁶¹ Exhibit D, 25 CFR 83.7(d), Governing Documents, ca. 1990, MNOF-Bruce; Meeting Minutes, 14 January 1990, MNOF-Bruce.

Florida Tribe of Eastern Creek Indians, **a sovereign Creek Tribe** [emphasis added], and Florida Tribe of Eastern Creek Indians, Inc., a Florida Corporation, Petitioners. v. W. V. Williams, 6370 Muldoon Rd., Pensacola, Fl 32526; Juanita H. S. Sandifer, 3230 Keating Rd., Pensacola, Fl 32504; Heywood R. Reinhart, 4712 Geiger Rd.; Milton Fl 32570; and Claudia Ellis, 141 Russell Dr., Milton, FL 32570, Case No.: 90-5093-CA-01, Division: "B".⁶²

State recognition of Florida Tribe/Muscogee Nation sovereignty in the state court is evidence of recognition of the Muscogee Nation as a distinct governmental "entity."

In summary, Walton County, the State of Florida, and the United States (via a federally appointed commission) have all recognized the Muscogee Nation community at and around Bruce, Florida, as a distinct Indian "entity" throughout the twentieth century. Walton County has recognized the special status of this community by exemption from taxation on the homes and properties of Muscogee Nation members living at Bruce from the founding of the town to the present. The United States recognized the Creek community at Bruce as a "group" eligible to bring claims against the United States before the Indian Claims Commission in 1951. The State of Florida extended recognition of the Florida Tribe's government by a resolution in 1986. This legislation recognized governmental powers and rights, including the right to bring suit as a "sovereign" in state courts.

In relation to Criterion 83.7(b)

5. OFA asked Muscogee Nation to demonstrate a) that "the petitioning group has been a community since historical times until the present," b) that "sustained interaction and significant social relationships must have existed in the past and still exist among the members of the group," and c) that these relationships and interactions occurred "across kin groups and other social subdivisions."

⁶² *Florida Tribe of Eastern Creek Indians and Florida Tribe of Eastern Creek Indians, Inc. v. W. V. Williams et al.*, Notice of Hearing, 23 October 1990, MNOF-Bruce; *Florida Tribe of Eastern Creek Indians and Florida Tribe of Eastern Creek Indians, Inc. v. W. V. Williams et al.*, Answer to Counterclaim for Declaratory Relief and Injunction, rec. 16 November 1990, MNOF-Bruce.

The 2002 Muscogee Nation response to these concerns addressed the continuity of Creek cultural practices from their perspective as members of this tribe.⁶³ The following narrative supplements and contextualizes that response in relation to additional scholarly and documentary evidence.

A) The petitioning group has been a community since historical times until the present.

The Muscogee Nation of Florida has existed as a distinct community in and around the town of Bruce, Florida, since historical times to the present. The term, “historical times” refers to the point in time at which the documented record of this specific Creek entity begins in the nineteenth century, framed within the context of more general Creek history and culture.

Several Creek families formed this community along the Choctawhatchee River in West Florida, in the nineteenth century after migrating away from Southern Alabama.⁶⁴

Until the 1850s, the history of the Bruce community and that of the Poarch Band of Creek Indians, a federally recognized tribe, were virtually identical. The OFA found that the Poarch Band today, “derived from a community which developed in the latter part of the 18th century in the Alabama-Tensaw River area, in what is now southwestern Alabama.” The OFA also found that, “Between 1840 and 1850, a portion of the Alabama-Tensaw community moved inland 15 to 20 miles eastward from the river and settled in what is now the northwest corner of

⁶³ Muscogee Nation of Florida, Petitioner No. 32, TA Review Letter Response, 14 March 2002, MNOF-Bruce, pp. 34-70.

⁶⁴ Lucius F. Ellsworth and Jane E. Dysart, “West Florida’s Forgotten People: The Creek Indians from 1830 until 1970,” *Florida Historical Quarterly*, ca. 1980, pp. 422-439 [Hereafter Ellsworth and Dysart, “West Florida’s Forgotten People”].

Escambia County, Alabama.”⁶⁵ Creek families from this same group of migrants continued to move south and east, also settling communities at about the same time the Poarch Creeks did, before and after the Civil War. In Florida, only the Creeks at Bruce continued to maintain a community throughout the twentieth century and to the present.

Contact between Creeks, Europeans, and Americans was marked by a great deal of economic change and movement. The area that would become parts of Alabama, Georgia, and Florida had been Creek territory before contact.⁶⁶ Friendly trade and intermarriage, as well as hostile relations and American expansionism, all contributed to a dramatic increase in the mobility of Creeks and other Native peoples back and forth across this part of the South. The movement towards settlement along the Choctawhatchee River was gradual. The Muscogee Nation of Florida does not constitute a recently formed grouping of descendants of Creek ancestors. They have remained together as a distinct entity throughout recorded history. This includes not only the time when the current members’ ancestors were actively documented as Indians in the early nineteenth century, but also when, in the context of anti-miscegenation laws, they were identified as whites, or avoided enumeration. As Ellsworth and Dysart note, “What is certain, “becoming white” in outward practices reduced or eliminated many potential problems” for Indians in the second half of the nineteenth century, particularly after Florida state law made

⁶⁵ United States Department of the Interior, Office of Federal Acknowledgment, *Proposed Finding Documents, Recommendation and summary of evidence for proposed finding for Federal acknowledgment of the Poarch Band of Creeks of Alabama, pursuant to 25 CFR 83*, 29 December 1983, pp. 4-5.

⁶⁶ Claudio Saunt, “Taking Account of Property: Stratification among the Creek Indians in the Early Nineteenth Century,” *The William and Mary Quarterly*, vol. 57 (October 2000), p. 733 [Hereafter Saunt, “Taking Account”]. In Florida, this territory would have overlapped with Timucua, Apalachee and Euchee land use, peoples with some cultural and linguistic similarities to Muscogee (see Kathleen A. Deagan, “Spanish-Indian Interaction in Sixteenth-Century Florida and Hispanola,” in *Cultures in Contact: The European Impact on Native Cultural Institutions in Eastern North America, A.d. 1000-1800*, William Fitzhugh, ed. (Washington D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1985), pp. 281-318.

Indian residency in the state illegal in 1852.⁶⁷ In this context, Muscogee Nation ancestors met with few options. They faced either removal, an unknown fate at the hands of military units assembled to hunt down and “deal” with Indians, or submission to the discrimination other non-whites encountered. Identifying as “Black” in Florida during the era of Jim Crow put one at risk of being subject to racist violence and substandard education, or being denied the chance to make a living. During this time, members of the Ward family, particularly those who could “pass for white,” emerged as the leadership for the Bruce community. Under the leadership of the Ward family, the community itself provided a set of insulating and self-sustaining mechanisms which protected Indian families.

Idell Bishop, who was born in 1904, illustrates the fear to outwardly identify as Indian in her childhood recollections,

They didn’t know what to think about the Indians, of course we were all Indians. The Indian and the, what they called the Indians and the white folks, we was all... I didn’t know if I was Indian for sure. I didn’t know whether I was an Indian or not. The Indians were just as good as anybody else.⁶⁸

As Lucille Bishop put it, “They said, ‘Let the dog lie.’ If you were an Indian or had Indian blood you didn’t say it.”⁶⁹ Even in the 1960s, when Muscogee Nation member Carol Pate was a young woman, she recalled Indian identity expressed only internally within the family,

... it was more or less a family thing. I’m sure we discussed it in families but we didn’t talk it too much to outsiders. We didn’t have many outsiders back then, and if somebody came in everybody was close mouthed with the outsiders. So we

⁶⁷ Ellsworth and Dysart, “West Florida’s Forgotten People,” p. 432; “An Act to Provide for the Final Removal of the Indians of this State, and for other purposes,” 1852, Florida Statutes, Ch. 555 [No. 76], Section 1.

⁶⁸ Audio interview of Idell Burnham and Alice Chapman by James M. McClurken, 28 October 2003, MNOF-Bruce, p. 5.

⁶⁹ Audio interview of Lucille Bishop and Zera Denson by James M. McClurken, 10 December 2003, MNOF-Bruce, p. 11.

didn't really talk too much. Now families I think did, 'cause I'm sure the parents knew they were, you know. And Grannie, she always made sure that we knew it.⁷⁰

Ellsworth and Dysart note,

The family became the mechanism for perpetuating the Creek heritage. Within the confines of the home, mothers of Indian lineage often passed on different aspects of Indian culture to their children. Some families continued features of Indian dress into the twentieth century while others spoke a few Creek words; used Indian hunting, trapping, and fishing techniques; practiced herbal medicines; enjoyed such dietary favorites as gophers, hone, and corn; used yard brooms made of gallberry vines; made reed, split oak, and pine straw baskets; built grave houses and followed burial practices. The extended family provided a means to communicate these customs and values, and the periodic family reunions further reenforced this important kinship network.⁷¹

During the period between 1890 and 1910, homestead lands became available, entrenching permanent settlement in the area. The economic transition from mobile labor patterns to settled farming also contributed to socioeconomic divisions within the community. The community structures and the circumstances surrounding land use, however, provided the mechanisms to perpetuate regular, continued interactions between members of all the socioeconomic divisions within the community until the present, as discussed below.

B) Sustained interaction and social relationships among members of the group.

While economic hardships caused some fluctuation in the population of the Bruce community, Bruce remained the center of a concentration of Creek families throughout the twentieth century, as demonstrated in the demographic maps included with this document (Appendix D).

⁷⁰ Audio interview of Carol Pate by James M. McClurken, 9 July 2004, MNOF-Bruce, p. 5.

⁷¹ Ellsworth and Dysart, "West Florida's Forgotten People," p. 435.

Contact in the twentieth century between the Bruce community and other Creeks in the South dissipated through the harsh economic times of the Great Depression. Social interaction and relationships were maintained within the community through participation in institutions such as the church and school, the Bruce Women's Club, and operations like the post office, stores, and the Bruce Café, each of which will be described below. Bruce, like Poarch,

remained relatively isolated from non-Indians well into the twentieth century. Even social interaction among the several Indian hamlets was generally restricted to special occasions... many older Creeks now living were employed by whites in the early decades of this century clearing the virgin timber, tapping turpentine, and cutting railroad ties... According to the oldest informants, in the early 1900s the Indians were scattered out in the woods on small patches connected by footpaths, and very few white or Negro families lived in the immediate vicinity. By necessity, the Creeks remained largely self-sufficient.⁷²

Like at Poarch, while the Bruce community did interact with non-Creeks by the 1900s, they were still geographically isolated and their community remained closed to outsiders. Examination of land and census records show an influx of Euro-American families into the area, however, there is little interaction between them and Creek families. There appears to have been little or no intermarriage between Creek and non-Creek families until the latter half of the twentieth century, when statistics are counterbalanced by marriage between the Bruce Creeks and other Indians, including Cherokees.

Creeks went out of their community and interacted with others primarily as laborers during the first half of the century. Many Muscogee Nation members know their family histories working in timber and turpentine production. For instance, Dan Penton's forefathers,

were timber people because people who are illiterate, without a land base in north Florida, had basically two or three ways to make a living. They could be a share

⁷² J. Anthony Paredes, "The Emergence of Contemporary Eastern Creek Indian Identity," in *Social and Cultural Identity, Problems of Persistence and Change*, Thomas K. Fitzgerald, ed. (Southern Anthropological Society, 1974), p. 66 [Hereafter Paredes, "The Emergence"].

cropper, tend a farm, they could work in the timber, turpentine business, or they could be in the commercial fishing business. My father's extended family, and including my father's mother's family, were all in the saw timber business. My grandfather and my great-grandfather, apparently were both pretty good at doing timber cruises and estimating what kind of saw timber was here.⁷³

One hundred year-old Idell Burnham recalled first-hand her father, George Matison Bishop, working very hard in the types of work available to men in the early part of the century,

My daddy was a logger. He worked picking up logs and working in the river. All of my family worked any kind of log work there was. That's all there was to do, you know, log work. You had to work whatever you could get to do. Turpentine work, there was saw mills and there was turpentine stills and there was, you know, ordinary work. There was a lot of work around here then.⁷⁴

This description was typical for Creeks across the panhandle,

The majority of Creeks had little formal education, and thus the only employment available to them was in unskilled or semi-skilled occupations. Because the region contained large amounts of unsettled land, they could farm and herd livestock, or work for the lumber and turpentine companies, or for the railroads. While most Indians provided menial labor for the woods industry, a few worked as carpenters and locomotive operators. Some Indians who resisted acculturation lived in isolated woods and along the rivers, bays and gulf until the 1960s eking out a bare living... Some found employment in delivery work, fishing, as teamsters, or as caulkers in the ship yards.⁷⁵

Idell Burnham also recalled frequently traveling along footpaths through the woods, and along the river, referred to as "the road" by community members, to visit or work with other Creek families. Between 1900 and the depression era, the Ward family owned and operated some of the businesses that supplied the community with employment opportunities. Creeks, who were not members of the immediate Ward family, worked on Ward family farms and in their fish

⁷³ Interview with Dan Penton by James M. McClurken, 11 July 2004, MNOF-Bruce, p. 3.

⁷⁴ Audio interview of Idell Burnham and Alice Chapman by James M. McClurken, 28 October 2003, MNOF-Bruce, p. 2.

⁷⁵ Ellsworth and Dysart, "West Florida's Forgotten People," pp. 430-431.

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camp, at a small shipyard, and in a hotel and motel among others. During the turpentine era, those who worked in that line of work, or for the Wards in farm work or timber, were paid in specie, which were exchanged for goods at the Ward's store. In particular, it was J. J. Ward who operated the commissary store in Bruce during this period, and found himself sustaining many families through hard times.⁷⁶ J. J.'s granddaughter, Zera Denson recalled,

You know, when I was little, my grand-daddy, J. J. Ward, had the big store in Bruce. It was a big wooden store and he sold everything anybody would need. That's when he would get his things off the Fritz. They'd bring it from Pensacola. From high-heeled shoes, to groceries, plus he had the post office. And I remember well, everybody would come, go to the post office, do their shopping. And he had his own money. He made little coins that said "J. J. Ward." Anybody that worked for him, he payed them with his money and then they spent it at his store. So he had that goin' pretty good. And he had big farms. We always had somebody else to farm. And when I was little, he had a giant fruit orchard, right there where the old house is in Bruce. He had pear trees, pecan trees, orange trees, apple trees, grapevines, blueberries.⁷⁷

During the Depression, J. J.'s daughter Malzie, and her husband, Angus Edward Pate, ran the community post office and a small grocery store where people from across the Bruce community knew they could rely on the assistance of the Wards. As J. J.'s [REDACTED] Pansy Bjorklund remembers,

Some of it [the community was] very poor. And 'specially from the sick ones. I can remember the Mixon family... that they would come nearly every day... my mama had a post office and a little grocery story... they want a cup of sugar or a cup of flour... anything to eat and Mama always sent them away with something.⁷⁸

The post office was first established at J. J.'s store in 1904, marking the beginning of the

⁷⁶ Deposition of Zera Wayne Pate Denson, n.d. #989, MNOF-Bruce; The Choctawatchee Clan of Eastern Creek Indians, n.d. # 1088, MNOF-Bruce.

⁷⁷ Audio interview of Odell Ward and Zera Denson by James M. McClurken, 22 October 2003, MNOF-Bruce, p. 12.

⁷⁸ Audio interview of Pansy Bjorklund by Heather Howard, 8 July 2004, MNOF-Bruce, p. 42.

town of Bruce which remained unincorporated. The town was named after a friend of the Wards, the poet Wallace Bruce of DeFuniak Springs, who also led the Florida Chautauqua Assembly beginning in the early 1890s. Throughout the century the post office provided a further means through which the Wards provided services to community members, and which brought together Creeks from across the area, who would spend time chatting with the postmaster (Malzie Ward Pate for much of the century) and other patrons.⁷⁹ The Wards and Pates were also responsible for carrying the mail to families throughout the rural area surrounding Bruce, and that work served as a network to carry community news and communication.⁸⁰

Other institutions that provided the mechanisms for interaction and social relationships in the Bruce community throughout the twentieth century were the churches and schools. In particular, the Pine Level/Bruce School, founded in 1895, and the Bruce Methodist Church, founded in 1912 were significant. The schools were the site of considerable community interaction for more than sixty years in the Bruce community. Again, the Ward family had much to do with ensuring the education of community members. Two schools were established in the immediate vicinity of the Bruce hamlet. Pine Level School was founded in 1895 in the center of Bruce. Its name changed to Bruce School in 1908.⁸¹ The land for the Bruce School was donated by Warren Ward.⁸² Another school, Seven Runs, existed within close proximity and was

⁷⁹ The Florida Muskogee (Creek) News, May 1998, MNOF-Bruce, p. 2.

⁸⁰ Anne Tucker, "Bruce Who?," n.d. #1314, MNOF-Bruce, p. 6.

⁸¹ List of Bruce Area Schools and Teachers (1895-1951) from Historical Walton County School Board Minutes, n.d. #2001, MNOF-Bruce, p. 1.

⁸² Kris Slocum, "Bruce Group Holds Fundraiser to Restore Old School," *The Herald*, Image #12, n.d. #728, MNOF-Bruce.

attended by Bruce area children for the period from 1896 to 1926. The original appropriation for Seven Runs was requested by James W. Ward.⁸³ The records of attendance, as well as of the teachers and supervisors for the schools, show that most were Creek Indian.⁸⁴ Between 1896 and 1926, possibly thirteen of the thirty-seven teachers at the two schools were Indian members of the community, including Mazie Ward, [REDACTED].⁸⁵ From 1926 through to the closing of Bruce School in 1954, the teachers were often Creeks, including Lamar Ward, [REDACTED], Mano Ward, [REDACTED], and Zera Pate Denson, who taught at the school during its last ten years.⁸⁶

All children were welcome to attend the Bruce School, although preliminary genealogical research suggests the majority were Indian.⁸⁷ The Bruce community members were determined to become literate, which would have been difficult as non-whites in the early twentieth century. The “racial literacy gap in 1900 in the South was still considerable (36 percentage points)” between whites and non-whites.⁸⁸ Zera Denson recalled, “the Bruce School was a good little school and it was full of Indians, with no race mentioned.”⁸⁹ Zera, who also attended the school

⁸³ List of Bruce Area Schools and Teachers (1895-1951) from Historical Walton County School Board Minutes, n.d. #2001, MNOF-Bruce, p. 1; Ward Family Genealogy Handwritten notes, 8 July 1895-6 May 1950, MNOF-Bruce, p. 1.

⁸⁴ Appendix A, “Bruce Area Schools Information.”

⁸⁵ List of Bruce Area Schools and Teachers (1895-1951) from Historical Walton County School Board Minutes, n.d. #2001, MNOF-Bruce, pp. 1-2. Analysis is based on preliminary genealogical research.

⁸⁶ Bruce Area Schools & Teachers, 1895-1951, MNOF-Bruce, pp. 1-2. Analysis is based on preliminary genealogical research.

⁸⁷ Appendix A, “Bruce Area Schools Information.”

⁸⁸ Robert A. Margo, *Race and Schooling in the South, 1880-1950: An Economic History* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1990), p. 58.

⁸⁹ Interview with Zera Denson by James M. McClurken, 7 July 2004, MNOF-Bruce, p. 17.

as a child, noted in the same interview that a good number of her school-mates and their families still lived in Bruce or very close by.⁹⁰ In addition to the many ways in which the school building was used for community purposes, events for children and young adults brought community members together regularly, throughout its existence as an actual school. These events included Christmas and Halloween celebrations, music and dance lessons, showing movies, and holding box suppers.⁹¹ As Lucille Bishop and Zera Denson recalled in a joint interview,

[Zera:] But, we went to school together, and went to church together. That was about all the entertainment we had.

[Lucille:] That was all. I didn't know there were anymore churches beside the Assembly and the Methodist, until I was grown. 'Cause around here, you just didn't go anyplace. We had no car and we didn't go places.⁹²

In addition to the Bruce School, the Bruce Methodist Church was, and continues to be, an important institution which sustains community interaction. The Methodist Church has been the center of community life at Bruce, providing a place for worship, community meetings, and entertainment, like parties, bingo, and dinners throughout the twentieth century. Church members have selected deacons who have served as leaders in the church and in the community throughout the twentieth century. The Church was also an important place where community members, separated by social and economic statuses, gathered from across different segments of the community. It is therefore discussed in more detail in section "c" below.

William Josiah "Diamond Joe" Ward and his granddaughter Mazie Rossell were the first adults to join the Bruce Methodist Church, as did most of the Creeks in and around Bruce.

⁹⁰ Interview with Zera Denson by James M. McClurken, 7 July 2004, MNOF-Bruce, p. 3.

⁹¹ Interview with Zera Denson by James M. McClurken, 7 July 2004, MNOF-Bruce, pp. 8-12.

⁹² Audio interview of Lucille Bishop and Zera Denson by James M. McClurken, 10 December 2003, MNOF-Bruce, p. 15.

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Because the church rolls have been preserved since the founding of the Methodist Church, they were used as a base roll for the membership of the Muscogee Nation of Florida. The Bruce Church has been a center of community activity for most of the century and was recognized as an Indian Church by the United Methodist Conference in 1991.⁹³ Many of the Bruce Church roll members trace to Ward lineages, but they also descend from non-Ward Creeks. In addition, while some Muscogee Nation members trace to a church roll member, they also trace to other Creek ancestors.

The Bruce Church provides the single most important evidence of continuous and sustained community interaction throughout the twentieth century, not only serving religious purposes but also operating as the site of large community gatherings, such as Homecoming, the Ward Reunions, and Democratic Party rallies. Records of the Church collection, kept for each month from 1959 through 1986, chart the contributions of the attendees of the Church for this period of time and show consistency and growth of the Church. In addition to tithes, an annual "Penny March" collected funds that went toward the purchase of goods to make fruit bags to pass out to community members, and to help needy families in the neighborhood.⁹⁴

Bruce area cemeteries also provide evidence of stability and continuity in the composition of the population. An examination of the names of those buried in the three main cemeteries used by the Bruce community -- Antioch, Black Creek, and Dead River -- indicate continuity in the presence of the same specific Creek families who have consistently made up the population since the nineteenth century. The cemeteries span from the post-Civil War era to the

⁹³ The Florida Muskogee (Creek) News, October 1991-December 1991; Bruce United Methodist Church, ca. 1992, MNOF-Bruce.

⁹⁴ [REDACTED], email message to Don Anderson, 2 June 2004; Appendix E, "Bruce Church Collections, 1959-1986."

present. The earliest burial still identifiable in the oldest cemetery, Antioch, is that of Virginia Ward, buried in 1882, who was the infant daughter of William Josiah Ward and Abseybeth (Purvis) Ward.⁹⁵ While other burials are evident, their markers have disappeared. In addition to the Wards, Adkison, Bishop, Bozeman, Burke, Daniel, Hare, Mixon, Pate, Rooks, and Silcox are the families included in this cemetery. At the Dead River Cemetery, Clark, Gainey, Infinger, Linton, Miller, Morrison, Sharon, Pate, Stanley, and Ward family members are buried.⁹⁶ At the Black Creek Cemetery there are Bishops, Burkes, Simmons, Infingers, Silcoxes, Hares, and Weathers.⁹⁷ Throughout the lifetime of the Bruce community, Muscogee Nation members and their ancestors have been buried almost exclusively in these three cemeteries.

An active men's club and the Bruce Women's Club, incorporated in 1954, have served to mobilize Creeks in and around Bruce in cooperative labor and community service. The men's club is an informal organization of male members of the Bruce Church. The Bruce Women's Club was founded with thirty charter members, following the closure of the Bruce School in 1954.⁹⁸ The intention of the original officers was to "go before the school board of Walton County and seek possession of a twenty-five year lease to the school building and grounds of the Bruce School with the right to own, lease and operate Real and Personal property thereon." The Women's Club brought together a large number of women from across the community, transcending the Christian denominational divisions of the community.⁹⁹ Zera Pate Denson

⁹⁵ Antioch Cemetery and Dead River Cemetery, n.d. #994, MNOF-Bruce; Photos of Antioch Cemetery, 25 October 2003, MNOF-Bruce.

⁹⁶ Antioch Cemetery and Dead River Cemetery, n.d. #994, MNOF-Bruce.

⁹⁷ Photographs of Black Creek Cemetery, 11 December 2003, MNOF-Bruce.

⁹⁸ Bruce Women's Club Charter, 8 November 1954, Private Collection of Zera Denson, p. 4.

⁹⁹ Deposition of Zera Wayne Pate Denson, n.d. #989, MNOF-Bruce, p. 4.

recalled some of the work of the clubs as follows,

And then, there was the Women's Club and the men's club. These were separate. We [the women] would get together and gossip, serve meals and raised money with crafts to take care of the cemeteries and to help families. The men's club did all sorts of things too, like community hunting and trying to solve community problems. We have always had community meetings, at least during my lifetime.¹⁰⁰

The women were instrumental in organizing social and political events. The Bruce Women's Club mission statement emphasized the social roles and responsibilities of members, "This Club shall be non-denominational and shall work with a social, religious and educational training in mind for the welfare of the future of this community."¹⁰¹ Zera Denson further described how the Bruce Women's Club combined their community work with political activity by holding fundraising dinners for attendees to the local Democratic party meetings. In her account, J. J. Ward was leading a Democratic Party fundraiser, in the late 1950s,

We either had them in the [church], if it was raining we had them in the church. And grandpa was ... the Democratic party chairman in this county for many years. So, the first one was always at Bruce. So, all the women would cook food and take out to the school, and we'd serve a plate to the candidates and anybody else who wanted to eat for a dollar. And that way the Women's Club would make a little money, you know, that way. So we'd have the political speakins' there, too. And then they'd speak, if we was outside they'd stand on the porch and yell. They didn't have a microphone. Everybody would stand out in the yard, tell who they were, what they was runnin' for, vote for me, you know...Just about everybody in Bruce [would attend these]...Two or three hundred. Yeah, we'd all go. 'Cause this was only. . .you know back then, you didn't know anybody, and you didn't have a newspaper, and you didn't go anywhere. You had to go listen to 'em so you'd know who to vote for. Course they'd come around before that time and try to go to every house, give you a little card, and tell you to vote for 'em, you know....¹⁰²

¹⁰⁰ Deposition of Zera Wayne Pate Denson, n.d. #989, MNOF-Bruce, p. 4.

¹⁰¹ Bruce Women's Club Charter, 8 November 1954, Private Collection of Zera Denson, p. 4.

¹⁰² Interview with Zera Denson by James M. McClurken, 7 July 2004, MNOF-Bruce.

The Women's Club still meets regularly. Zera Denson notes that even now, "There are one or two people in it [the Women's Club] that are not Indian because they live on the river or on the outskirts of the Bruce community and want to be a part of the place. Before that, the members were either Creeks, or wives of Creeks."¹⁰³ The Women's Club was also instrumental in preserving the Bruce Schoolhouse, originally built in 1890, and which now houses the Muscogee Nation Tribal Council offices,

The Bruce Women's Club has been helping the community since 1954. It was started, says Billie J. Ward, to get away from being just a church group. Ward said all the women of Bruce were involved including the tribal women. The club first met at the old schoolhouse. It was a plot to keep the building from being torn down, says Ward. The schoolhouse is one of the oldest buildings in Bruce and houses many memories for the children of the area. The building housed a regular Walton County school but it was called the Indian School by locals. That school closed in 1954 and the school board deeded the property to the Women's Club. It has been a voting precinct since the 1930's, says Benson [sic].¹⁰⁴

The Muscogee Nation tribal council began leasing the building from the Women's Club in 1971, and in 1999, the Women's Club transferred the title to the council,

For 48 years, members of the Bruce Womens [sic] Club have met in the former school house, a building they leased for the first 20 years and have owned for 28. The club will continue to meet there, but they no longer own the historic building that has served the community for more years than most can remember. The change in ownership came at the request of the club's members, who feel that more good can come to the building if it is owned by the Florida Tribe of Eastern Creek Indians. The Tribe leased the building from the Bruce Womens Club for years, using it as a Council House, museum, classroom, reference library and gift shop.¹⁰⁵

In the post-World War II era, economic conditions caused some dispersal of community

¹⁰³ Deposition of Zera Wayne Pate Denson, n.d. #989, MNOF-Bruce, p. 4.

¹⁰⁴ "Bruce Women's Club Serves Community with Bake Sale/Yard Sale," ca. 2000, MNOF-Bruce.

¹⁰⁵ Muskogee News, 15 February 1999, Private Collection of Zera Denson.

members, but most of the original families still remained within fifty miles of Bruce.¹⁰⁶ The closing of the Bruce School resulted in Bruce children being bussed to nearby Freeport or DeFuniak Springs. The Ward family shifted their economic focus to service businesses, from land-based activity (much land was sold when cash was needed). While they had operated stores for a number of years, they moved to also operating a hotel outside the community, and turned the grocery store into a café and motel. It was originally on the central road in Bruce, but opened in 1953 as the Bruce Café along the highway,

Today, Bruce's best-known landmark is the Bruce Café at the intersection of state roads 20 and 81. The café was opened by Lura (Ward) McCook in 1953 in a wood building that had been a store, said current owner Lillie Mae Miller. Miller, who had worked at the restaurant in its early days, bought the café in 1973. From Bruce it's an 11-mile drive to the next closest Walton County restaurant, but many people stop in Bruce just for a hearty meal at the cafe.¹⁰⁷

The Café continues to turn over a good business and is, along with the Muscogee Nation tribal council house and the churches, another site for community gatherings, such as wedding and baby showers, Lion's Club meetings, and some tribal business meetings. The restaurant is filled to capacity five days a week for lunch, drawing mostly members of the community, but also passers-by along the highway. The Café provides part-time employment for four to six members of the community.¹⁰⁸

After the Second World War, Creeks and Creek descendants were re-linked across the Southeast through the Indian Claims Commission Dockets 21, 272 and 275.¹⁰⁹ As early as 1949,

¹⁰⁶ See demographic maps in Appendix D, "Creek Demographics and Households."

¹⁰⁷ "Walton Community of Bruce Has Native American Roots," 5 August 1991, MNOF-Bruce.

¹⁰⁸ Video interview with Lillie Mae Miller and Lawana Dollar by Heather Howard, 12 July 2004, MNOF-Bruce.

¹⁰⁹ Docket payment letters are a primary source of Indian ancestry for current Muscogee Nation members. It should be noted that while most utilized their lineage to Elizabeth English Ward as proof of

J. J. Ward was in contact with his distant relatives in the Alabama Poarch community as a representative of the Bruce area Creeks for claims in Docket 21. Mazie Rossell and Lamar Ward also led the struggle to bring services to their community through the monies that might be won in the claims case, as noted in a plea for support they put before the Walton County Commissioners in 1949,

The Indians had come before the Commission in February seeking approval to unite Walton County with Okaloosa, Santa Rosa and Escambia Counties, plus all of the counties in Northwest Florida, West of the Appalachicola [sic] River... Juanita Felter told the Board, "We are not here to dictate to anyone. We are not here to dictate to our own people." She was responding to a question raised earlier by Commissioner Lloyd Weeks who said there were at least two other groups trying to organize the Indians in Walton County. "We are here to administer the money that could come to this county through federal grants," she went on to say. Grants could be used for vocational training, scholarships, Indian culture education, housing aid, legal aid and medical aid.¹¹⁰

J. J. Ward recognized that many relatives, who were Creek descendants scattered across West Florida, were also eligible for the payments, and he worked to include them. The Docket 21 claim dragged on for a number of years, and like the Poarch leader, Calvin McGhee, J.J. Ward never saw the fruits of this labor on behalf of his community. The federal government did not make payments until 1971, after both men had died.

As described in the Muscogee Nation response, Creek culture was inwardly practiced and protected during the first half of the twentieth century. The Indian Claims Commission and the context of the burgeoning civil rights movement made it possible for Bruce community leaders

their Creek ancestry for Indian Claims Commission purposes, current research is in the process of demonstrating that many Muscogee Nation members trace ancestry to several other members of the historical Creek tribe. Clearly, these same people also trace their ancestry to John Ward, who himself was half Creek. In the 1950s and 1960s, when the claims were filed with the Creek Nation East of the Mississippi, and because members of the Ward family took the lead in seeking justice for the Creek families of Bruce, it was simply expedient to trace the Ward/English ancestry of the community members at that time, particularly since the Ward family had the most organized records.

¹¹⁰ "Creek Indians Delegation Seek Commissioners Aid," 25 August 1949, *The Breeze*, MNOF-Bruce.

to express themselves outwardly as Indians again during the 1950s and 1960s.¹¹¹ As in Indian communities across the country, this period was marked by the development of a more outwardly projected pride in identity and a revitalization of Indian culture.¹¹²

By the early 1970s, the Muscogee Nation established its elected tribal council. Bruce became the center of Creek language programs, craft production, and other Creek-identified activity for Western Florida.¹¹³ While the newly established tribal government attempted to administer Creek descendants across West Florida, they also prioritized their focus on the needs of the Bruce community, devising ways to deal with social concerns such as housing problems, unemployment, and poverty, and concurrently stimulating continued participation in cultural activity.¹¹⁴ These programs created further opportunities for continued community interaction.

The Muscogee Nation of Florida tribal council has met fundamental Bruce community needs throughout the last three decades. The tribal council's struggles and successes in service delivery to the Bruce community, and the political gains achieved for the community, have been

¹¹¹ Muscogee Nation of Florida, Petitioner No. 32, TA Review Letter Response, 14 March 2002, MNOF-Bruce, pp. 34-70.

¹¹² Paredes notes the mirrored pattern at Poarch, "For more than one hundred years, these Alabama Creeks did little to assert their identity as American Indians." And, as one of his informants adds, being Indian was something people tried to hide – seemed like they were ashamed of." However, with the emergence of the Claims Commission cases, and in the era of civil rights activism, "there have been major, if not revolutionary changes in the eastern Creek Indian community... they, along with scattered Creek descendants elsewhere in the region, have experienced a generalized revitalization of their social identity American Indians and as Creeks" (Paredes, "The Emergence," pp. 65, 69).

¹¹³ Bill Kaczor, "State's Muskogees fight to reclaim culture," 4 August 2002, MNOF-Bruce; Muskogee News, 27 October 1998, Private Collection of Zera Denson; Robert E. MacLaury to Ann Tucker, 24 March 1998, MNOF-Bruce; D. S. Adams, "Mack Bayou Burial Ground to be Returned to Indians," *The Beach Breeze*, 5 March 1987, MNOF-Bruce; Maribeth Carter, "American Indian Day Celebrated," *The DeFuniak Springs Herald-Breeze*, 6 October 1983, MNOF-Bruce.

¹¹⁴ Choctawhatchee Clan Of Mvskoke Creek Indians Newsletter, vol. 1, no. 5, June 1983, MNOF-Bruce; Muscogee Nation of Florida, Public Relations packet, ca. 2003, MNOF-Blountstown; Michael Stewart, "One tribe's tribulation," *Northwest Florida Daily News*, 16 September 2002, Private Collection of Zera Denson.

reported widely in the media. Long-standing committees have focused on tasks such as promoting culture and heritage, language programs, parents' and children's issues, senior citizens' concerns, land, housing, education, economic issues, citizenship, and federal acknowledgment. In the 1980s, the Council successfully obtained land from Walton County, a 13-acre archaeological site, which Muscogee Nation leaders fought to preserve.¹¹⁵ The Muscogee Nation has done a great deal of work to conserve and educate the public about the heritage of their community and have advised extensively when local archaeological work has uncovered the remains of Native Americans.¹¹⁶ At the historic schoolhouse where the tribal offices are now located, they have maintained an archive and library, a gift shop, and a meeting hall with permanent museum displays.¹¹⁷ They have also successfully received major grants to revitalize the Creek language and share it with others. The Muscogee Nation provides a congregate dining program for seniors in the community and have provided members with a community newsletter since 1984.

C) Relationships and interactions across kin groups and other social subdivisions.

The Ward family figures predominantly in the community history because of the pivotal role its members played in successive generations by taking an outward role in generating and preserving the community. Many of the other Creek families were destitute and uneducated.

¹¹⁵ Melinda Kuzucu, "Land Deeded to Creek," *The Destin Log*, 6 December 1989, MNOF-Bruce; Donald Sharon to Ronald Force, ca. 1989, MNOF-Bruce.

¹¹⁶ Pam Mee, "Sandestin Returns Acreage to Indians," item from unidentified newspaper, 28 October 1987, MNOF-Bruce.

¹¹⁷ Choctawhatchee Clan Of Mvskoke Creek Indians Newsletter, vol. 1, no. 5, June 1983, MNOF-Bruce; "The Trail of Happy Tears-stark contrast to days past," *The County Record*, 16 October 1997, MNOF-Blountstown, p. 2; Donald W. Sharon to the Florida Tribe of Eastern Creek Indians, n.d. #1859, MNOF-Bruce.

These families nonetheless participated in the community as workers, and attendees at the school and church. Creeks in and around the Bruce area continued to live in continuous close proximity to each other, and their dead are buried in the same three nearby cemeteries. They have intermarried among these families, and are present in each other's households, even across different families (see Appendix D).

Beyond cooperative labor that can be documented in local economic activity, such as logging, the turpentine business, and farming, two key institutions in Bruce brought people together in lasting community relations beyond simply extended family relations, the church and school. Both straddled the socioeconomic divides of the community. The Bruce Women's Club and The Bruce Café, discussed above, also illustrate how these organizations bring community members together across religious and other social divides.

The Bruce Church, from the perspective of Ward family members, was built mainly for their extended family, however, the records show that other families identified as Creeks also attended.¹¹⁸ When the Assembly of God Church was founded later it attracted some of the Methodist Church's Indian members. Most of the deacons for the Methodist Church have been Ward family members, while the Assembly of God Church had other Creeks, such as Bozemans and McCormicks, in leadership positions.¹¹⁹ The following anonymous excerpt from Ward family records illustrate disagreement within the community over religious practice, as well as differentiation between segments of the community divided by social status. In writing about the churches, the author writes,

¹¹⁸ Church Register of the Bruce Methodist Episcopal Church, South, 1912-1922, MNOF-Bruce.

¹¹⁹ Audio interview of Lucille Bishop and Zera Denson by James M. McClurken, 10 December 2003, MNOF-Bruce, pp. 9-10.

The members of the Bruce Methodist Church were, and still are Ward family members. The congregation of the Assembly of God Church are not Wards. The Wards broke away from the congregation of a church attended by Indians or non Indians and the Turpentine communities. They founded their own family church, choosing Methodism as the religion because the Methodist Church would assist in building a church and supplying a full-time minister... The philosophy of early Wards did not encompass questions beyond "serving God" and "taking care of their own." Any brand of organized white religion was seemingly satisfactory. The church was an acceptable basis for family reunions. Two are still held annually! March is the time of Homecoming, a time selected because it was the month of Diamond Joe's birthday and October is the Ward Reunion. It was originally the time of the Harvest Busk on the late 1800's - a 3 day celebration of the Ward family with musicians, trading, barn raising, hunting and fishing and dancing. Wards would come from all areas of Florida and Alabama. The modern reunion has church music, singing, bringing food and eating communally.

The description highlights differences in the social status of those attending the Methodist Church versus those at the Assembly of God; it shows a divide between Indians/non-Indians, and Wards/turpentine workers. Historical data cited above indicates that there is, in reality, overlap across these social-economic/racial divides among the original membership of the Bruce Methodist Church. This disagreement may indicate controversy in the community over religious orientation, and perhaps over whether or not the church was an appropriate place to mix religion, politics and certain aspects of social life. In addition, it is noted that the "philosophy" of the Wards as leaders in the community was to use the church as a site for important aspects of community life and interaction: the function of the annual Ward family reunion as a platform for discussions on community behavior, values, and needs. In a 1982 local newspaper article, the Ward reunion was described as an event where,

Wards and Northwest Florida Indians are gearing up for a recreation of their heritage and a strong rebinding to their legacies. The Methodist Church at Bruce is just across a quiet country road from the Creek Council House.¹²⁰

Held in the Fall, the Ward family reunion also corresponded with harvest time and

¹²⁰ "Ward Family Reunion Held at Bruce," 21 October [1982], MNOF-Bruce.

symbolically with the Creek Green Corn Festival. In the Spring, Homecoming, begun as a commemoration of the long-time community leader, Diamond Joe Ward, also brings together Bruce community members. Homecoming highlights the values of sharing and caring. Even during the depression, there were no shortcuts taken for the meal served at Homecoming, as the DeFuniak Herald reported,

After the service, the ladies announced they had prepared dinner on the ground. If you have ever heard a noise like that at Bruce, you know what it means. One of the best spreads I ever saw was before us, and after that congregation had finished, not half was consumed. Those Bruce people know just how to capsule hard times and fill you with the very essence of prosperity. If you ever have an opportunity to get to Bruce on one of her public days, avail yourself and you will come away saying, "the half has not yet been told" [sic] God has done a great deal for those people down there and we have many there who appreciate it.
John 3:16.¹²¹

Homecoming and the Ward family reunions are still held each year. Like the Church roll itself, these gatherings assemble members of the community through their "Ward" heritage, but also include people of other Creek ancestry.

In summary, roughly six generations of Creeks have lived as a community in and around the town of Bruce, Florida.¹²² Creek families formed a community in this area along the Choctawhatchee River after the second Creek Wars of 1837-39. The Muscogee Nation descend from specific families of Creeks, who maintained community relations through endogamous marriage patterns and frequent face to face social relations, particularly through the establishment of community institutions such as churches, schools, the post office, and

¹²¹ "Homecoming Day at Bruce," 24 March 1932, MNOF-Bruce.

¹²² The geographical area that is considered inclusive in the community covers the territory within only a fifty-mile radius of Bruce. See demographic maps in Appendix D, "Creek Demographics and Households;" Church Register of the Bruce Methodist Episcopal Church, South, 1912-1922, MNOF-Bruce.

businesses such as stores and the café. In the latter part of the twentieth century, community members began to organize around Indian politics, participating with other Creeks in claims cases, and forming a tribal council to represent the Bruce community, as well as Creek descendants across West Florida. The community continues to thrive around its institutions, and the tribal council continues to provide structured community programs, and to advocate for their members at the state and national levels.

6, 7, 8. The OFA raised concerns that pertain to demonstrating interactions as a community between tribe members across West Florida and Alabama. Namely, clarification was requested regarding interaction between members of the original petitioning group at Bruce, Florida, those at Blountstown, Florida (referred to as the Harjo/Boggs/Parrot group), and those in Escambia County, Florida. In addition, it was noted that this latter group were potentially enrolled members of the Poarch Band of Creek Indians, a federally recognized tribe near Atmore, Alabama.

Muscogee Nation Tribal Enrollment Ordinance, Ordinance #04-01-100 (year-1st ordinance-Section 100) limited tribal membership to those persons who trace lineal descent from persons whose names appear as founding members of the Bruce Methodist Church between 1912 and 1922. Thus, leadership outside of Walton County, Florida, is no longer relevant to the discussion of Muscogee Nation community interactions and political structures.¹²³ By adopting the Bruce Methodist Church roll as a historic base document from which to count membership, Muscogee Nation has assured that no persons from Poarch Creek can be enrolled in two tribes.

9. The OFA maintained that “an extended family group descended from one Indian ancestor, no matter how large or cohesive the group of kinsmen, does not form a tribe,” and therefore asked Muscogee Nation to show community interaction between the “Ward

¹²³ Muscogee Nation of Florida, Tribal Enrollment Ordinance, Ordinance #04-01-100 (year-1st ordinance-Section 100), 7 February 2004, MNOF-Bruce.

subgroup [at Bruce] and other Eastern Creeks or their descendants.”

The OFA has accepted that the Ward family has adequately been shown to descend from the historic Creek Nation, and that they constitute a cohesive group of kinsmen. However, OFA staff believed the petition did not demonstrate that other community members also descended from the historic Creek Nation, nor that these members interacted with each other and with the Wards. Evidence of community interaction was addressed in the Muscogee Nation’s 2002 response, and supplemented above in the section titled, “In relation to Criterion 83.7(b), 5.” The members of the Bruce community do not descend from “one Indian ancestor.” The Wards descend from several key Creek ancestors: Elizabeth English and her husband James B. Ward, Daniel David Ward, Elijah Ward, and his wife Sarah Cochran were all Creek Indians, and founders of the Bruce community. In addition, three of James B. Ward and Elizabeth English’s sons married three sisters (Purvis) who are of Creek ancestry through the Wright family. Circumstantial genealogical evidence suggests that the current members of the Muscogee Nation have several more Creek ancestors, as described in point #4, above.

10. There was little documentation to demonstrate that the Harjo-Boggs group functioned as a distinct community.

Muscogee Nation Tribal Enrollment Ordinance, Ordinance #04-01-100 (year-1st ordinance-Section 100) limited tribal membership to those persons who trace lineal descent from persons whose names appear as founding members of the Bruce Methodist Church between 1912 and 1922. Thus, leadership in the Escambia County group is no longer relevant to the

discussion of Muscogee Nation community parameters and functions.¹²⁴

11. In relation to Criterion 83.7(c), the OFA noted two key omissions regarding the demonstration of political leadership among the petitioning group for the period beginning in the nineteenth century to the formation of the tribal council in 1983:

- i) no historical leadership for the Escambia County group was described,**
- ii) the petition needed to show that there is a political connection between the membership and leaders and thus that the members of the group and its leadership maintain a bilateral political relationship.**

i) As noted in #10 above, the Muscogee Nation Tribal Enrollment Ordinance, Ordinance #04-01-100 (year-1st ordinance-Section 100) limited tribal membership to those persons who trace lineal descent from persons whose names appear as founding members of the Bruce Methodist Church between 1912 and 1922. Thus, leadership in the Escambia County group is no longer relevant to the discussion of Muscogee Nation political leadership.¹²⁵

ii) The Muscogee Nation defines leadership abilities according to a number of skills and attributes which they describe as:

the ability to read and write, social traits to enable effective work relationships with non-Indian communities, the ability to transfer land, marry, certify births, or run a store, and the management skills to keep the township fed, clothed, healthy, legally protected, and housed.¹²⁶

While no single Muscogee Nation leader can be said to have owned all of these skills and

¹²⁴ Muscogee Nation of Florida, Tribal Enrollment Ordinance, Ordinance #04-01-100 (year-1st ordinance-Section 100), 7 February 2004, MNOF-Bruce.

¹²⁵ Muscogee Nation of Florida, Tribal Enrollment Ordinance, Ordinance #04-01-100 (year-1st ordinance-Section 100), 7 February 2004, MNOF-Bruce.

¹²⁶ Muscogee Nation of Florida, Petitioner No. 32, TA Review Letter Response, 14 March 2002, MNOF-Bruce, p.73.

attributes, the community at Bruce, Florida, has been led by citizens who have effectively served as leaders, protectors, and providers throughout the twentieth century. Evidence that there is a political connection between the membership and leaders within the Muscogee Nation community, and thus “that the members of the group and its leadership maintain a bilateral political relationship” during the first eighty years of the twentieth century are found in records maintained by two of the town’s institutions: the Bruce Methodist Church (founded 1912) and the Pine Level or Bruce school (founded 1895).

Throughout the first eight decades of the twentieth century, persons selected by the Muscogee Nation community to operate and maintain the Bruce United Methodist Church and Bruce School were also recognized as community politicians and economic leaders at Bruce, Florida. Bruce School closed in 1954, limiting the institutional exercise of leadership within the Muscogee Nation community to its church leaders.¹²⁷ Today, the Bruce Methodist Church, recognized by the Alabama-West Florida Annual Conference as a Native American church, continues to serve the Muscogee Nation community, and is a site where Creek leadership is exercised.¹²⁸ The fact that Muscogee Nation community members accepted leadership by prominent individuals who headed their institutions is an indicator of a bilateral relationship between the two socio-political components of Bruce.

Since 1978, the Creek community at Bruce has participated in the constitutionally governed Muscogee Nation/Florida Tribe. Leaders have been selected from among the town’s prominent Creek families by community-wide elections on a regular basis. After the creation of

¹²⁷ Interview with Zera Denson by James M. McClurken, 7 July 2004, Muscogee Nation of Florida, p. 15.

¹²⁸ Bruce United Methodist Church, ca. 1992, MNOF-Bruce; Fred E. Zeigler Jr. To Zera Denson, 24 September 1991, Private Collection of Zera Denson.

constitutional governance structures, the elections held to select governmental officers are an indicator of a bilateral relationship between leaders and followers.

The community and its leaders 1900-1978

The Bruce-centered Muscogee Nation community, as described above, included a number of Creek families. The family names Bishop, Bozeman, Burke, Hare, Infinger, Penton, Silcox, Ward, and Wright – discussed above as descendants of documented Creek Indians – all appear as founding members of the Bruce Methodist Church between 1912 and 1922.¹²⁹

Twentieth century Muscogee Nation leadership was drawn primarily from the descendants of James B. Ward and Elizabeth English, who made effective decisions for Bruce’s political, social, economic, and cultural continuity through to the present day. Although communities are complex and decisions are made at many social levels, a handful of persons are documented as the keepers of community properties and public servants at Bruce, Florida between 1900 and 1978. These Muscogee Nation leaders are William Josiah “Diamond Joe” Ward (b. 1830 - d. 1924), Jessie Josiah “J. J.” Ward (b. 1870 - d. 1966), and Mazie Ward (b. 1903 - d. 2001).

William Josiah “Diamond Joe” Ward

William Josiah “Diamond Joe” Ward led his family’s migration from Dale County, Alabama, to Walton County, Florida, during the Civil War, settling near Dead River, a few miles north of Bruce. In 1895, Diamond Joe bought a tract of land on the Choctawhatchee River north of the site that would become Bruce. Three of Diamond Joe’s brothers, James Madison, Ben Franklin, and Thomas Jefferson, left Dale County, Alabama with their families to follow

¹²⁹ Church Register of the Bruce Methodist Episcopal Church, South, 1912-1922, MNOF-Bruce.

Diamond Joe to Florida and also acquired land in Walton County.¹³⁰ The Wards joined other Creek Indian families who already lived in Walton County, and who would also settle at Bruce at the turn of the twentieth century, such as George M. and James F. Bishop, George W. and William Infinger, Elijah Padgett, and Samuel Simmons.¹³¹ Their descendants and those of other landless Creek families of Walton County, still form the socio-political core of the Muscogee Nation community at Bruce.

Diamond Joe Ward, noted for his charisma and community involvement, won respect and a constituent following in the Bruce community because of his intellectual prowess, spirituality, generosity and kindness.¹³² He is attributed with the founding of the Bruce School and the Bruce United Methodist Church.¹³³ Although Diamond Joe remained active in the institutions he founded until his death in 1924, their construction, funding, and operations were community projects.¹³⁴ The structures have been physically maintained by the community, and their operations were supervised by members selected by the larger Muscogee Nation

¹³⁰ Handwritten letter by Margie Weathers concerning her Indian descent, n.d. #866, Private Collection of Zera Denson; Patent Certificate #1405, issued to Benjamin Franklin Ward, 25 September 1882, Bureau of Land Management – General Land Office Records Online Resource [Hereinafter BLM-GLO Records]; Patent Certificate #13473, issued to David Ward, 1 June 1859, BLM-GLO Records; Homestead Certificate #12513, issued to Thomas Franklin Ward, 25 September 1896, BLM-GLO Records.

¹³¹ Homestead Certificate #18851, issued to George M. Bishop, 11 January 1909, BLM-GLO Records; Homestead Certificate #20634, issued to James F. Bishop, 9 October 1906, BLM-GLO Records; Homestead Patent #93909, issued to George Washington Infinger, 6 December 1909, BLM-GLO Records; Homestead Certificate #16278, issued to William F. Infinger, 11 October 1902, BLM-GLO Records; Homestead Certificate issued to Elijah S. Padgett, 13 November 1895, BLM-GLO Records; Homestead Certificate issued to Samuel M. Simmons, 24 August 1901, BLM-GLO Records.

¹³² The Choctawatchee Clan of Eastern Creek Indians, n.d. #1088, MNOF-Bruce.

¹³³ Kris Slocum, "Bruce Group Holds Fundraiser to Restore Old School," *The Herald*, Image #12, n.d. #728, MNOF-Bruce; Church Register of the Bruce Methodist Episcopal Church, South, 1912-1922, MNOF-Bruce.

¹³⁴ "Death Claims Pioneer Resident Of Walton Co.," *The Breeze*, 13 March 1924, MNOF-Bruce.

community that they served, throughout the twentieth century.¹³⁵

Teachers and administrators of the Bruce School were often hired directly from the Muscogee Nation membership. For example, Muscogee Nation member Zera Denson (granddaughter of Diamond Joe Ward) taught at the school between 1944 and 1952.¹³⁶ Diamond Joe's son, J. J. Ward, and members of J. J.'s extended family, Jess Sharon and J. Lamar Ward, also served on the school board.¹³⁷ J. Lamar Ward also served for a number of years as the school principal. Thirty to forty students attended the school each year, many of whom were Muscogee Nation children, including Wards, Bozemans, Burnhams, Burkes, Halls, Simmons, Bishops, Stanleys, etc.¹³⁸

Diamond Joe converted to Christianity early in life and had the reputation of quoting the Bible – chapter by chapter and verse by verse.¹³⁹ Although not an ordained minister himself, he officiated over community weddings and funerals.¹⁴⁰ Diamond Joe is credited with inviting ministers of several denominations to the Bruce community to build and pastor a church at the turn of the twentieth century. He successfully recruited a Methodist Episcopal minister, Rev. J.

¹³⁵ Kris Slocum, "Bruce Group Holds Fundraiser to Restore Old School," *The Herald*, Image #12, n.d. #728, MNOF-Bruce; Ward Genealogy Handwritten Research Notes, n.d. #279, Private Collection of Zera Denson, pp. 1-3; The Florida Tribe of Eastern Creek Indians 2nd Native American Festival, 5 June 1999, MNOF-Bruce; Muskogee News, 15 February 1999, Private Collection of Zera Denson.

¹³⁶ Interview with Zera Denson by Heather Howard, 9 July 2004, MNOF-Bruce, p. 12.

¹³⁷ J. J. Ward Political Leadership, n.d. #1082, MNOF-Bruce; "The Ward family line has been present . . .," n.d. #1087, MNOF-Bruce, p. 2; Audio Interview of Billie Joe Ward, Donald Thomas, and Zera Denson by James M. McClurken, 23 October 2003, MNOF-Bruce, p. 14.

¹³⁸ Appendix A, "Bruce Area Schools Information."

¹³⁹ J. J. Collins, "James B. Ward Lived As Spy Among Indians," item from unidentified newspaper, 2 August 1956, MNOF-Bruce; Carol McCrite, "Ward Family Chronicles," *The DeFuniak Springs (Fla.) Herald-Breeze*, 8 October 1981, MNOF-Bruce. Diamond Joe, herein, was also credited with knowing the Declaration of Independence word for word after his first reading of it.

¹⁴⁰ Wards Buried at Dead River Cemetery, 1 November 1981, MNOF-Bruce.

W. Mathison, to lead a revival in the area. Following Rev. Mathison's meetings, Diamond Joe and his granddaughter, Mazie Rossell, convinced the revived community to build Bruce United Methodist Church. Mazie recounted that:

About 1913, the Bruce Methodist Church was started. My grandfather, (Diamond Joe) William Josiah Ward, was the first adult to join and I was the first child. Just as he told me, the young folks followed me and the older ones followed him. It just so happened at the end of the Revival held in the School House (1 room) by Brother J. W. Mathison, we had a membership of 83 which was my grandfather's age. We started building the church and during the time before it was completed and the cornerstone laid, six people joined the church [and] were considered Charter Members.¹⁴¹

Construction of the Bruce United Methodist Church was a community effort that demonstrates the bilateral political relationship between Diamond Joe Ward and the Bruce community. Mazie described community involvement in Bruce Church reconstruction in 1929,

In the cornerstone, we placed a Bible, a list of the members, a \$20 gold piece place there by my grandfather and copies of some other papers, most likely the deed, etc. The building iteself [sic] was erected by the Grice's from Red Bay. A good many of us had jobs assigned to us to raise the money for materials. I remember my task was to get money to purchase the floor joists. My friend, Vina Pate, had the sills. Brother Mathison called her Miss Sills and me Miss Joists. I believe my little brother Mano was called Mr. Windows. Our father J. J. Ward, donated much of the materials that went into the old church. It took approximately one- an- a-half [sic] years to complete the church building, and when the date was set for the dedication, William Josiah Ward (Diamond Joe) sent school children across the dirt road to the one-room schoolhouse to locate their History books to follow along as he recited the Declaration of Independence.¹⁴²

The list of founding members is found in the Church Register of the Bruce Methodist Episcopal Church, South.¹⁴³ Several deacons responsible for the operation of this church have attended the

¹⁴¹ Bruce United Methodist Church, ca. 1992, MNOF-Bruce.

¹⁴² Bruce United Methodist Church, ca. 1992, MNOF-Bruce.

¹⁴³ Church Register of the Bruce Methodist Episcopal Church, South, 1912-1922, MNOF-Bruce.

church from the 1920s and 1930s to the present. They were and remain community leaders recognized by the church as leaders in a bilateral socio-political relationship.

Jesse Josiah Ward

Diamond Joe Ward died in 1924 and responsibility of leading and stabilizing the community and the institutions he created passed to J. J. Ward. Like his father, J. J. Ward provided social, political, cultural, and financial assistance for Muscogee Nation members. By the early twentieth century, J. J. owned thirteen homesteads and the largest general mercantile store in the Bruce area.¹⁴⁴ He served as the patron and leading deacon of the Bruce Methodist Church, school superintendent, and as a Democratic Party activist who could muster as many as 400 voters in the Bruce community.¹⁴⁵ As J. J.'s granddaughter Zera Denson recalled:

The democrats kicked off their political campaign from Bruce because this place was a block vote. The women would serve meals inside and the men would listen to the speakers out in the yard. Before using the school, we met in the Methodist church. The politicians would speak from the preacher's podium."¹⁴⁶

J. J. also officiated at wedding ceremonies.¹⁴⁷ He and others in the Bruce community worked together to provide employment and services, and held social and political events to meet

¹⁴⁴ Audio Interview of Billie Joe Ward, Donald Thomas, and Zera Denson by James M. McClurken, 23 October 2003, MNOF-Bruce, p. 33.

¹⁴⁵ Various newspaper items, n.d. #1075, MNOF-Bruce (entry for April 24, 1924); Various newspaper items, n.d. #1075, MNOF-Bruce (entry for May 1, 1924); "Mr. Ward Writes on the Choctawhatchee Bridge," *The DeFuniak Springs (Fla.) Breeze*, 30 October 1930, MNOF-Bruce; "Mr. Ward Shakes 'em Up," *The DeFuniak Springs (Fla.) Herald*, ca. 12 June 1930, MNOF-Bruce; Letter from J. J. Ward to Voter, n.d. #986, MNOF-Bruce.

¹⁴⁶ Deposition of Zera Wayne Pate Denson, n.d. #989, MNOF-Bruce, p. 4.

¹⁴⁷ Various newspaper items, n.d. #1084, MNOF-Bruce (entry for September 21, 1911); Various newspaper items, n.d. #1084, MNOF-Bruce (entry for October 26, 1911); "Walton Leader Succumbs at 90," item from unidentified newspaper, 18 December 1966, MNOF-Bruce.

community members' common needs.¹⁴⁸

J. J. Ward, along with his lineal and collateral kin, controlled the economic underpinnings of the Muscogee Nation community between 1900 and the Great Depression. As a land owner, J. J. played a role in production of the region's primary export, turpentine. He also provided direct employment in the manufacture of turpentine and other foodstuffs and products required to support the trade.¹⁴⁹ As owner of the commissary that provisioned workers, he also profited financially and politically from retail and credit sales. Control of credit through a local cash/token system allowed J. J. to develop substantial influence among Muscogee Nation community members.¹⁵⁰ J. J. Ward's control over economic production and provisioning helped build a social and physical barrier between Muscogee Nation residents of Bruce and laborers from outside the community, a line so difficult to cross that the Bruce community maintained its Creek identity when others lost their own.¹⁵¹

From the Great Depression to World War II and into the second half of the twentieth century, J. J. Ward effectively served his community. His granddaughter, Zera, described J. J.'s career and political status:

¹⁴⁸ Various newspaper items, n.d. #1084, MNOF-Bruce (entry for 20 March 1924); "From Mr. Ward," *The DeFuniak Springs (Fla.) Herald*, 30 October 1930, MNOF-Bruce.

¹⁴⁹ Deposition of Zera Wayne Pate Denson, n.d. #989, MNOF-Bruce, p. 2; "Margaret Sharon: Mother, Grandmother, Great Grandmother," ca. 1986, MNOF-Bruce; Various newspaper items, n.d. #1084, MNOF-Bruce (entry for March 31, 1921); Audio Interview of Billie Joe Ward, Donald Thomas, and Zera Denson by James McClurken, 23 October 2003, MNOF-Bruce, pp. 10-12; See also Interview with Zera Denson by James M. McClurken, 7 July 2004, MNOF-Bruce, p. 12.

¹⁵⁰ "Walton Leader Succumbs at 90," item from unidentified newspaper, 18 December 1966, MNOF-Bruce; Information about Jobie Jason Ward, ca. 1985, MNOF-Bruce, p. 2; Deposition of Zera Wayne Pate Denson, n.d. #989, MNOF-Bruce, p. 2; Ed Pate & Grover Burnham, *Timber Industry*, July 1981, MNOF-Bruce; Interview with William Odell Ward by Heather Howard, 10 July 2004, MNOF-Bruce, p. 4; Unknown to Barbara, ca. 2000, MNOF-Bruce.

¹⁵¹ Interview with Zera Denson by James M. McClurken, 7 July 2004, MNOF-Bruce, p. 17.

Exemption 6

He was the micco. . . . He was Mr. J. J. or Grandpa Joe. He took care of the community like his father before him [Diamond Joe]. He was not elected. Our leaders had other qualities back then. He was more red faced than dark and could read and write and knew how to work with whites. The person that ran our towns had to be able to blend in and be able to conduct business. The community knew he was the leader and so did the other towns. It was just he way it was. Everybody else stayed out of the way unless there was trouble. . . Like legal trouble. After the turpentine went away, the men started doing other things to survive. Making liquor was our biggest industry. And it could get dangerous. Grandpa had to get the workers out of jail. Bruce was a distribution point. Grandpa had the key people that would fo [go] in and testify. . . .¹⁵²

Anthropologist, Anthony Paredes notes that Poarch Creeks had “little, if any, formal leadership and political organization,” in the early part of the twentieth century, whereas the Bruce Creeks did maintain the distinctive leadership of successive members of the Ward family.¹⁵³ This leadership was outwardly expressed in the form of mainstream political organization, such as through the Democratic Party and in civil service. The Wards took the lead in organizing key community institutions: the church where many of them served and continue to serve as the deacons, the school where many served as superintendent, principal, or teacher, a post office, commissary stores, and the café. Between 1900 and the depression era, the Wards also contributed considerably to providing employment for many of the families around Bruce. Idell Burnham and [REDACTED], Alice Chapman, recalled J. J. Ward and other Ward family members in the following way,

[Alice:]...Mr. J. J. Ward, the man you talked about, he taught all the people my age, which is 76. He was very kind to everybody, Zera’s grandfather. He had a

¹⁵² Deposition of Zera Wayne Pate Denson, n.d. #989, MNOF-Bruce, pp. 2-3.

¹⁵³ Paredes, “The Emergence,” p. 67. Early Poarch community life virtually mirrors that at Bruce, as Paredes continues, “Social ties were primarily those of family, kinship, and locality. Each of the Indian hamlets had a community hall built with communal labor and serving as a recreation center, church, and school. Members of the community and occasional traveling Baptist preachers conducted church services. Schools were operated on a per child fee basis with parents hiring anyone who could be engaged to teach the children to read and write. Many of the Creeks who grew up during this period never really learned to read and write.”

lot of wealth. He always helped. Then there were the Sharons, who owned the property right across from the church this way. And Suzy Ward, who lived to be very old. She was Mr. J. J.'s sister, wasn't she?¹⁵⁴

[Idell:] He was good to everybody, as far as I know, he was good to everybody. He had a big store and everybody that needed groceries that didn't have money, they got groceries on credit. A lot of them never did pay the old feller back, but it was alright.¹⁵⁵

Calvin McGhee, leader of the Perdido Band of Friendly Indians of Alabama and Northwest Florida in the Poarch Creek area, approached J. J. Ward in 1950 to assist him in enrolling Creek descendants to participate in Docket 21 claims proceedings.¹⁵⁶ These federal hearings tested Creek claims to compensation for the lands taken from them by the Treaty of Ft. Jackson.¹⁵⁷ J. J. Ward and Calvin McGhee held meetings at Bruce to enlist participation of Creek descendants living outside of Oklahoma and to gain judicial acknowledgment for Creeks living East of the Mississippi.¹⁵⁸

Work on ICC Docket 21 was J. J.'s final contribution to the well-being of the community he had already served well for fifty years. As historians Lucius Ellsworth and Jane Dysart state, "Creeks with important political connections, such as Jesse Joe Ward, lobbied leaders including Senators Spessard Holland, George Smathers, John Sparkman, and Lyndon B. Johnson, as well

¹⁵⁴ Audio interview of Idell Burnham and Alice Chapman by James M. McClurken, 28 October 2003, MNOF-Bruce, p. 4.

¹⁵⁵ Audio interview of Idell Burnham and Alice Chapman by James M. McClurken, 28 October 2003, MNOF-Bruce, p. 3.

¹⁵⁶ Deposition of Zera Wayne Pate Denson, n.d. #989, MNOF-Bruce.

¹⁵⁷ Billie Ford Snider, comp., *Creek Indians East of the Mississippi* (Published privately, 1993), citation is to Preface.

¹⁵⁸ Deposition of Zera Wayne Pate Denson, n.d. #989, MNOF-Bruce.

as Congressman Robert L. Sikes, to push the claims commission.”¹⁵⁹ J. J.’s wide political influence with politicians like Congressman Claude Pepper proved effective in obtaining compensation for Creek descendants for the Creek land that was taken from them in The Treaty of Ft. Jackson.¹⁶⁰

Mano Odell Ward and Mazie Ward Rossell, 1950s-1970s

As J. J. Ward aged, his son and daughter, Mano Odell Ward and Mazie Ward Rossell, assumed their father’s leadership in the Muscogee Nation community. Mano was also certified and served as Bruce’s Notary Public. He officially notarized affidavits for applications for Docket 21 payments.¹⁶¹ Mano, like his father, ran the Bruce Community’s grocery store. Unlike J. J. Ward, however, Mano supplemented his income, and that of his relatives, with the proceeds of a popular and illicit distillery.¹⁶² Mazie Ward proved effective in the political realm, assuming her father’s role as the Democratic Party Chairperson for Walton County, and serving in that capacity for over fifty years.¹⁶³

Mazie Ward Rossell was a leader of considerable influence within the Bruce Community. Besides her role in founding and supporting the Bruce Methodist Church, she served as President of the Bruce Women’s Club for 22 years, a community organization whose membership was

¹⁵⁹ Ellsworth and Dysart, “West Florida’s Forgotten People,” p. 438. Their findings are also supported by testimony of J. J.’s granddaughter: Deposition of Zera Wayne Pate Denson, n.d. #989, MNOF-Bruce, p. 3.

¹⁶⁰ Claude Pepper to J. J. Ward, 6 December 1955, MNOF-Bruce.

¹⁶¹ Mother’s Affidavit, Lurene Elizabeth Ward, 21 November 1920, MNOF-Bruce.

¹⁶² Audio Interview of Billie Joe Ward, Donald Thomas, and Zera Denson by James M. McClurken, 23 October 2003, MNOF-Bruce, pp. 23-25.

¹⁶³ Mazie Rossell Obituary, 8 February 2001, Private Collection of Zera Denson.

comprised primarily of Muscogee Nation women. She was the first gubernatorial appointee from Bruce to serve on the Northwest Florida Creek Indian Council beginning in 1978. Mazie served on this statewide committee during the administrations of Florida Governors Bob Graham and Bob Martinez.¹⁶⁴ As a leader in a state-wide organization Mazie Ward Rossell also presided over the Bruce Community during the formal organization of the Florida Tribe to draw cash to Bruce for the benefit of her community.¹⁶⁵ Locally, she continued her duties at the Bruce Methodist Church until her final years; her funeral was conducted at the church in 2001.¹⁶⁶ She also successfully organized community members for maintaining the Muscogee Nation community's cemeteries, sites with strong cultural significance to Muscogee Nation members to this day.¹⁶⁷

The Elected Leaders, 1980-Present

The Muscogee Nation community at Bruce organized itself as the Florida Tribe of Eastern Creek Indians in 1978 under the leadership of Mazie Ward Rossell. In the past, the community had chosen their leaders based on each person's abilities, usually from among those who were members of, or connected to, the Ward family. Leaders in the new constitutional

¹⁶⁴ Mazie Ward Rossell to Mary, n.d. #1096, MNOF-Bruce, p. 2.

¹⁶⁵ Deposition of Zera Wayne Pate Denson, n.d. #989, MNOF-Bruce, p. 5.

¹⁶⁶ The Florida Muskogee (Creek) News, January 1988, vol. 3, no. 1, MNOF-Bruce; Minutes of Council Meeting, 28 February 1988, MNOF-Bruce; The Florida Muskogee (Creek) News, vol. 4, no. 4, October 1988, MNOF-Bruce; Minutes of Council Meeting, 9 April 1989, MNOF-Bruce; Mazie Rossell Obituary, 8 February 2001, Private Collection of Zera Denson.

¹⁶⁷ Micco Mazie Rossell to Folks, n.d. #992, MNOF-Bruce; Meeting Minutes, 22 January 1989, MNOF-Bruce.

order stood for election under constitutionally established procedures.¹⁶⁸ Evidence of elections conducted to fill seats on the Florida Tribe/Muscogee Nation tribal council lends strong supporting evidence of a bilateral political relationship between leaders and followers. A sample of the many documents on file at the Muscogee Nation tribal offices is evidence of the seriousness accorded to the election process by the Muscogee Nation tribal council and Muscogee Nation members.¹⁶⁹ Representative councils headed by Tribal Chairpersons, Don

¹⁶⁸ Agenda, 23 August 1981, MNOF-Bruce [copy of 1978 Constitution enclosed]; Constitution of the Choctawatchee Clan of Creek Indians, adopted 7 August 1982, MNOF-Bruce. This constitution was amended in 1980 and 1991 (Harry A. Rainbolt to John C. B. Thomas, 11 April 1996, MNOF-Bruce). A second constitution was adopted in 2001 (Constitution of the Muscogee Nation of Florida, 21 January 2001, MNOF-Blountstown).

¹⁶⁹ The Florida Muskogee (Creek) News, vol. 1, no 1, January 1984, MNOF-Bruce; Agenda for Meeting of January 15, 1984, 15 January 1984, MNOF-Bruce; Vntola Haco, Micco (Andrew B. Ramsey) to Council Member, 12 March 1984, MNOF-Bruce; Minutes, 17 April 1984, MNOF-Bruce; Summary of Minutes, 24 March 1985, MNOF-Bruce; Minutes, 4 April 1985, MNOF-Bruce; Donald Sharon to Council Member, 10 April 1985, MNOF-Bruce; Summary of Minutes, 28 April 1985, MNOF-Bruce; Donald Sharon to Council Member, 6 May 1985, MNOF-Bruce; Summary of Minutes, 19 May 1985, MNOF-Bruce; Summary of Minutes, 8 September 1985, MNOF-Bruce; Summary of Minutes, 10 November 1985, MNOF-Bruce; Administrative Procedures, ca. 1986, MNOF-Bruce; Summary of Minutes, 23 March 1986, MNOF-Bruce; Donald W. Sharon to Council Members and Friends, 1 May 1986, MNOF-Bruce; The Florida Muskogee Creek News, October 1986, MNOF-Bruce; 1987 Elections, Instructions for Voting by Absentee Ballot, 1987, MNOF-Bruce; Summary of Minutes, 22 March 1987, MNOF-Bruce; The Florida Muskogee (Creek) News, vol. 4, no. 2, April 1987, MNOF-Bruce; Donald W. Sharon to Council Member, 17 May 1987, MNOF-Bruce; Summary of Minutes, 17 May 1987, MNOF-Bruce; Summary of Minutes, 30 August 1987, MNOF-Bruce; Minutes of Council Meeting, 28 February 1988, MNOF-Bruce; Minutes of Council Meeting, 27 March 1988, MNOF-Bruce; Donald W. Sharon to Council Members, March 1989, MNOF-Bruce; Minutes of Council Meeting, 9 April 1989, MNOF-Bruce; The Florida Muskogee (Creek) News, January-February-March 1991, MNOF-Bruce; Florida Tribe of Eastern Creek Indians, Tribal Code, ca. 1991, MNOF-Bruce; Donald Sharon to The Florida Tribe of Eastern Creek Indians, 21 December 1991, MNOF-Bruce; Council Meeting Minutes, 26 January 1992, MNOF-Bruce; Agenda, 18 July 1993, MNOF-Bruce; Council Meeting Minutes, 22 January 1995, MNOF-Bruce; Sara A. McCoy to Florida Tribe of Eastern Creek Indians Election Committee, 22 February 1995, MNOF-Bruce; Sara A. McCoy to John Thomas, 23 February 1995, MNOF-Bruce; Notice of Election, 26 March 1995, MNOF-Bruce; Regular Council Meeting Minutes, 19 January 1997, MNOF-Bruce; Regular Council Meeting, 18 May 1997, MNOF-Bruce; Unknown to Scott Streater, 18 May 1997, MNOF-Bruce; Regular Council Meeting Minutes, 17 January 1999, MNOF-Bruce; Muskogee News, 15 February 1999, Private Collection of Zera Denson; Sara A. McCoy to Zera Denson, 31 March 1999, Private Collection of Zera Denson; Zera Denson to Dear Sara, 22 April 1999, MNOF-Bruce; FTECI [Minutes] Regular Council Meeting, 25 April 1999, MNOF-Blountstown; Anne Tucker to Charles Helseth, 18 April 2000, MNOF-Bruce; Regular Council Meeting Minutes, 21 July 2001, Private Collection of Zera Denson; Muskogee Nation of Florida Muskogee News, September 2001,

Sharon (1984-1991), John Calhoun Breckenridge “Breck” Thomas (1992-1996), J. A. “Brick” Mason (1997-2002) and Ann Denson Tucker (2002-present) have all pursued funding on behalf of their Muscogee Nation constituents. They have worked tirelessly to provide services to Muscogee Nation members and to preserve the Muscogee Creek cultural legacy. Muscogee Nation tribal councils have, more importantly, undertaken the responsibility for operation of a government that the State of Florida and the United States would recognize as the legitimate representative of the Muscogee Nation of Florida.

12. The OFA requested a description of how the Muscogee Nation determines the eligibility of members.

The Muscogee Nation determines eligibility of members according to provisions of the Tribe’s 2001 constitution and 2004 membership ordinance. These documents are included with this submission.

13.

A) In support of the above, the OFA requested descriptions of:

- i) application procedures (including a copy of the membership application)**
- ii) membership eligibility, and**
- iii) the group’s procedures for the maintenance of the official enrollment records.**

B) The OFA also requested an explanation of the membership criteria for the Northwest Florida Creek Indian Council.

Muscogee Nation is in compliance with 83.7(d) with the submission of the Tribe’s 2001 Constitution and 2004 membership ordinance. The differences and associations between the Muscogee Nation (formerly the Florida Tribe of Eastern Creek Indians) and the Governor-

appointed Northwest Florida Creek Indian Council were explained in section 1, above.

14. The OFA asked that member numbers used on the roll submitted with the original petition be explained.

Muscogee Nation is herewith submitting a newly revised membership roll. Numbering on the roll submitted previously is no longer pertinent.

15. The OFA noted an omission in the genealogical evidence supporting the Muscogee Nation membership's descent from "the historic tribe of Indians" (the Creek Nation prior to removal, or before 1840).

This question has been addressed in sections 4 ii and 9, above.