This is Deborah Locke in Flandreau, South Dakota. I’m interviewing Beverly Wakeman this afternoon and this is part of the Minnesota Historical Society Oral History Project. Beverly first of all could you spell your name for me?


DL: Do you have a nickname?

BW: No.

DL: When and where were you born?

BW: I was born in Pipestone, Minnesota August 18th 1933.

DL: Who were your parents?

BW: [excerpt made over phone later] My father’s name was Enos Redwing and my grandfather’s name was John W. Redwing. My grandmother was Elizabeth Columbus Redwing, and her father was William Columbus. I think his wife’s name was Jenny.

My mother was Mary Francis Lewis (That was her maiden name.) She married a Neuman and then she married my father, Enos Redwing. Her father’s name was Robert N. Lewis and her mother’s name was Myrtle Martin.

DL: How many brothers and sisters did you have?

BW: I have a sister Juanita Redwing Nesje (That’s her married name.) I have a brother Robert Dale Redwing.
DL: How long have you lived here?

BW: All my life.

DL: You never lived anywhere else for any reason?

BW: Like I said, I was born in Pipestone, Minnesota. My father worked at the Pipestone Indian School hauling coal and when he received his land assignment here in Flandreau we moved over here and then I was here all my life except for when my husband was in the Service and we lived in Colorado Springs. Otherwise I’ve been here all my life.

DL: Those land assignments; those were made in what year? Do you remember? Or did it vary from reservation to reservation?

BW: I think it might have been in the 30’s or 40’s maybe.

DL: 34 sticks in my mind but I’m not sure.

BW: That could be, yeah.

DL: Are you an enrolled member of the [Flandreau] Sioux?

BW: I am and I’m on the base roll. There’s not very many left today that are on the base roll, that first roll.

DL: Do you have family members at other reservations?

BW: No.

DL: Where did you go to school?

BW: In Flandreau here.

DL: The public school?

BW: Yes.

DL: What grade did you go through?

BW: Well I didn’t finish but I went here.

DL: What is your earliest memory as a child from the time that you were real small?

BW: Well I can remember coming over here. We never had a car. I think we caught a ride with somebody. But coming to Flandreau, it seemed like it was a long ride to me
because I was a kid. I don’t think the road was paved. It seemed like I could hear rocks
underneath the car. That’s my earliest memory [when] we came to Flandreau.

DL: The rides [were] probably in wagons…

BW: Yeah. We never had a car until after we moved here. My father had horses. I have
to get back to years. Our people came here and they came here because they wanted
to live like the white man. They wanted to be farmers and they wanted to… First of all
they wanted to be Christians. The first thing they did was to build a church. So they
farmed but they had horses and farming was hard. In later years they could hardly
make a living on those farms. So they rented out their farms to non-Indians. We had a
garment factory at the entrance to the Flandreau Indian School. My mother worked
there and she ironed. They made doctor’s clothes for Indian hospitals. They made
dresses and pajamas for the students that went to the schools. They laid out the
material, cut it, sewed it and she was one of them that pressed the outfits and then they
packaged them up and sent them out. I think she marked me for the rest of my life
because I still iron today. Some people say, “Oh, I don’t even have an ironing board or
iron.” But I iron everything.

Then I might say that this factory that we had (I probably get carried away here) during
the Eisenhower [administration] -- when he was in office, they closed that factory
because they said [it was] competing with private enterprise. So they closed this factory
and most of our Indian women, that’s where they worked. The men didn’t have jobs.
The Indian School didn’t have very many local Indian people working there at that time.
They made jobs for them. My mother-in-law was one of them and my husband’s aunt.
There were some other ladies that were hired at the Indian School as dormitory
matrons. For the first time they hired some of our Indian men. They worked at the plant
hauling coal and jobs like that. So my mother of course had worked quite a while and
so she retired then and drew her Social Security. So that was that story.

DL: What games do you remember playing as a little kid?

BW: Oh I think it’s like all kids -- we made mud pies and played with our dolls and just
played, played ball. We had friends down town. We played ball. I mean there was just
like a gathering of all the kids, all different ages, you’d play ball and go sliding.
Sometimes we didn’t have a sled; we’d use cardboard boxes and slide down the big
hills.

DL: Did you have chores to do too?
BW: We had cows, but I never did milk [the] cows. I [had] no real chores. [added via phone later: Mother didn’t want us to waste food or soap, so she did all the cooking and cleaning.]

DL: What’s the first news story that you remember from your childhood? Some event that happened that was bigger than just your immediate community.

BW: First of all you have to remember we did not have electricity. We didn’t have a battery for a radio so we didn’t really hear much. But what I thought during the war – the war made an impression on me. They had “blackouts” – everybody was supposed to turn their lights out because you didn’t know if [enemy] planes would be [flying] over. That made an impression on me.

DL: Which relative had the most influence on you?

BW: I have to say my mother and my father too.

DL: What were they like?

BW: Well what? I always knew that I had two parents that loved me. Even if we didn’t have much, we knew that our parents… My mother was always home. She never… I’d go places all the time here but my mother was always at home when she wasn’t working. I always had a warm feeling when she was at home. So I guess I’d have to say both of them.

DL: She was a very traditional homemaker then.

BW: Yes.

DL: Made her own bread I bet, homemade everything?

BW: Yes.

DL: Did she make her own clothes too?

BW: No, she didn’t make her own clothes.

DL: You were a little different. You got out more than she did.

BW: Oh yes, yes.

DL: Did your family celebrate the holidays?

BW: Yes we did.
DL: How?

BW: Well we always had an artificial Christmas tree. Like I said, we didn’t have electricity. But my mother always made things nice for us. We always had presents and the traditional foods.

DL: Which traditional foods? Were they Dakota foods or traditional holiday foods?

BW: Oh no, now remember I said my father was a full blood. My mother was not. I never heard him ask for, like wheat corn soup or Dakota foods. He probably liked it but he never said anything.

DL: He didn’t expect her to know how to do that.

BW: No.

DL: So she made the more…

BW: Traditional [food], like everybody else. I don’t think we had turkey. We had goose a lot; goose and dressing. Her mother-in-law was German so a lot of times the things that she cooked were like the Germans. But that was all right with us.

DL: Did you learn anything at all about being Dakota in your growing up years?

BW: Well we always knew we were Dakotas. Like I told you my dad never talked about anything. They never told any of them, his sisters, they never told us anything. One time I asked him why he didn’t teach us to speak the language. He said, “You know what? Your livelihood isn’t going to depend on whether you can speak the language. I think he was right because for forty years, I worked at the Flandreau Indian School and we had kids from all different tribes, all over. Even the people that worked there weren’t just from Flandreau so I don’t know who I’d be talking to. Although we had students that talked their… Like the ones from Rosebud or Pine Ridge but otherwise, I don’t know who I’d be talking to.

DL: Did you ever hear your grandparents speak Dakota?

BW: My grandparents were dead by that time… I think my grandfather John W. Redwing died in the twenties and I think my grandmother died probably not too long after that. So no, never but when we’d have company that could speak, my father would talk. They talked good. Or some of his relatives would come and they would talk but otherwise, no, never.

DL: Was your mother accepted as a non-Indian into the family?
BW: I think about it today. People accept whoever we marry pretty much, but in those days I think they must have had a hard time. [Someone] told me that when my father married my mother, his brother really didn’t like it. He was upset; he didn’t think that they should marry. Maybe that’s why they kind of stayed to themselves. And of course, we didn’t have a car so we couldn’t visit different people. I imagine they had a hard time because in those days it was unheard of to have Indians and non-Indians marry. We never ever felt with my half sisters and brothers, never felt any different.

DL: You said you never heard too many stories while you were growing up. So you probably didn’t hear anything about the war. When did you finally learn about what that war meant to your family?

BW: Probably not until even after I was married. My husband, he was tribal chairman here for twenty years and he went different places and he worked for the Post Office downtown here. He worked for the Post Office and he retired which was thirty some years and so we would go different places. We went to Mankato and he asked some of those people there, where they had the hanging. And there was not any marking to show where this was.

DL: Was that the first time that you heard about the hangings when you went to Mankato with him?

BW: Oh no, I had heard about it after but not from my parents, not from my brother, never.

DL: Well it turns out you have some relatives who were very directly connected to that war. Tell me more about them.

BW: Well I really didn’t know them because they were gone.

DL: A couple generations back.

BW: My great grandfather, William Columbus... In fact I have a paper here that I wrote down. He was born in 1811 I think and he was born at, they called it Kaposia in South St. Paul in Dakota County. Then he was at Grey Cloud Island and I wrote this down and I don’t know where I got it, and that was Washington County across the river from Dakota County. Now have you ever heard of this?

DL: Sounds right.

BW: OK. Then my grandmother, Elizabeth, she was a Columbus married to a Redwing, John W. Redwing, and she was born in 1858 and my father was born in 1888. So I don’t know too much about them. That’s what I wanted to ask you about; if you’ve ever
seen any pictures. I don’t have pictures of William Columbus but he must have been kind of well known. I’ve read that he was some way related to Little Crow.

DL: I don’t know too much about the Columbus family. I do know there’s some Columbus [family] members still at Lower Sioux.

BW: Yeah, that’s right and I’m related to them. Their father…

DL: Thomas.

BW: Thomas Columbus, Tom Columbus, he was… His father and Moses Columbus and my grandmother, they were brother and sister. We think that probably our great grandfather, William Columbus maybe was married a second time. Maybe his wife died my grandmother’s mother, because of the age difference from her brother Moses. Then she also had a sister Lucy Columbus she… I have a book here and I want you to look at it, that I bought. It’s Old Betsy. At one time she was married to Taopi. Have you ever heard of that? Taopi?

DL: No.

BW: This is what I want you to help me with that I don’t know which one she was married to. There was a Solomon Taopi and I think it shows on one of the records that there were like two. But this Old Betsy was the mother. Then she married Dave Thomas from Morton. They never had any children but she raised a girl but I didn’t know her. She’s probably dead now. I mean she probably died a long time ago.

DL: Were any of your family members forced to leave Minnesota?

BW: Oh yes, like my great grandfather; I said he went to… He was a prisoner down to Davenport.

DL: Your great grandfather? What was his name again?

BW: William Columbus.

DL: William Columbus must have been rounded up among those 303?

BW: And then my grandfather John W. Redwing, he also was a prisoner. I think I saw someplace he was either 20 years old or 24. Then when they finally got out, they came here. Well they probably went to Santee and then they came.

DL: But they were prisoners of the U. S. Government.

BW: They were prisoners.
DL: They must have been found not guilty.

BW: Not guilty. Then they homestead. They came here, they homestead. My great grandfather William Columbus, he homestead. He had 160 acres over there by the Indian School. I have a home. It’s not on Tribal land. It’s taxable land but not far from there. That’s where he homestead. Then I don’t know what happened. Maybe they had to pay taxes or something, didn’t have the money. He sold his land and went back to Minnesota and he died over there. He’s buried over there somewhere at Morton.

Then my grandfather John W. Redwing, he homesteaded north of Flandreau at Riverview Township. Now I’m the type; I have to know where they went and where they lived. I want to see where they were. For I don’t know, days, weeks, months, we always tried to find this Riverview Township. My half sister and my brother and I… I think every Sunday we drove around and thought we were going to find a sign that said Riverview Township which we didn’t. Some of these people here from Flandreau said I knew… I talked to them and asked them where it was and so we went there and it was close to the river. It seemed like they always went so they’d have water. They lived close to the river. Maybe they had to pay taxes. I don’t know but he sold his land and moved down where that first church is, well east of there down by the river. That’s where he died and my grandmother lived down there and she died there too.

DL: Did you hear any stories ever about the experiences of your great, great grandfathers when they were in jail?

BW: No.

DL: Did they ever write letters or…?

BW: I don’t know but the tribe… I don’t know what year that was. The tribe chartered a bus and those of us that wanted to go, we went down there. My daughter and my granddaughter and I went down to Davenport. Of course where the prison was there’s beautiful homes in there. But they put us on a little bus and took us. I can’t remember that woman’s name but they had a meal for us and they had some papers there too with different people in the history and the different Indians. They said at that time that they were going to put up a marker where those people got off the boat and came. But I’ve never heard anything since. One of the council members I said, “What ever happened? I thought they were going to put up a marker showing where these people got off that boat and they were prisoners.” I have to tell you this story. I don’t know if it’s true but they told us that somebody, one of these people, bought this home and wanted these carpenters to do some work. They said they tried to work on that house and it was so hot they couldn’t stand it. They had to quit working. They said well maybe it was
because some of those prisoners they’re buried there. So anyway I don’t know but that’s what they told us.

DL: Have you been to Minnesota?

BW: Oh yes.

DL: Have you been to Mankato?

BW: Yes.

DL: You just mentioned that before.

BW: Yes.

DL: Did you have any special emotion when you were in that city?

BW: No, only that we were surprised that when my husband asked where the hanging was, they had nothing showing where [it] was.

DL: How about anywhere else in Minnesota that you visited?

BW: Oh Morton because we had relatives that lived there. I had aunts that lived there and uncles.

DL: Do you feel any connection to Minnesota?

BW: No.

DL: So this is home?

BW: This is home even if I was born in Minnesota. I was born in Pipestone, Minnesota. This is home to me.

DL: What is your opinion of the war?

BW: I don’t know, I guess I couldn’t really say because I never knew anything about it until later years. I’m not like some of these young people today that are angry because I don’t know that much about it. I mean only what I read. I’ve read about Little Crow and about the war but I can’t say I have too many feelings about it.

DL: What does the word homeland mean to you?

BW: [Long pause.] Well this is my homeland to me; yes right here.
DL: Do you think it’s a good idea to commemorate the events of the mid-1800’s? Or should we just forget about it?

BW: Oh no I think it’s all right.

DL: What’s the best way to do that?

BW: {Long pause.} Gee I don’t know, I guess I really never thought about it. I think now days they have more things commemorating the… Well say for instance this powwow that’s coming up in July the last of July… My husband was Tribal Chairman and he... It wasn’t a powwow as such. This is what I got out of it, that they wanted to show how the people have come so far. When we first… Fifty years… It’s going to be fifty years they had this first powwow and that’s what it was that commemorating that how the people have come along working and how they’re living today. So that’s all I can say about that because I don’t know, other than that.

DL: How many children do you have or grandchildren?

BW: I had three children, two sons and a daughter, and six grandchildren. Both sons have passed away and I have one daughter living and she lives in Aberdeen, South Dakota. I have 13 great grandchildren and six great-great grandchildren. I have two that live in California and here I have let’s see, three.

DL: If you had a magic wand, what would you wish for Dakota people today?

BW: Well I guess I would have to say that we all get along. A long time ago here, when we didn’t have anything, we didn’t have this Casino and we didn’t have money, people got along. They had... They were close. If we had things going on everybody... They were there. So I think I would like to see them like it used to be a long time ago people getting along together. I’ve seen more in these last years, in my later years where these young people... Like I said my [mother] wasn’t Indian, my father was a full blood but I never [heard] him running white people down or her running Indians down, never. I see that today and I think that here, we’ve always gotten along with the townspeople, worked together. I wish you could go to the community center. We had a woman here, a good friend of mine painted murals on the walls. You can see... There are six panels and in there you can see where the Indians and the whites were always together, worked together. You can just see it in these murals. Sometimes I’m worried about these young people today that they don’t know this. Anyway that’s my feelings, maybe not somebody else’s but that’s how I feel.

DL: We’re about done. Is there anything you want to add?
BW: Well like I said, I would like you to look at those papers that I have. If you can ever find anything on the Columbus's, pictures. Maybe they have them in the Historical Society someplace. We have... I was telling you about these murals that we have. Now this, my dad always called her grandma Lucy, she was a Columbus and she was married to Tyopi and Dave Thomas. Well they knew that she was here and she played this Pettagrew girl. They were one of the first families here. In these murals, they wanted to paint them but they didn't have a picture of grandma Lucy as a child but they did get the Pettagrew girl. They found an Indian girl to portray grandma Lucy and then another girl portrayed this Pettagrew because they played together. They said it didn't matter that grandma Lucy didn’t speak English and the Pettagrew girl didn’t talk Dakota. But they played together with their beads and it shows them setting together playing. That to me, makes me feel good. So like I say each one of those murals tells me a story in how the people worked together.

DL: Is your husband a distant relative of Sarah Wakeman, a famous Wakeman from the 1862 war?

BW: No, he was not.

DL: That does it, thanks so much for your time.