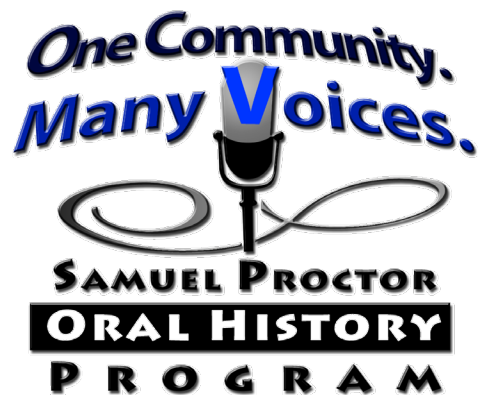


# Catherine M. Canty

**Southeastern Indian Oral History Project (SIOHP)**  
**CAT-009**

**Interview by:**

**Emma Reid Echols**  
**February 24, 1981**



University of Florida • Samuel Proctor Oral History Program • Paul Ortiz, Director  
P.O. Box 115215, 241 Pugh Hall, University of Florida, Gainesville, FL 32611-5215  
(352) 392-7168 [www.clas.ufl.edu/history/oral](http://www.clas.ufl.edu/history/oral)

**Samuel Proctor Oral History Program**  
College of Liberal Arts and Sciences  
Program Director: Dr. Paul Ortiz

241 Pugh Hall  
PO Box 115215  
Gainesville, FL 32611  
(352) 392-7168  
<https://oral.history.ufl.edu>

**CAT 009 Catherine M. Canty**  
**Southeastern Indian Oral History Project**  
**Interviewed by Emma Reid Echols on February 24, 1981**  
**31 minutes | 18 pages**

**Abstract:** Catherine Canty, a grandmother of eleven, describes her life and community on the reservation. Growing up, her mother was often sick, so she took over cooking and other duties around the house, including caring for her siblings. She married at the age of fourteen, a decision she later regretted as it cut her education short. She then discusses the church and tells a childhood story as well as two local folk tales. She describes her diet growing up and her large family before speaking about her personal religious beliefs.

**Keywords:** [Catawba Nation; Chief Samuel Taylor Blue; South Carolina--Rock Hill; Storytelling; Family histories]

**SAMUEL PROCTOR**  
**ORAL HISTORY**  
**P R O G R A M**  
**University of Florida**

CAT 009

Interviewee: Catherine M. Canty

Interviewer: Emma Reid Echols

Date of Interview: February 24, 1981

E: This is Emma Reid Echols, Route 6, Box 260, Rock Hill, South Carolina, February the twenty-fourth. I'm visiting in the home of Catherine Canty. Her mother and her father were Arzada and Idle Sanders, and she's sitting here right now working on a piece of pottery that reminds me so much of her mother. Her mother always likes to make those frogs and ducks, and so here is a little turtle, I think, with his four little feet and his tail sticking out, and with her rubbing stone she rubs it little by little and bit by bit, wetting it down as she goes, exactly as her mother did. A piece like this would take six to eight hours, probably, of rubbing—besides all the other work that she'll do on it. Catherine, give me your full name and your address.

C: Catherine M. Canty. That's Route 3, Box 298J, Rock Hill, South Carolina.

E: You have this lovely trailer. How long have you been living in this trailer?

C: Well, I've had it two years, but I've just lived here from October of [19]79. I didn't come live here when I first got it 'cause I went out and babysat for my daughter from May 'til October before I come to live here.

E: I was surprised to see your trailers down here, this nice trailer, and I'm also surprised to see that lovely community house across the road built by the federal government. What do you call the name of that?

C: Community Building.

E: Community Building. And how long has it been open, do you know?

C: Uh, I don't know, but it's been open ever since I've been down here, but I don't know exactly how long, so I've been coming here often. I know it's been open two years.

E: I know you Indians are proud of that and thankful to have it, aren't you?

C: Yes.

E: And you needed it, it's been, for a long time. I see so many improvements. I saw your church so nicely painted and the schoolhouse so well done over and painted. Now, you're using the schoolhouse for what purpose now?

C: For church, for Sunday School class. We use the big part when we go have the—all of them give, after the classes and everything annexed, and we go there for the sacrament meeting. We have our church in the morning from nine until— from nine 'til ten is the Relief Society for the ladies, and then a priesthood for the men from nine to ten. And then from ten to eleven, we go in another class and have a Sunday School class. Then when that's over, then we go out to the other church and have sacrament meeting.

E: Who is your elder now?

C: Parson Blue is the bishop.

E: Bishop.

C: Yes, he's a bishop now. Let's see, Dean King is the ... let me think. Well anyway, they got Brother Yandel—I don't know his first name—Dean King. You've got the other ones; they was his counsels.

E: You've got some good workers in that church, I can well see. Of course, you grew up on the reservation. Whereabouts was your home as you were a little girl on the reservation?

C: Well, I lived over up on that road way over there when I was a little girl. I lived where—you know where William Sanders lives out there?

E: Yes, I do.

C: Well, that's where I remember living first.

E: Tell me about your life as a little girl. What do you remember about as a little girl? Going to school, or playing around, or what?

C: Well, yes, I remember when I was playing a good little bit around. Me and my brother one time, we had a cow, and we'd go and take it up the river. Since he was the oldest and sometimes Momma'd let me go with him. I had a friend—her name was Alma Thatcher—and she would go with us sometimes. One day in the summertime, we was going, we had to cross the branch up the river and take that cow. I think it was about three feet wide, but it wasn't very deep, and they had some rocks you could cross on, or if you were a kid you could wade it. We'd been taking the cow up the river and was cutting on our way back home, and he saw an old water moccasin up laying upon some briars hangin' over that. It was a little deeper upstream, and briars was hanging over that branch, and he thought, well, he'd get him a stick and knock that old water moccasin down. Well, he went and cut him a stick just—maybe I was something like nine, and he was three years older than me; he might have been twelve or thirteen. He knocked that snake out kind of like, and he throwed it up on, you know, he throwed it up to the

bank. So, then he took that stick and pulled a limb on out from it, and he made little forks. Then he put that stick over that snake's head. My girlfriend, Alma Thatcher, she—he had a string with him. I don't know why, but he did, he had an old string. And she tied that up. I held that snake's tail up, and Alma tied that string to its tail, and we drug that snake to the house. Momma made us, made him take it off.

E: Oh.

C: We did.

E: That could have been a big, dangerous snake, you know?

C: Yeah, it could've. It was a pretty good-sized water moccasin.

E: Could have hurt you.

C: Yeah, it might have been poison, I don't know, but I just remember that he did that, we did that.

E: You remember any animals in the forest? Did your brother hunt rabbits or squirrels?

C: Oh, yeah, he hunted a lot. When they hunted, he would take rifles into the river. At that time—well, I guess they still do: carp jump up. He shot at carp and tried and brought it home. Then he used to go out, and he'd hunt squirrels and things like that. He killed a good bit of rabbits and squirrels, and he fished, brought home things like that as he got older.

E: Your mother was a good cook. You learned to cook from her?

C: Well, I cooked some, but not really. I learned from my mother-in-law probably 'bout, I got married when I was fourteen.

E: Fourteen?

C: Yes.

E: And then you've had six children?

C: Yes. I didn't get to go to school a whole lot. Momma was sickly a lot. Momma was sick one year—I can't remember whether it was [19]29 or [19]30—and she had something. The doctor said she had rheumatic fever, and she was paralyzed, but I don't remember how long it was for. She couldn't even move her arms and comb her hair or nothing; she could only move her head. Woke up one morning like that, so she wasn't able doing things for herself. Well, I had to stay out of school a lot and try to do what I could—cook and do what I could.

E: And were you the oldest of the—?

C: I was the oldest of the girls. I missed a whole lot in school 'cause I only got fifth—well, I was in the sixth grade when I left and went and got married. And then when she had her babies, I had to stay out of school. So, I missed—

E: Missed a lot of school.

C: A lot. And I figured, if I'm going to have to stay home and raise children, I may as well get married and have my own.

E: Oh really! [Laughter]

C: And then nobody to tell me any different.

E: How old was your husband?

C: He was seventeen.

E: You were fourteen, he was seventeen?

C: Uh-huh.

E: And did he have a job?

C: He didn't have no job. We run away—well, Momma never did even know. They didn't allow me to talk to boys or nothing. I was slipping around talking to them when I went to church and school or something like that, you know. And so, I run away from school one morning when I went to school. Well, we had done had it all planned out, you know, when I go to school, to be excused and just go on and he'd pick me up over there. The schoolhouse was up there where Sammy Beck's trailer is now. My grandfather—Papa's daddy—was there in the schoolyard when I asked to be excused, but I never saw him that much, so I didn't pay him no attention. And so, I went on out, but instead of going—at that time, there was outhouses, but I didn't have to do that, so I didn't go over there. I just went on across the hill and on over there. [Laughter] We went to York and got married.

C: Where did you live then?

E: We stayed with my grandmother when we come back.

C: And your grandmother'd be Sally?

E: No, Rachel Brand.

C: Rachel Brand.

E: Yeah, we lived with her. When I recalled it for them when I got back, Papa, he told me, he said, "You made your bed hard, now you're gonna have to learn to lay in it."

E: Well, you had to work, I'm sure.

C: Well, I just took up melding pottery and helping out some, and he—we lived with Gran Rachel, then we lived with his mother then some. We lived around like that



a long time, 'til about [19]39, and finally, his step-daddy told him, said, "Here you got two children. It's time for you to get out and make a home for them children." But he had worked some. He worked for Miles **Hornbarger** in town, and he paid him fifty cents a day at that time, and we had like that and them things, what he could get and things like that. You see, at that time, there wasn't much work to get.

E: That's right. And then where was your first home that you had together?

C: Together? Well, we moved out up there—can't think of that house name. First time we moved out was in a house by ourselves.

E: That was a happy time when you had your husband and those two little children all by yourself.

C: Yes, and the two children. We built a little house that summer, and we moved over—it's right over there across the hill. We built a little house the first year in [19]39, and it was just a little one-room, didn't even have no fireplace or anything. Then the next year, we sealed it off and made two rooms and built a fireplace, too.

E: What do you remember about your school days? Who was your first teacher? Miss Dunlap?

C: I think I went to one called **Elder** Johnson, who was one of our church members there at one time. We went to him the first time, I think, I went to him. Then afterwards, there was some—I can't think of who else now. But Brother Davis was my biggest teacher.

E: Everyone loved him, I'm sure.

- C: Uh-huh. Everybody was saying he was the best man that ever hit this—teacher that ever hit this stop at the reservation.
- E: I believe, is he still living in—?
- C: Uh, he was, and now he, he was—
- E: Gaffney, it is.
- C: That, there it is. My children went to him. This was Brother Davis in Salt Lake City, and he still is.
- E: Oh, I see, that's a different one.
- C: He was from Columbia, down around there.
- E: You learned all the basics—to read and write and those kind of things, I'm sure.
- C: Oh, I continue to try to read. The next day, when I got up after I got married, I realized that I had made a big mistake. The next day, when I heard that school bell ringing, I realized that I had done made a big mistake. But parents didn't talk to us back then like they do now. They had company a lot of times, and it was grown people, and you go play. You're not to be heard while they've got company and things like that. They didn't talk to you like they do now.
- E: I'm glad that you studied and read since you left school, and I see that you have. You said your mother and father used to tell you old-timey stories. You remember any things your mother and daddy used to tell you?
- C: Papa never did tell us and talk to us too much. He told me something just a while before he died, but I wouldn't dare repeat! [Laughter]
- E: Your mother had a good memory, didn't she?

C: Yeah, she used to tell us about—a lot of times, Papa would be gone at night; he was gone sometimes when we were small. After we moved over here, she'd tell us that they was—one time this Indian, he went to the spring. I don't remember his name, but see, he went to the spring, and he said that a jack-o-lantern carried him off, said it was raining kind of. And he said, "Can you call up the jack-o-lantern?" Said there was jack-o-lanterns at that time. Said he had a bucket on his arm, and he said that he was gone 'til the next day. They said 'fore he got, I guess, 'til daylight the next day. Said it was late in the evening when he went to the spring, and he said the jack-o-lantern—he followed it and said if you get started following a jack-o-lantern, it would carry you off. He said when he come back, he still had that bucket hanging on his arm with just a little bit of water like that caught in it, you know, while he was walking all that time. And said he didn't come back 'til the next day. I've often wondered about them. Was them some stories that was handed down to them from the older people or just what? I don't believe Mama told that, you know, would make up something and tell it like that. I believe that's something was handed down to her.

E: I think so, too. Did she tell you any other stories like that?

C: Yeah, she told us that one time this Indian said wild Indians carried him off.

E: What carried him?

C: Wild Indians, she said.

E: Oh.

C: She said that there used to be more wild Indians. That's what they called them, they were wild Indians.

E: They were wild Indians, that's right.

C: Yeah, and she said they carried him off and told him to not to tell what they fed him, 'cause if he did, he would die. And said when he come back, he told what they fed him, and he died. But he had told 'em what, you know—I don't know where he took them, nothing like that, but like I said, I just wondered if that was something that was told to the older people, and it was something that come down.

E: Handed down. Your mother used to love to sing, too, didn't she? Do you remember any songs she sang?

C: I only heard her count to ten in the Indian language, and she'd count to ten for us and—

E: Can you count to ten now?

C: No, I never even—I didn't even bother to try to learn it. I didn't realize that maybe someday it would mean a lot to the children.

E: Now, what about your church experiences? What about going to church? Did you sit with your mother and father, or did you sit with the crowd?

C: Well, I hardly ever did after I got some size. I might have sit with them when I was small—you know, real little—but after I got some size, I'd usually sit with girls my age—children, you know, like me. At this time, that I can remember, Chief Blue, which is my uncle, he was the preacher. And then Mr. Ben Harris, he helped out in church. And sometime Uncle Will might, when he tried to do right, well, he helped out in church. And different ones that taught Sunday school, but Uncle Sam and, I would say, his family—not his wife. He had a little [inaudible

18:12] She wasn't married, and she was a young girl. Of course, I was small when she was a big girl. And she played the piano and organ, and he preached. And we had Elsie Blue—she's with the orchestra now—and she was a chorister in church. And then Vera Blue—that was his daughter, and she's a Sanders now, you might know her, Albert Sanders's wife. But she was his secretary in the church. And then Guy and Leroy—well, they was the only ones at home when I could remember, and they was the deacons in church. And they were good kids then, but you know when kids get grown, they've got a mind of their own, go their own ways, and they don't like when they're at home under their roof sometimes.

E: Chief Blue could not read himself, but he knew the Bible, didn't he?

C: He knew it then. His children read to him, and I guess maybe other people would read to him. Now, I can't ever remember his wife helping him. She went to church, but I can't ever remember her helping him any.

E: Do you remember a church bell, or did they have some implement that they'd hit with a hammer, a piece of metal?

C: Well, they had a church bell at this time, at that time, 'cause they had a little old church then. It was set right where that house is, right as you come into this road—right below where you turn in to come up here. There was a church there made out of wood, a little log church, and they had a church bell, and he rung that. Uncle Sam would ring that church bell, you know, for Sunday school and things like that. Then if anybody died, no matter what time of night it was, Uncle Sam always rung that bell, and if that bell rung at one or two o'clock at night, you

could say somebody died. Because you could hear it all over the reservation.

And then after, they tore that church down and built another church.

E: That was a white Mormon church.

C: Yes, a white church. It was called stucco, I believe it was.

E: That's right.

C: Well, then he had some kind of a wheel or something that you hung out the other side of the church on a tree that he would ring for Sunday School and things like that, then, after that. And then if anybody died, he'd always go to the schoolhouse and ring that bell, and he'd go up there and ring the bell.

E: He was a faithful Chief.

C: He was a good person, and he always went—if anybody was sick, he always went to see them. Even after he was dead about six years, if I got sick—I had strep throat once in a while or something like that, when I'd get sick—well, Sam always come to see me in my dreams. I would always dream of seeing him, so I says he come to see me. [Laughter]

E: Do you remember any of the medicines that he made, do you—?

C: Not too much. I was thinking about that the other night after I talked to you. The yellow root that he'd—but I don't know how he made it up or anything like that, and I wouldn't know it if I saw it.

E: I think Gilbert Blue, probably, and some of the other Indians still know where those wild herbs grow down here.

C: They might, I don't know. But now, I know my Uncle Roy, did but he's dead now. I would think Major Beck knows. Of course, he's not an Indian, but he's been here so long, I feel like he is.

E: And he married Chief Blue's daughter. He's been here for a long time. Chief Blue lived where Major Beck lived at one time, I believe, there where the old village well is. Was food scarce for you in those days, or did you have enough?

C: I never can remember us going hungry or nothing like that because at Momma's, we had chickens on the yard, and we had turkeys sometimes, and one time she had some doves, and things like that. Well, in the summertime, she'd try to can a little something—can blackberries and, well, peaches when she could and apples a lot of times. I know that it was some time that she dried them, you know, peeled them and lay 'em on top of the porch on a towel, dry 'em out. She made jelly and things like that. And then we had chickens, so we had eggs, and we never had a whole lot to eat and nothing, but we had—and we had peas, Horthy Gray's peas and things like that, and corn, and we'd raise wheat and take that flour of wheat and had that ground. Seem like we even took it back to North Carolina somewhere, I can't even remember where back then.

E: Now, you made some of your money by making pottery. As a young girl, you started making pottery. Have you made pottery off and on all of your life?

C: No, not even when I was at home I didn't, and maybe after I left, after I got older and got married, I made 'em then, but now, when I was at home, I didn't do any of that. I only rubbed. But after I got married, then I was at home all the time, and I did learn how to make pottery.

- E: But you never have gotten much money for that pottery. It's hard work.
- C: Not a whole lot. The most I've got was two years ago when I got fifteen dollars for some pieces that I had made, fifteen apiece.
- E: Yes.
- C: That's the most I ever got out of one piece. I did—I went to work in [19]43. I went to the mill and went to work then in the cotton mill in the spinning room with J. P. Stevens. It wasn't J. P. Stevens at that time, but that's whose it is now, and I worked there until 1979.
- E: Now, you didn't have a chance to get an education, but what about your children? Did they all get to go to school?
- C: Yeah, I wanted—see, that made me realize that I wanted them to have more than I had, and I wanted them to have more education, but I only had three to graduate from high school. Let's see, the three of them graduated—
- E: Now, what were those three?
- C: That was Troy and Kirk and Jordan. Sadie finished the seventh grade. At that time, the school bus wasn't coming in through here, and seventh grade was high as they could go up here; and so the school bus wasn't coming in here, and they said that if she'd meet them up there at the church, that she could go to school and ride the bus, but I said—and a lot of times when it rains a whole lot, she'd be good and wet by the time she got up there to catch the bus, so I didn't push her to go to school up there since it was a long walk. Huey, he quit after, I believe it was the ninth. And Sadie quit in the seventh, while Julianne was in the eleventh when she quit.



E: You've got six children, are they all married?

C: All married.

E: How many grandchildren do you have now?

C: Oh, I have ten.

E: That's a lot. [Laughter]

C: Sadie's got four, and Lou Ann's got two; that's six. And four in Kirk; eight. And Charles got three; nine, ten, eleven. And I'm expecting another one any minute now.

E: So you have eleven?

C: I got, uh, let's see [inaudible 26:41]

E: How many of your children live on the reservation proper, or where do they live?

C: I got one that lives right here, she's got two children. And then I got one that lives across the road over down there on the other side of the Becks' down there. Them's the only two that live down here. Troy, he lives in Rock Hill on Keel Street, and Huey lives over on Route 7, I believe it is, back over yonder on the other side of the [inaudible 27:18] factory.

E: But you're all close around Rock Hill?

C: Yeah, all except Sadie, she lives in Charlotte. She's got four children, and she lives in Charlotte.

E: You raised a fine family, and I know you're just so proud of them.

C: Yeah, and I got a bunch, about nine great-grandchildren.

E: Well, now—

C: I forgot about Huey's six children. [Laughter]

E: Oh! You all, you have always gotten along with the White people in this community. I know your mother and daddy did, and you have. What's your relationship? How do you all feel about the White people?

C: Um, tell you the truth, that I don't feel any different.

E: That's good.

C: I feel like my soul is the same as theirs, and when they was writing things in the paper, saying things about us, at times it kind of irritated me and irked me, but I felt then that we shouldn't say anything because it caused hard feelings, and then maybe after a while it wouldn't—whatever happened then, those things, if I didn't say nothing and cause them to have hard feelings at me, I wouldn't have nothing to feel bad about.

E: That's right. Well, I think the White people want to be your friends, and you want to be their friends, and that's the way it's always been.

C: Yeah.

E: We're not responsible for what took place years ago, are we?

C: No, and so I don't feel—I just don't want to say nothing bad about people because I'm not like that. Sometimes I have been like that, but I realize that that ain't good for people. And you say bad things about people and after a while maybe you think, well, that ain't right, saying those bad things about people maybe because God knows what we does, and he's gonna be the judge someday, so why say anything?

E: That's right.

C: And He's gonna know everything.

E: One day He'll know it all, won't he?

C: Yes, He's gonna know everything.

E: What's your idea about—of heaven? You sound like you've got a real belief in heaven.

C: Oh, yeah, I do. [Laughter]

E: That's good.

C: Yeah, I don't believe maybe like you do, but I believe in the Bible, and I believe that there's three degrees of glory, that there can be a place where Jesus—wait a minute, let me see, I don't know if I can tell you about the things that—but when Jesus was on the cross, you know, and he said to the—what was it that the thief said to him? And he said—

E: He said, "Today you'll be with me in paradise."

C: Yes, and I believe that we'll all be in paradise and that we will—because I think God's a just god, and I think that that will be where we'll go and be with Jesus 'cause he died and, I mean, he come to this earth to be with us to be the same as we are, so when we die, we'll go where he is because he was the same as we are. And then if we are bad enough, like little babes that has no sin, that they'll be the ones that go to heaven. And that maybe that we'll have a chance to progress to get up there, too, if we try to live to do right, but I don't think God would come down to send us to hell with people that has committed murder and things like that. I don't think he would send people down there like that to be with those people. And I don't think that—well, God don't have sins like we have, and I don't

think that we equal to him to go up there because we been here, and we have done some sins and—

E: But you believe in the forgiveness of God, of course?

C: Oh, yes.

E: Well, it's good to have someone to have that wonderful belief 'cause I can tell that you have it.

C: Yeah.

[End of interview]

Transcribed by: Rayyan Merchant, August 27, 2021

Audit-edited by: Lauren King, February 20, 2022

Final edited by: Evangeline Giaconia, July 5, 2022