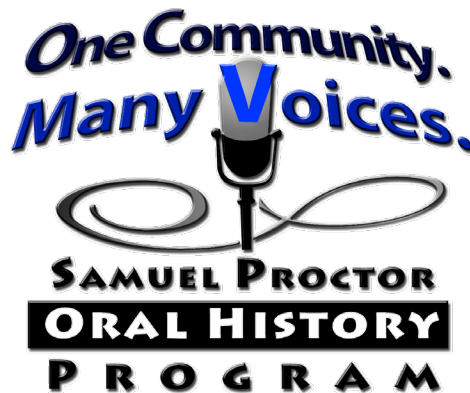


# Mildred Blue

**Southeastern Indian Oral History Project (SIOHP)  
CAT-168**

**Interview by:**

**Emma Reid Echols  
September 4, 1992**



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**14 minutes | 12 pages**

**Abstract:** Mildred Blue is the daughter of Doris Blue, a respected and well-known Catawba pottery maker. Mildred, age 70, has continued in her mother's footsteps by making and selling finely crafted pottery, sometimes even using some of the tools left by her mother. Mildred talks about how she has lived on the reservation all of her life, sometimes in school, sometimes working at the bleachery or Family Dollar store, and sometimes helping her mother make pottery. She describes her family, namely her mother and her father, Andrew Blue. She is hopeful that the settlement the Tribe has received will be beneficial to the young people. She mentions that she faced some unfair treatment as a Catawba Indian in the past but also believes that things are getting better for the Tribe and looks forward to a good future.

**Keywords:** [Catawba Nation; Doris Blue; North Carolina-Charlotte; Pottery; Family histories]

**ORAL HISTORY**

**P R O G R A M**  
**University of Florida**

CAT 168

Interviewee: Mildred Blue

Interviewer: Emma Reid Echols

Date of Interview: September 4, 1992

E: This is Emma Echols, from Charlotte, North Carolina, 5150 Sharon Road. I'm visiting on the Catawba Indian Reservation today and this is a very special today. I'm in the home of what used to be Doris Blue, and her daughter Mildred Blue is here. As a fact, she's making an Indian head over there, all by hand—molded by hand—a beautiful thing she's doing. And I have so many memories of Doris Blue. She was an outstanding person. She married, of course, as you remember, Chief Blue's son. Let me see if I—Mildred, what was his name?

B: Andrew.

E: Andrew. I never did know Andrew, but I knew Mildred's mother Doris very, very well. She was not only an outstanding pottery maker, but she was respected and loved all over the reservation and in many places otherwise, too. Well, I'm going to move over here to where I can talk to Mildred. Mildred, you have always lived on the reservation, haven't you?

B: Yes, ma'am.

E: And where did you go to school?

B: Right here on the reservation, through the seventh grade. They—

E: Who were your teachers?

B: Willard Hayes and Jim Davis.

E: And then did you have any White teachers after that?

B: They were White.

E: Oh, yeah, I know they were. [Laughs]

B: No, ma'am, I didn't. Some of the other children had Mrs.—

E: And you went through what grade?

B: Seventh, down here.

E: And then where did you go after that?

B: Rock Hill High.

E: Did they treat you nice at Rock Hill High?

B: Some of them did.

E: [Laughter]

B: Some didn't.

E: Yeah, I know. That's hard, isn't it? And then after you finished your schooling, what did you begin to do?

B: I worked in a discount store. Well, I worked in the bleachery during the war. Then for a while I stayed home and helped my mother with the pottery, and then in [19]63 I went to work at the Family Dollar store on Cherry Road. And I stayed there seventeen years, until I retired from there.

E: Seventeen years at the Family Dollar on Cherry Road. That's a long time. Do you—have you saved all of your mother's tools that she used for pottery, the rubbing stones and things of that kind?

B: Yes, ma'am.

E: And the little knife she uses?

B: Part of them are the ones that she used. Some of them I've collected myself. I have some of hers.

E: And you make the same kind of things that she used to make?

B: Yes, ma'am.

E: Do you make the one with the snake wrapped around it?

B: I've made some small, small ones. I haven't made the large but—

E: I think I have one of your mother's like that. I have several of her little ducks when she—I was fascinated with all that. And one time I bought from her an arrowhead, like the one you are making now, except it had an Indian on it, I believe. You make that kind, too, don't you?

B: No, ma'am, not with the Indian on it.

E: Well, anyhow, I have one that your mother made. I'm so glad that you've got your own home here. And your mother used to have a store. You don't have a store any longer here?

B: No, ma'am. That was my little store, and I—when I went—worked at the Family Dollar store, I closed it out. It was too much for her to handle.

E: Did you drive, or how did you get into—

B: Yes, ma'am, I drive.

E: So, you go into Rock Hill to do your shopping, then?

B: Yes, ma'am.

E: What do you think about the settlement with the Indians—the grant you're going to get? Do you think it's going to affect you or not?

B: Well, it probably will, but not as much as the young people, because I'm up to the age that'll—I don't know how much longer I'll be here, so. [Laughter]

E: Well, how old are you, Mildred?

B: Seventy.

E: Well, I'm a few years older than that, you know.

B: Yes, ma'am.

E: [Laughter]

B: But it'll help. I know it's going to help the younger people.

E: And for the education and for the training.

B: Yes, ma'am.

E: It's very important. Do you still fire your pottery out in the back yard, like your mother used to do?

B: Yes, ma'am.

E: Same way?

B: Same way.

E: And sometimes you don't know what's going to turn out. You have a broken piece, don't you?

B: Sometimes. You don't know. When they come out you don't know if they all gonna to be in one piece or if they're all going to be in several pieces.

E: That's right.

B: Sometimes you fire—you can fire twelve and you'll get twelve good ones, and other time you put twelve in there and you'll have twelve broken ones.

E: Oh, no.

B: So, you just don't—you just can't—

E: That's very disappointing, isn't it? You don't have any trouble selling your pottery, do you?

B: No, ma'am.

E: Now do they call on you to come into schools and demonstrate your pottery sometimes?

B: Well, I have been asked to go, but at the time that I was supposed to go I fell and broke my ankle, so I couldn't go. [Laughter] But we go to museums and places like that.

E: Now, tell me who your mother and who your father were.

B: Doris Wheelock.

E: Yeah.

B: And Andrew Blue.

E: And your grandmother was?

B: Rosa Wheelock.

E: And she's the one that taught at the school here.

B: Yes, ma'am.

E: And your grandfather was an Indian from another part of the country.

B: Yes, ma'am. Wisconsin.

E: From Wisconsin. What was the county, what was—

B: Oneida.

E: Oneida. And he used to be also a Medicine Man. He would come demonstrate medicines, didn't he?

B: Yes, ma'am. And he was also a great football player.

E: Yes. I have corresponded with the school where he was—trying to get some of his records—and I have a picture of your father demonstrating his herbs and medicines when he sold them.

B: Yes, ma'am.

E: Now, how many brothers and sisters do you have?

B: I had two brothers and one sister, but one brother has passed away.

E: You go to school here on the reservation—to church here on the reservation. Do you remember the old church too, don't you?

B: Yes, ma'am. I remember the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, better known as Mormon.

E: Yeah. And you've always—you and your mother both have always had a close contact with the White people of this community as well as the Indians.

B: Yes, ma'am.

E: Your mother as a little girl wanted to go to school, but she was not allowed to do that. Isn't this right?

B: That's right.

E: And there was—your father used to bring your mother out here, and she would stay on the reservation during the week. Who would she stay with?

B: With her aunt.

E: Who was her aunt? That's alright, we'll think in a minute. And—

B: Betsy. Betsy Harris.

E: Betsy Harris. I didn't know that. At that time, there was a teacher, taught for a short time, Ms. Macy Stephenson, drove out here from Lesslie. And your mother used to ride back with her to Lesslie in her little buggy, and Ms. Macy Stephenson would put her on the train for Rock Hill. Did you know that?

B: No, ma'am.



E: I think I'm correct.

B: She may have, you know, told me about it, and I just have remembered—

E: Miss Macy was very—was deaf, but she loved music, and so she taught a number of them down here to play the piano or the organ. Did you ever hear anyone tell about that?

B: No, ma'am.

E: Well, there's been a wonderful relationship between the Whites and the Indians most of the time, haven't it?

B: A good portion of the time, there have been.

E: Most of the— [Laughter] You're too young to remember the—in 1918, when the flu epidemic killed so many down here.

B: I wasn't born 'til [19]22.

E: No, you weren't born then. But I remember, the history says that the White people came out here with soup kitchens and helped to—who of Sam Blue's family do you remember? Of course, your father was his son. What other ones of the Blue family do you remember?

B: I remember my uncles. Guy Blue.

E: Guy Blue.

B: Nelson Blue.

E: Oh, tell me about Nelson. He married the little girl across the river, was it **Arris**? Leola.

B: Leola. I believe she was a Watts, I'm not sure.

E: Did you know Leola?

B: Yes, ma'am.

E: They were very happy together, weren't they?

B: Yes, ma'am.

E: He was a fine-looking person. And I don't have a—only picture I have of her is after they were married and so forth. But she—the story is that her father made her a little boat, and she paddled across the river to come to school, which is where she met Nelson. Now Nelson would be your—

B: Uncle.

E: Uncle. Do you remember Nelson?

B: Yes, ma'am. He just died about, probably about ten or twelve years ago.

E: Has the reservation changed very much as far as the trees and the roads and things of that—houses?

B: Yes, ma'am. There's a lot more—there's mobile homes here now, and the trees have grown up. Back when we were growing up, most people farmed. When they would be cleaning up during the spring to get their fields ready, sometimes the fire would get out of hand and burned—kept the trees burned—and they didn't grow up very big. But now we've got lot of—there's a lot of big trees here now.

E: And now what about, they used to go hunting down here for deer, and rabbits, squirrels. What else?

B: I think turkeys, ducks, most anything—any kind of game that you could hunt, they did.

E: Now, how old were you when your father died?

B: About forty. He died in [19]60. I must have been about thirty-eight, I guess, something like that.

E: So, you very well remember him. What did he do? Did he work in Rock—

B: He worked at the Rock Hill Printing and Finishing Company.

E: Rock Hill Printing and Finishing?

B: Yes, ma'am. It was built in 1928, and he went to work there in 1930 and worked there until [19]58 or [19]59. His health was bad.

E: You're so nicely situated here in your lovely home, but all up and down the reservation I see trailers, trailers, trailers, and some of them not in very good repair, and no little gardens, and not many flowers around them. You're different here. On this tract of land, can you use as much of the land as you want to?

B: We have a lot. I think it's three hundred feet square, I believe it is, and we can use as much of it as we want to.

E: And it's all you really need.

B: You can't come within—there has to be I think three hundred feet between the two houses, unless it's a member of your family. And that's my brother that lives there.

E: Oh, it is?

B: And it doesn't make any difference. As long as I agree that he can live that close to me, well, it's all right. But if it wasn't a member of my family, they couldn't live there.

E: Now, what does your brother do?

B: He works at Westinghouse.

E: Westinghouse. In Charlotte then?

B: Yes, ma'am.

E: That's a good job. You know you Indians amaze me. You're electrically inclined, any kind of mechanics. There are several of people who work at the tire companies and things of that kind.

B: Yes, ma'am.

E: That's really interesting. Now, Doris Blue has a—does she have a daughter across the road?

B: Yes, ma'am.

E: And who is she—what's her name?

B: Betty Garcia.

E: Yeah. And her husband is a painter.

B: Yes, ma'am. He's retired.

E: Oh, has he retired?

B: Yes, ma'am.

E: I want to come to see her some time, too. Well, what do you see for the future of your people? You're proud to be an Indian, and more and more people are proud of you, aren't they?

B: Yes, ma'am. [Scraping noises] I think so.

E: And you go back and remembering and knowing a lot of the history, don't you?

B: Yes, ma'am.

E: When you get through scraping that piece, I want you to show me one or two of the pieces that you've made, or one that Doris has made. Well, it's a—I've been

here so many, many times and visited Doris and seen you too, but it was Doris that I was talking to and watching do it. Now I'm watching you. And no one taught you how to do that. You watched and see how the pottery was made?

B: Yes, ma'am.

E: Now, do you still get your pottery clay across the river?

B: We did. We don't anymore.

E: Where do you get yours now?

B: I haven't—I don't know where I'll get it when I use this up. [Laughter] But he's refused to let us go back and get any more.

E: Now who's going to be—well, Sammy—Fred Sanders be the assistant to Chief Blue now?

B: Yes, ma'am.

E: Are you pleased with that—the officers in the Tribe?

B: Yes, ma'am.

E: So, you look forward to a good future with them.

B: I hope so.

E: I hope so, too. [Laughter]

B: Well, it's going.

[End of interview]

Transcribed by: Callum Karoleski, December 5, 2021

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