

LUM 86A

Lew Barton/Mrs. Brantley Blue

May 19, 1973

B: Today is May 19, 1973. I am Lew Barton interviewing for the Doris Duke American Indian Oral History Program under the auspices of the history department at the University of Florida. Today I'm privileged to be in the home of Commissioner and Mrs. Brantley Blue from Fairfax, Virginia, and with me is one of my favorite people, Mrs. Blue, who has consented to talk with us on this interview. Mrs. Blue, you are very kind, you are one of the kindest people I know, and I can't say a lot more for I always choke up ^{a little bit} when I try to say something nice about you because it seems so inadequate. You and the Commissioner have always seemed to me to be the ideal couple. You complement him in so many ways and you know they say back of every great man is a great woman. And I'm sure that this is true in his case and I'm sure he'd be the first to agree.

MB: I can certainly complement you very highly in many ways.

B: Thank you. How do you like living here in Fairfax?

MB: I like it fine. Where Brantley is, is where I shall be.

B: "Thy people shall be my people?"

MB: That was in our wedding.

B: That is beautiful, isn't it? And I'm sure you mean it, you're always so sincere. Well, I'm glad you two got together and I'm sure there are many, many other people ^{who} ~~that~~ feel the same way.

MB: Thank you.

B: And you have a beautiful home here in Fairfax. It's so quiet here and you've been such a gracious hostess, having us in your home and

you're so very kind to have us here.

MB: It's people like you that help us to make things beautiful in life.

B: I certainly appreciate that . I want you to tell me some little things about Brantley and yourself that you don't mind telling; I mean anything that you want to tell or talk about. Anything at all that you would like to talk about. You might not think that it would be interesting to others but---

MB: He's a very busy man. We intend to retire some day to somewhere like in the mountains and build an Indian cabin and do it all in the design in which no one would ever question that it couldn't be the Lumbee home.

B: That's great. You have some things that remind me of Lumbee^{around here} a lot.

You know, on the walls. Could you describe some of the things you have?

MB: Well, I have a portrait that my daughter has done on green velvet.

She's done by wine and by knitting, and then I have gifts that I have had sent in from out west and from Lumbee country, and I enjoy looking at them. And I enjoy it very much, especially when I'm down here alone just working, inspires me. It gives me an inspiration to work that much harder.

B: Did you ever think the Commissioner would become--you knew he would become something great, someone great. You knew he was already, just hadn't developed. But did you know how far he would go? Did you have any idea of this?

MB: I had a great estimation, an intuition.

B: Tell me about, would you mind telling me about the dream you had? I've had that impression--

MB: I dreamed that I'd fall on his feet underneath the columns and knew that he was only twenty-two years of age.

B: Is that the columns here in Washington?

MB: This was in Kingsport. He was a poor lawyer where he was until I beset at the lawyers table because he was an Indian until after he married me and then they changed their lines right quick like and this is what I wanted but I had this dream that he would either be governor or a federal judge in which there's no question about whether he could be a federal judge when he leaves this office or not or what he would be. But you have to let a man lead his own ^{life} ~~life~~.

B: Well, that's very interesting to hear that part of you course----

MB: You have to let a man be a man.

B: That's great. A man has to lift a woman to be a woman, right?

MB: Right.

B: Let each be each.

MB: Well, I wouldn't want to be a man. No, no, I wouldn't want to be a man.

B: Well, I'm glad you're not.

MB: Thank you sir.

B: What's good for the Commissioner is good for all of us. His many friends, ..., and you've been so influential in his life. Would you tell us something before we get back to him, tell us something about your early life, where you attended school and things like this, things of the biographical nature, that you can remember at the moment?

MB: Yes, I went to ^{? not clear!} Vaudenfince High School and my father went to Milligan College, so naturally I attended Milligan College as most of our family did. I didn't send my daughter to Milligan, I sent my daughter to Pembroke where her father went to school because it was more important.

B: Who was your father? He was a judge---

MB: My father was, no he wasn't a judge, but you can walk into the area and I ~~can~~ believe you'd still find out who he is. He left such a record behind him. He was the high sheriff of the fifth largest county in the state of Tennessee, the first man to be elected in twenty-eight years and the man before that was Joe Thomas, who was an uncle of mine.

B: For the sake of people who don't know about it, would you mind giving us your father's name and your mother's name.

MB: My father was Ruby A. Milam.

B: How do you spell that last name?

MB: M-i-l-a-m. Owner of the Kingsport Milling Company. He was in feeds, also real estate, and well, he was a very busy man. He built him many things.

B: How did you and Brantley come to meet each other?

MB: On a blind date and a dare.

B: This date, would you tell us about it?

MB: Well this girl friend called me and she wanted me to meet this young lawyer. I said I am tired of lawyers, I don't like lawyers, and I have no time for lawyers, and I was dating Dr. "Zip" then, and I had, I didn't have any time for lawyers.

B: The thing about it is that you didn't know about this one particular lawyer, did you.

MB: Well, for Pete's sakes, I was head at the milling business, and I had to go around and work with men, and I had to prove myself as the woman, and I felt like I had done a miracle and then I had to fool with the lawyers every time they turned around. In fact, our lawyer turned out to be one of the best friends that Brantley had and he said, oh well,

he said, I'm losing a lawyer but I'm gaining a, I mean, I'm losing a client, but I'm gaining a good friend, and that's one of the best friends that Brantley has right now, is ^{McIntock?} McInturk Gainesford, right now.

I can call him right now and ask him for anything and--

B: Did you fall in love right away or---

MB: Well, not until he told me he was Indian. He told me--I said what nationality are you. He looked like Daddy.

B: There is a striking resemblance between your father's picture and your---

MB: Yes, and he looks much like Daddy, and I worship my Daddy, and although Daddy was very strict ^{and strong.} ~~on~~ Oh, ^{he} ~~he~~ could look over his glasses, we always had dinner in the dining room, we don't live like this today. But Brantley, I saw in him something and I saw what my father had turned down. They wanted Dad to run for Congress. They wanted Dad to run for this and for that, and he wouldn't do it because we had an estate, and he says I'm happy at what I've got, and we did have an estate.

B: It seems to me--

MB: We had a mill dam and we had bridges, concrete bridges, and we had orchards, we had hands, we had black cattle, we had ---

B: Were you brought up out in the country on a country estate or something like this?

MB: No, you'd be surprised because the first man that Kingsport, see Dad was one of the first men, and you have your choice. You pick your land. So he picked it.

B: Did this young lawyer greatness, was it sorta a promise in the beginning to you, or was it *sort of, you be came aware of it as you went along?*

MB: Well you see I had been in this terrible ~~er~~ my grandfather had given me

a new Dynaflo~~e~~, ^{have you ever -- ?} ~~have you~~ -- ^{it was in '49} ~~with some forty lines~~, and he hadn't even gotten my name on it, he was going to put my name as Dorothy Milam on it, Dorothy Milam, Kingsport Milling Company,

B: This was in 194⁹, right?

MB: Well, eleven days later, these boys from State College, not Milligan, but from State, they whapped the fool out of me. There was no way I could go, I couldn't go that way, I'd go into a tunnel. If I went that way, I went into a bank. What do you do When you see a car sliding sideways into you?

B: Right, it must have been a terrible experience.

MB: It was, I didn't wake up for thirty days, and that's why I don't like lawyers. Everybody wanted to handle that case. Everybody wanted to handle that case, oh! *It was because I carried the highest insurance, so* Naturally, they wanted to handle the case, and I just didn't like lawyers, and in that contest there was only one and he laughed at me, because I pulled my mother out of his office to go down and buy a new dress with porcelain buttons down the front. This was in a shop that was, well it was a department store, just close by.

B: How long did you live in Kingsport? This was where his practice was when you met him. in Kingsport right?

MB: ~~well,~~ ^{But} it was hard to get him started.

B: Yes, it's pretty hard to get anybody started in any profession, I imagine.

MB: Well, I really thought that he could do it on his own. They would call him Little Rovie when he ^{would enter} ~~went into~~ the courtroom because the judge was Daddy's roommate, Todd, lawyer Todd was Daddy's roommate, lawyer ~~Don~~ Dodson

~~Todd~~ was Daddy's roommate, and then there was Daddy, and all these boys were fighting for Brantley.

B: Well, as I understand it then, the judge before whom Brantley did most of his practicing was an old ^{friend} frined of your father's.

MB: Yes, yes, this is very true.

B: I imagine that it is kinda hard to establish a practice in medicine or law, you know, well how long---

MB: It wouldn't have been too hard, but Brantley had to yell, I'm Indian, I'm Indian, I'm Indian. And they wouldn't let him ^{sit} ~~fit~~ at the lawyers table.

B: He's always been pround of that hasn't he?

MB: Yes.

B: I can imagine.

MG: And so have I. And so I fit the highest society since I was eligible, and so I just picked ~~my~~ Deon, and I said Deon, we are going to have lunch today at McRae's. She said why. I said because I said so. And she said well, OK, you gonna pick me up, or am I gonna pick you up? I said you're gonna pick me up. We're having lunch.

B: Do you think prejudice against Indians has its intents in this particular part of the country?

MB: I think they tried to use it because they knew that he was the apple in the eye of ^{too many} ~~two men~~ of the ^{big} ~~big~~ boys and Brantley was staying on the Democrat party.

B: He didn't change his political affiliation at all?

MB: He didn't change it, he didn't change it, no. And Bill Elbert said this,

now I know where the colonel was, I've been with it too long, ever since I've been ninety years old. You're going to move to a Republican whether you like it or not, and you study the Republican politics, and see what you think about it, and then he went, he went, he went just like that. I had insurance companies and everything calling in there. But do you know, I never once entered his office, except at night to decorate it.

B: How about your mother, your mother and father, they liked Brantley didn't they?

MB: My father was already deceased at that time.

B: I see, I'm sorry.

MB: I wish, oh Daddy could have meant ^{so much} to my Brantley, so much. Because look what he put Pete into. Bill Franklin, here he is the biggest stockholder and Ben Frranklin, Roses, the Clandens, Ramseys, you name it, everything from Blue Field to ~~what is~~ it in Florida where Walt Disney's doing his thing.

B: Walt Disney World?

MB: Sebring^{in Sebring?}nell. He's got two, two stores, two big stores there.

B: Now how long---

MB: And the other brother-in-law is on Black Angus and you can't mess with that because he's ah-ah, what do you call it, takes care of animals, well you know what I mean.
of you

B: How many/children were they in the immediate family? Did you have any brothers and sisters?

MB: I've got one brother. He is a professor.

B: Where does he live?

MB: He lives in Kingsport also. But they love Brantley.

B: Uh-huh. I know they do. Brantley has one of the most remarkable personalities of anybody I know. People---

MB: Well, they love him because I love him. They feel if he mistreated me they wouldn't give him the time of day, you know.

B: Well, he's not gonna do that. I've known him long enough to know that he wouldn't do that.

MB: But, Brantley's not that kind.

B: And you have a brother--

MB: And he is brilliant, he is. If he can build a house for you, he can do anything, but he's a professor, really.

B: He's a professor?

MB: Uh-huh.

B: Your family was very--

MB: Prominent.

B: Yes.

MB: Too prominent, in a way.

B: Sometimes that can be a problem

1. [tape in terrible shape here]

MB: Well, I just hope that it doesn't hurt Brantley none. It's put Brantley where he is. Now right now he can walk into forty-room mansion and be greedy and---gracious and all this and that. But he might be--

B: ~~Did you~~ Do you remember the first time you ever went together with --- Robinson. Do you remember your impressions at this point of Robinson (?)

MB: I never thought anything about it. I was so busy with wedding plans--

B: You really had your men in flowers I bet didn't you?

MB: Well, my wedding dress alone cost over \$525 and here they were interested in the wedding, and all this and that, and all the girls with dresses turned down, green satin and huge bouquets of red roses. It was fabulous, it was fabulous. Well, Brantley went into a stare, he just simply went into a stare. Bless his heart, had I known, I wouldn't have poked. I would have gone across the state line, and gotten married.

B: Well, prejudice and things like this--

MB: I didn't know, I didn't know.

B: You don't ever know until, really, I don't think anyone ever knows about those things until they come into contact with them. You have to experience it.

MB: Well, what makes you feel so good now, is when you go back home, Pembroke is home to me. Wehn you go back home and you see the fine homes going ^{up} ~~out~~ and baing built, doesn't it make you feel proud.

B: It certainly does. We've seen marvelous progress in my life--

MB: I wanted to go back and fight, well, when I saw that Brantley was more of less reacting differently, and in which I felt maybe that he might be, to Kingsport. I'm sure that he was tired of being called Little Broby, Little Sheriff, Little Big Boy, Little this and that. I'm sure that he was mighty sick and tired of that, but I think that maybe had we gone home and worked then, maybe we could have done more. I don't know.

B: You have certainly done a lot. Aren't you very happy about your accomplishments? Doesn't that make you feel good.

MB: Well, a rolling stone gathers no moss. I know that. He's certainly been nothing but a, uh--he hasn't been a rolling stone. But darling don't you think that maybe had we gone home and worked--I don't know. He'll be worked all over the state of Tennessee and--
can't

B: But he ~~XXX~~ work in the state of North Carolina because he was an Indian, right?

MB: Why does that have to stop things?

B: Well, uh, those are human problems and I guess it took time, but don't you think that it's improving along those lines. Things were a little better now than they were when Brantley was coming along. Now just this week, when Brantley was telling me about the four, I mean the five--

MB: Lawyers?

B: Lawyers who are graduating--

MB: Well, for all of this, that's him--

B: Uh-huh. They won't ever have to go through what he went with, through, now.

MB: Yea.

B: So this is improvement, and I'm sure this gives him a great deal of satisfaction and you too for they won't have to go through the same problems. They'll have a little bit better chance. At least they can practice law in the state of North Carolina today .

MB: Uh-huh.

B: But they couldn't have when he--now here's what it means...

MB: ~~It's~~ ^{And that's} hard to believe.

B: It is.

MB: It's hard to believe--

B: It is hard to believe. But I'm certainly thankful that, you know, it's

an improvement. We have it. This is what encourages me---and I know that it encourages him. Because he wants things to be better for others, than it was for him, you know.

MB: Yes, he's encouraged these boys very much.

B: I'm sure he has. Now he's very influential, isn't he? I mean he, Brantley's influence is felt over a wide area and by many people because he always encouraged others. He achieved great things. It seems to me that's encouragement.

MB: Yes, that is. I certainly do.

B: Yes, and his heart ,... his heart if for such improvements and he's been so consistent, you know, over the years.

MB: He'll receive his reward.

B: Yes, I'm sure.

MB: Someday for ^{what} all he's done.

B; Now just with the knowledge of the five young Indian men graduating from law school--now that's part of his reward right now. Part of it, because this is improvement--this is progress. This is better justice, you know, and it's reflected here in this five young men. You can probably shake hands with ^{some} ~~each~~ one of them, and not only them, but many other--

MB: Where you have too. You have--you just don't know how much good you've done.

B: I thank you very much.

MB: You just don't believe how much you've done.

B: So many of--well, I don't think anybody can be around Brantley very long without loving him. Do you?

MB: Well, no, I kinda doubt that.

B: He's serious, he's hard working, he has his dreams, and he goes

after those dreams *and gets them done.*

MB: Hitch your wagon to a star. Yes that's what he always said.

B: It must make you feel very good because together you and he have ---well, you've come a long way. Not only to your selves, but to others as well. Today *-----they'll never have* to be discriminated against the way that he was and the way that several other law students were.

MB: I cannot understand how anybody can discriminate against anybody. I cannot understand this---to---my---it will not comprehend.

B: It is hard to understand, you know. It isn't reasonable. Somebody said that prejudice isn't reasoned into them now and it can't be reasoned out of them. It's just an emotional thing I think. Don't you think so? Maybe it's more emotional than reason. It's sort of a condition .

MB: Oh, yes. Being that its man--and being that you know so much more than I do. But I'll Swannee. I just cannot. I cannot see.

B: It's hard to believe that these conditions still exist at ~~this~~ ^{these} times. It must be devastating to us. You know, to a young couple to come up against this or problems like this, because you probably didn't realize that this kind of prejudice existed until you came in contact with it. Or if you knew it, it was a remote sort of thing, something you might have heard about. But you just couldn't believe that--

MB: No, I'd never heard of that. All I heard was love stories of the ~~young~~ American Indian. No, I'd just never heard of that, or anything so absurd.

B: What do you , ah, what do you plan to do in the future?

Do you have any definite plans?

MB: His plans are my plans.

B: Right, I liked what you said about thy people shall be my people.

MB: They are my people. And you know my daughter used the same thing in her wedding.

B: This is a beautiful...

MB: Thy people shall be my people. My people shall be thy people.

B; He might still be,..he might still end up in the ^{United States} ~~state~~ supreme court. Do you have any---

MB: It won't surprise me at all. No, it won't surprise me at all.

B: Knowing Brantley you know that...

MB: Oh, no, you're not taping this.

B: Yes, I am.

MB: Oh you are? Oh, no. Don't tape that!

B: 7.

MB: Wait a minute.