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## Film premier to reveal oral history of Butte Tribe and their land

Belinda Brooks

“Guarding Tribal Lands,” The Oral History of the Butte Tribe of Bayou Bourbeaux, a film by NYTN, will premiere on March 4. The debut will be at The Louisiana Sports Hall of Fame & Northwest Louisiana History Museum, a branch of the Louisiana State Museum.

Following the film presentation, a panel discussion will be held with the facility’s Branch Director, Jenae Biddiscombe officiating. The panel will consist of Chief Rodger Collum, who will be discussing the oral history of the tribe; Film Director Danielle Romero, who will discuss the making of the film; and Vice Chief Belinda Brooks, who oversees the tribe’s historical documentation. Due to the high interest in the featured mini-documentary, two “sold-out” performances have been scheduled at 2 p.m. and 5 p.m.

Romero commented, “The opportunity to film a project as special as this was a privilege. We were overjoyed to bring Butte Tribe’s oral history out into the open with the tribe for the first time. I hope we conveyed how deeply the Desadier family is connected to this land and each other, even today.”

Although Louisiana History speaks of the indigenous people of Natchitoches Parish, the details of precisely who they were and where they went remained a mystery

for over 200 years. Who would have thought that one family on Bayou Bourbeaux held the secrets to all those questions? Additionally, only a handful of the family members knew the secret.

For Native Americans, tribal land is more than the dirt beneath their feet. The land itself is seen as a sacred living being. Chief Rodger Collum is doing more than protecting the land of his ancestors. Conflicts over the ownership of his family lands have been a constant battle his entire life. Numerous area landowners have decided that all they had to do was claim the land and that Chief Collum would stand by and watch them take over. It never took too long for those people to realize that they bit off more than they could chew. No one stays on top of guarding tribal lands like Collum. He has lived on that land his entire 70 years of life. He knows every trail, every tree and every law that involves the possession of his land.

“Guarding Tribal Land” tells the story of Collum’s commission to protect the land. The assignment was handed down to him by the ancestors who walked the ground before him. During the film, Collum reveals many secret places of the tribe’s oral history.

The film crew followed the chief to Butte Hill, which is the namesake of the tribe. While standing at the gravesite, one could sense the sacredness of

the earth beneath their feet. Butte Hill is a sacred Native American burial mound. White Smoke and his wife, Two Moons, were the last chief to be buried there. Chief Collum spoke of his childhood memories of going to Butte Hill with his grandfather, Clarence Desadier, aka Chief Parrain. He told of his years of tutelage under the guidance of his elders to carry on the oral history of his tribe.

Following the trip to Butte Hill, the next stop was the site of the Scottish massacre. Twelve Scottish settlers stopped on tribal land to hunt, fish and mark homestead land. One morning, as day broke, Chief White Smoke and his son, Powder Face, attacked the settlers from all sides with braves dropping from the treetops. Twelve scalped Scots lay dead when the battle was over; wagons were torched and their possessions were confiscated. Collum led the group to the exact place of the massacre. He showed them the remains of a wagon wheel buried in the ground close to 200 years ago.

Not far from that spot, the small Native American graveyard holding the bodies of Chief Powder Face, his wife, Marie Louise Perez, and children lay waiting for the film crew. In recent years, Chief Collum has replaced headstones and crosses on the family graves. Unfortunately, two small bodies have had to be

repatriated because of erosion throughout the years.

Chief Collum’s herd of Painted Tennessee Walkers is featured in the film. The beauty of the horses galloping across tribal lands is something to behold. Bloodlines of this herd date back to the early-1800s. Chief Powder Face, Joseph Pereda Desadiero, began the herd as he traveled back and forth from Texas, Natchitoches, and New Orleans in his contraband trade. Powder Face’s son, Joseph Desadier Jr., aka Chief Hawkeye, inherited his father’s horse passion. It all worked together to understand better the love that Chief Collum continues to exhibit with his herd today.

Not only does Chief Collum know the land of Bayou Bourbeaux, he knows the lakes that surround it. The land along with the bodies of water completed this Natchitoches area as the Louisiana Sportsman’s Paradise in the mid-1900s. Artifact evidence alone can prove the existence of the center of Native American activity was on the Prairie Lake side of the bayou. Before the man-made lakes were formed, Prairie Lake was just that, a vast, lush green prairie that attracted huge buffalo that supported the life of the indigenous people of the bayou.

Today, in the middle of Prairie Lake is Yarmuck Island which was originally Yarmuck Hill. As the



Chief Rodger Collum guides filmmaker Danielle Romero through the wilderness of Butte tribal land.

film crew traveled to the island by boat, Chief Collum told stories of traveling there with his grandfather, Chief Clarence Desadier. Collum’s grandfather told him many stories of the Yarmuck Mound and Native American life on the hill.

The group then traveled to Collum’s Temple Mound, where numerous indigenous artifacts were collected. Bayou waters surround the mound. There the tribal musicians and singers gathered to record music for the documentary. The band was dressed in full regalia as they honored their ancestors with the music of the elders.

After the filming of the music, Chief Collum led his guests to the oldest tribal living quarter that remains standing behind the Pace Community Cen-

ter. The home of Clarence Desadier, Chief Parrain, still stands after more than 100 years. Once again, the feeling of calm and the spirit of Butte Tribe ancestors vibrated throughout the property.

Interviews with the chief and vice-chief were held at the Pace Community Center. The center was first built in the early 1900s as an elementary school to replace the Native American Desadier School, which was built shortly after the Civil War.

To learn more about Butte Tribe’s oral history and the details mentioned in the upcoming documentary, go to [Buttetribe.org](http://Buttetribe.org). Following the premiere of the documentary, the public will be notified of where the film may be viewed online.