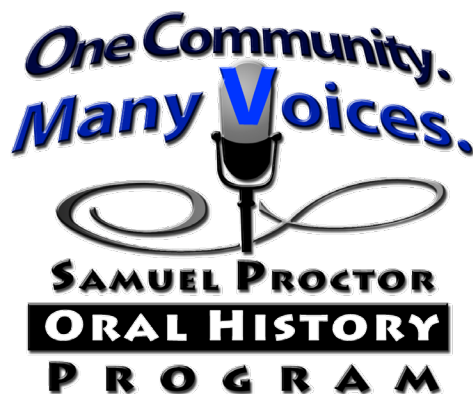


Doris Bulock Blue and Edna Wheelock Brown

**Southeastern Indian Oral History Project (SIOHP)
CAT-155**

Interview by:

**George Ball, Alan Stout, and Monsoon
May 23, 1983**



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31 minutes | 21 pages

Abstract: The identities of the speakers are frequently unclear throughout this interview. The interviewee discusses her style of pottery and influences. The speakers discuss different methods of creating pottery, and the interviewee shares techniques that she and her sister inherited from their great-grandmother. She then talks about how the Cherokee Nation started to imitate Catawba pottery and how this has impacted Catawba pottery sales. The interviewee has new style pottery for sale in Carowinds and in museums in the Carolinas but shares her desire to gain popularity for the old style again. Then, she discusses youth involvement in pottery-making and how she hopes it is not a lost art.

Keywords: [Catawba Nation; South Carolina--Rock Hill; Pottery; Art]

SAMUEL PROCTOR
ORAL HISTORY
PROGRAM
University of Florida

CAT 155

Interviewee: Doris Bulock Blue and Edna Wheelock Brown

Interviewer: George Ball, Alan Stout, and **Monsoon**

Date of Interview: May 23, 1983

U1: The Catawba Indian Reservation is located five miles south of Rock Hill, South Carolina. It's now privately owned with some state support and no longer has any connection with the federal government. Inhabited by several families of mixed Indian ancestry. The purpose of the visit is to see two ladies: Mrs. Doris Blue and Mrs. Edna Brown. These two ladies are sisters, and they are keeping alive the tradition of pottery making among the Catawbans. They make and fire pottery by a method that's been used for hundreds of years.

M: When I was a child, the Indians came through all of the smaller towns around this section of North Carolina with the wagonloads of pottery which they sold from door to door.

GB: Well, we're just come down from Gastonia from Schiele Museum and we were just lookin' at some of your pottery and talkin' to you a little bit about people.

U2: I could talk to you, I just don't have anything to show you.

S: So how 'bout Ms. Brown, does she usually have those?

U2: Oh, yes. Yes, she has some.

S: Does the museum in Charlotte still sell any of your pieces for you?

U2: Who?

S: The museum in Charlotte.

U2: No, I never had any of that. I have some at the museum in Columbia. Bring those out. I sold mine to a museum in Columbia.

S: That's the museum of science?

U2: Yes. In North Carolina there's one of the at the University of South Carolina Archaeology that used to work back in forth from Columbia here.

S: Have you ever entered any of your work at the fair in Cherokee?

U2: No. We go up there every year.

S: You should.

U2: **We go up and everything, they're selling things, those are crafts is something and they show you.** This is my first attempt at a piece as large and I just always made the small pieces. I make pipes and little small pieces. Turtles and canoes, but I never did go into these large ones. And they had this art show in Columbia in November and this man wanted me to make a piece as large as I could, and I made that keychain and some other bowls about this big. It had a snake on 'em and this year I don't make none.

S: We got one of your pieces with a snake on 'em in the **alley**. But not for sale. It's on exhibit. I believe George has been down here to see you before. This is George **Ball**. He's with the biology department at Jackson college.

GB: When I was here, Mrs. Blue wasn't here. I talked with her daughter, wasn't it?

S: And this is **Monsoon**. She's a potter too.

U2: You are?

S: And my name's Alan Stout. I look like my last name. Stout.

U2: Do you use a wheel?

M: No, I use coil method.

U2: Well, we use that sometimes too.

M: I like to make small things. On the larger pieces we have to use the coil—

S: We have some scale village things in our museum, and she's made these little, tiny miniature pieces of pottery with the coil method. And they're perfectly beautiful.

M: Where do you get your clay?

U2: We have to get our clay—

S: Probably down at the road.

U2: Over on the other side of the river. The river's just about of a quarter mile from here and we get the clay over on the other side. I don't know why we started not to get some on this side but it's over there. But the Indians have gone over there I guess for generations. I don't even know how long. We've got the clay at the same spot.

M: Does it always fire different colors like this?

U2: Yes, ma'am. This is probably the same clay because we get the clay the same place and some of the times it comes out red, some of the times real dark like this.

M: When I was a child, they used to come through, the Indians selling this pottery from a wagon.

U2: That's right.

M: And they often had—we had bowls like this, but it didn't have an Indian head on either side of the handles.

U2: Uh-huh, yes.

M: I remember that coming through then.

U3: Are we talking to her?

U4: No, ma'am.

M: How long do you let your clay set before you use it?

U2: Oh, not any length of time. I just have to—I spray mine. I get it real wet and then I take a screen wire and pour it through it and that catches all the little bitty things and then after that it has to let all the water evaporate. So it takes about three weeks. Then it's just as quick as its drying so far.

M: I find that the longer I keep mine, the easier it is to work with.

U2: I have had clay six months. Last fall I got some clay ready from a year ago and for some reason I wasn't able to work with it. I just put it in a plastic bag and tied it up and it was soft [inaudible 06:19] Now, when I get a big bunch of clay ready to work with, maybe I want to work for a week with that soft. It makes it so hard.

M: And then not do anything for a month.

U2: That's right. And I get all my clay ready ahead of time. Well, I just wrap it up in the plastic, put it aside, and when I'm ready for it, I just go.

M: I keep mine in the refrigerator.

U2: You do?

M: It keeps it from getting' smelly.

GB: I think I heard your daughter tell me one time that you use some molds.

U2: Yes, sir, I do. I have molds that are real old now. They belonged to my great-grandmother.

M: Can I see one of 'em?

U2: I don't have 'em. My sister has 'em. They go between the two. They belonged to my mother and then when she passed away, well, my sister and I got her things.

She uses 'em and then I use 'em so right now she has 'em. If you would like to go down to her house—

M: What did you have molds of?

U2: We had molds for an Indian head pipe, a tomahawk, a chicken comb, and a plain pipe.

M: We always called 'em a smoking pipe.

U2: Well, years ago most of the Indians who smoked used this little pipe. And I had the four pipe molds but, that's all. The rest of the things—

S: That pipe with the big high headdress too, that's flat on the top. Where did that style come from?

U2: I really don't know.

M: Do you have any other clay here now?

U2: No, I don't have any. No.

S: Where do you usually fire your pottery?

U2: Just in the—

S: In the back?

U2: I heat it in the stove. I have a gas stove, I heat it in there. About five hundred degrees. When I got out of bed, I already have my fire out the backyard.

Anywhere, I can make a fire and then when it burns down, I just take the pottery out of the stove, I take them out there and I can put it on this cove and start heating wood on 'em and burn it like that for two hours.

M: You break any pieces while firing?

U2: Well, sometimes, I break a good many. Other times I don't. It's luck.

M: It's most fun seeing what happens.

U2: Yes, that's right. Now when I lay these, I was kinda in a hurry. My son works over at Weston House in Charlotte, and he wanted some of these for Christmas—some of 'em over there wanted some for Christmas—and I tried to get in a hurry and I—

M: You can't rush it.

U2: No, sure can't. I didn't put much love.

M: I think the color's interesting.

U2: Does your pottery—how do you burn yours?

M: I have a kiln. Make it with a kiln.

U2: Well, I just wonder if the pottery we make, like that I make now when it's finished, would stand up—

M: That's why I asked if you have any clay. I was gonna make a little pot and try it.

U2: I just wonder. Well, there was a girl here who went to Winthrop college once. She would work for ceramics, and she brought me some clay that they used in ceramics, and she took some of my clay back with her. And hers worked all right because I made some pieces out of that and burned it the way I burned mine.

M: Did she not let you know about hers?

U2: No, unh-uh. She was going to take our clay, and make something and burn it, you know, the way she burned it.

M: I'd like to have some of that clay for our Indians diorama.

S: That'd be good.

U2: What is that? When did you have that?

M: We're going to build a diorama of a village scene of the **cave** dwellers and I'm going to make the little people for it, for the scene and the pottery, some of the stonework, you know, to build little houses with.

U2: Well, are you from Gastonia, too?

M: Yes.

U2: Well, that's not too far. Maybe you can come back a little later and get some.

M: I will.

U2: I can hold some for you then.

M: I'd like to try it out because I have issues with using the other clays the Indians use.

S: We can bring her some of that black clay out of Lineberger Creek, let you try that. We've found a good deposit.

U2: Yeah. You know I've never seen anybody make pottery with a wheel.

M: Oh, I have used a wheel.

U2: I've never seen that. I would like to, I think it would be really interesting. I've seen it on television but just to see a fresh made pot or anything would be interesting.

M: Well, I have done it but I not a lot because I don't have a wheel of my own but—

U2: I think it would be very interesting—

M: It's not too difficult.

U2: It isn't.

M: You just have to learn how wet to get it

U2: Or it'll turn out a lot of it.

M: It'll collapse if you get it too wet, you have to have it just right consistent—

U2: Well, that's the way with this, if you try to make your pieces while it's wet, it'll sag.
You have to make it just right to hold it up.

S: What do you use for temper in your clay?

U2: Not anything.

S: Not anything. It must be good clay.

U2: We don't put a thing. A lot of people ask me what I put in it. This one person asked me if we put our—I believe she said they said they put quick dust in it so maybe—

M: Well, that makes it like terracotta.

U2: But we don't put a thing. We just get the clay out of the ground and work it up like I told you we do and take it and burn it.

U3: Doesn't this have a glaze on it?

U2: The glaze comes from the rocks.

U3: It does?

U2: We don't put anything on it at all.

M: You just rub it enough with it.

U2: We just rub it. That puts the glaze on it.

M: I've done that too.

S: A lot of the old pottery pieces that you find, you say it's tempered with crushed shells. You ever try that?

U2: No.

M: The last piece I made was a little piece made out of terracotta. And it is so rough, you can't put a glaze on it.

U2: This clay is real ground up when you strain it. Get all the little pieces of rock and things out of it. It's real good to work with. It's smooth. You can just put the prettiest shine on it when you get it made and everything. Just with the rock. And we don't put anything on it afterwards, you know, like the ceramic work.

M: I'd like to know what it is that causes these dark spots. It must be some iron or something in that clay.

U2: A lot of times, we think that maybe it's the wood that we use. Maybe a certain kind of wood. I always use pine. Pine bark.

M: The way that it sets doesn't show any variation in the color?

U2: Yes, it does. But I just thought maybe a lot of times the difference in the wood brings out a different color, now, I don't know.

M: Well, it could be a combination.

S: When you do a pot, let's say you put a rattlesnake on it, do you mold it as you're molding the pot or do you do it later and put it on with the clay slip?

U2: Later.

S: You put it on with slip?

U2: I make my pot, my bowl, and when you make these things, you have to make 'em by two. And I'll make the bowl first. Let that dry a while. Then I'll put some neck on it, a little rim, and just set it in time. Let that dry a while then I'll put the two handles on it. Those have to dry. Then I'll turn it over and I put the legs on it. Three legs. Well, that dries a while. And then when the leg's dry enough to hold it, I turn it back over and I shape the snakes. Shape it out on my board. Then I'll wet the pot, you know, wet it, take a stick or something then rough it up, score it

up and do the same way on the snake and then I'll put the snake on it. Paste it on there real good. Smash it.

S: That three-legged pot. Is that typical Catawba?

U2: Yes, mmhm.

S: You don't see any of the Cherokees doing that except recently they've begun to copy it.

U2: Now you know the Cherokees have taken up our craft. The Cherokee crafts were beadwork and baskets. Years ago, they didn't know anything about pottery. And ... oh, I don't know it must've been in the late 1800s, I had an aunt that married a Cherokee man and when she went up there, she made pottery. And they started. And now during that more than usual, because they have a bit of flexibility, all these co-ops, all those shops there—

S: All the tourism.

U2: Everything and we don't have anything. Now, they've got our trade, and getting rich off it. But the Cherokees way back didn't know pottery.

S: What do some of the older Catawba pottery pieces look like? Big cooking vessels?

U2: Yeah, and great big bowls like this lady's with heads.

S: With **jugs**?

U2: Yes, and with heads and some of them were wedding jugs and things like that. Now, a lot of us are copying modern pieces. You know, we see something in the store or something that's pretty, we'd try to copy.

S: Don't you think it'd be better to go back to the old style and make it a pure art form?

U2: It would.

S: You ever use any carved wooden panels to put any design into the—

U2: No. Cherokees do.

S: Some of the old pots that come out of the ground have that.

U2: The Cherokees use that now. I have a cousin in Cherokee, and they sent up this one lady that went up there and she's considered one of the best potters in Cherokee and she uses a paddle for that design. She goes around different places and demonstrates pottery making, and that's actually—

S: Have you ever seen some of the really old pots that were like clay formed around a gourd or clay formed around a basket and then gourd and basket burned out when it was firing?

M: No, I'll talk some hours there's a place where the Indians—

U2: Excuse me, please.

[Break in recording]

GB: You mentioned someone up in Cherokee. The only Cherokee potter that I know of is a lady, she's now dead, named Maude Welch. Is she someone that you're familiar with?

U2: Yes, I know her—I knew her.

S: Or Mrs. Crow? Amanda Crow?

U2: No, I don't know her. But Maude lived down here for a while.

S: We have a few of her pieces. Mrs. Crow has been winning first, second, third place at the Cherokee Fair lately these past few years.

U3: Well, she also had an exhibit in Chicago at one time. In that one brochure.

GB: Oh yeah, well, she's done a lot of things with her wood carving, and she's done some stone carving, but mostly wood and terracotta I think. She's a potter.

M: Do you have any soapstone 'round here?

U2: I really don't know. I imagine so.

U5: Did you or your sister tell my husband that they are showing some of your things at Carowinds?

U6: Yes ma'am.

U5: Don't they have a display of—

U6: I made seven hundred pieces of pottery for Carowinds when they first opened up.

S: How much do you usually get from your pottery?

U6: Well, then for the price, we were just getting two dollars each for small pieces. That's all I made. Small pieces and pots. But now I've got—I'm getting more. I've gone up on the prices and people hesitate to pay.

U5: Do you have any idea how much they resell them for then, over there?

U6: I think the pieces that I would sell for two dollars, they were getting four. Just double.

U2: I would have guessed that.

S: When you do some more pottery, are you gonna make some of the older style pieces?

U6: Yes, I would like to copy some of the older styles, some of the older potters. I had a cousin that was just real good and she's been dead now about fifty years and they have some of hers at this museum in Columbia. And I would like to copy some of hers.

S: I'd be interested in getting some of your pieces that were more like the old style for our museum.

U6: I would like to make some.

S: Add to what we have yours. What we have of yours is pieces that people have bought and been donated to us.

U6: In the fall when I went to Columbia, I didn't make but two of each kind. I made two pitchers, I made two snake pots, and I made two bowls. Just two of each kind. Candlesticks—well, the candle sticks are the little round ones. Real old kind, little rounds ones with a handle. I didn't make too many just to display.

S: How long have you been making pottery? Since you were a girl?

U6: Since I was small.

S: Mother taught you?

U6: Yes.

S: Did grandmother make pottery too?

U6: Well, my great-grandmother did. My great-grandmother was the one who brought my mother up. I didn't know my grandmother.

S: Are any of the young people here learning it?

U6: Yes, there's quite a few.

S: That's good to hear.

U6: Yes, well, they quit for a while. They didn't seem to take any interest in it but now there's quite a few of them. Now—

S: Does that encourage you?

U6: Yes, it is. I have two daughters, one that just left a little bit ago. She helps me all the time. Without her I wouldn't get much done. And I have another daughter who's not interested at all. She says she worked too hard when she was small.

S: What about young people outside your family?

U6: Some of them are, some of them aren't. Most of 'em move to Rock Hill to get a job when they finish high school. Making pottery is not for 'em.

S: It looks like they'd be interested in learning it just to preserve the art form.

U6: It looks like it.

S: 'Cause it'd be a great loss to everybody for it to be completely gone.

U6: It would be like our language. After Chief Blue died, our language was gone. No one there could speak it anymore.

S: Can you speak any of it?

U2: No, sir.

S: That Catawba language is an eastern Sioux dialect, wasn't it? Completely different from Cherokee.

U6: My father was full-blooded Oneida from Green Bay, Wisconsin.

U5: Is that right?

U6: And I didn't learn to speak his language.

U5: How did he happen to come to South Carolina?

U6: Well in the early 1900s or late 1800s, Carlisle, Pennsylvania, was a government school for Indians. You could go there from any Tribe, anywhere. And my mother went from here—

U3: Met him—

U6: And my father came from Wisconsin to Carlisle.

U5: Are you familiar with that school, Earl?

E: Mmhm.

S: Jim Thorpe's school.

U6: Yeah, my father played football with Jim Thorpe.

S: Did he?

U6: Uh-huh. He was an All-American up here at Cherokee. Best Chief there was— he's dead now, Chief Powell. And one of the men from here went up there one summer and said on the wall of Chief Powell's office was a picture of Chief Powell's brother and my father and Jim Thorpe. Real good picture. I'd like to have it, but I never did see it.

S: Do you remember anything your grandmother or great-grandmother told you about what life was like for the Catawba during their lifetime?

U6: No, my great-grandmother was up in her eighties, and I don't remember much about her. She was old when I was real small so I just don't remember much about her. And my grandmother, I don't remember her at all.

U2: Well, have any of you read this book by Mrs. Brown about the Catawba people?

S: I've read part of it. They have a copy of it in the library there.

U2: In this book, if you read it, it mentions a Chief Allen Harris and his wife Rolla Harris.

S: Yeah, I remember that.

U2: That's my great-great-grandparents. And the same little paragraph, there's a writer—I don't remember who wrote this article in there—that said they went to Chief Harris' home and said Chief Allen Harris and his wife were telling them about two of their granddaughters that had been sent to Carlisle and how they were so proud of their granddaughters because they had sent them to Carlisle. Well, one of those granddaughters was my mother.

S: Do you have a copy of Stanley South's booklet on Indians of the Carolinas?

U2: No, I don't.

S: I'll send you one.

U2: Okay. I appreciate it. I have this book by Mrs. Brown. When she was finishing this book, she happened to have a paragraph with a little bit of information from Chief Blue and he had been ill for quite a while, a year or more, and he died before she finished it.

S: He was the last Catawba Chief?

U2: He was the last Catawba Chief—no, Albert Sanders was after him. And Mrs. Brown came down and I gave her what information I could. In the back of the book, it mentions different people that helped her and she sent me a gift.

S: Is there a Chief now?

U2: Yes, from [19]62, the people thought—you know how people are never satisfied, they think they could always do better some way or do something else—in

[19]62, the people decided that they wanted a title to their land and they didn't want it held in trust by the government and they were saying so and they divided it up and everybody tried their lot and we went along the trial, what we considered the trial—

S: After that if they wanted to, they could sell their land—

U2: They did, **and they did just because they wanted to instead of using** whatever they wanted to do except this little old reservation that we own now that the state holds in trust.

S: How much land is that?

U2: Six hundred and forty-four acres.

S: And how many families live on that?

U2: Oh, they coming back here so fast, I couldn't tell you. At one time it was three hundred.

S: They are coming back?

U2: But they're coming back so fast that you could go around in circles and come out over on the other side and there's trailers all over the place over there. They just coming back in here, because here you don't pay any tax on your property. Of course, it's not ours. Like my daughter actually has a trailer and she don't have to pay tax on that. The only thing we pay tax on is automobiles.

M: Was your clay deposit included in your reservation?

U2: No, it's outside the reservation. But the people are real good in their objective to us Indians. And we always ask permission to go in there and we always cover it

up—it's in a ditch in a pasture. We always cover it up like when we found it so they never object in any way.

S: Is it good to you to see all the people coming back into the land that's left?

U2: Yes, I think so.

S: Has anything good come out of it other than they avoid their taxes?

U2: Well, it seems like it but last fall, I guess one reason I guess they're all coming back, the Tribe was reorganized. Now, we have a Chief.

S: This past fall?

U2: This past fall.

S: Who's the Chief now?

U2: Gilbert Blue. Chief Blue's grandson. Gilbert Blue's the Chief.

S: Do you have town meetings?

U2: Yes, they have a vice Chief, and they have a council, and they have committee positions, different things.

S: Would you like to see the reservation developed for tourism like it is in Cherokee or would you rather keep it nice and peaceful like it is?

U2: I would rather keep it like it is. I just don't believe I'd like it like Cherokee. Unlike now, just like this the whole time.

S: Except when somebody like us comes along. [Laughter]

U2: Well, except maybe at night. Teenagers are the same everywhere. We have a bunch of teenagers, and they get in their cars, and they go around the roads like racetracks. But probably otherwise peaceful. I believe I'd like to see it just like this.

S: Do you mind if I got a picture of you holding your coffee?

U2: Nope.

S: Come out in the sunshine, I want to get a good one.

U3: Now the pottery that's over at Carowinds, is that in a shop?

U6: Yes, it's called **Eden Pickings**.

U3: It is.

U6: But there's pottery everywhere, some of it is even—

[Break in recording]

S: This is a portrait made that I put on now. Let's get a close-up.

U2: Am I in the way?

S: That'll do it. Can we see out back where you fire?

U2: Mhm, sure! It's just—

[Break in recording]

U2: Or any other kind of wood, sometimes I use oak. Just whatever's available.

S: Have you ever used dried cow manure?

U2: No. Someone asked me that.

S: Maria Martinez. Have you ever heard of her?

U2: Uh-huh. Sure have.

S: She uses dried cow manure and actually she gets her fire going like you do with the pine bark. She just round it up like a beehive and it's that real dark, heavy smoke that comes out of it that makes her pottery jet black and then she'll take a smooth river rock and polish it down. It's just the shiniest black.

U2: After it's burned?

S: After it's burned.

U2: We couldn't do anything like that with ours because after it's burned if you tried to do anything with it—

S: It would abrade it, wouldn't it?

U2: It would scratch—

[End of interview]

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