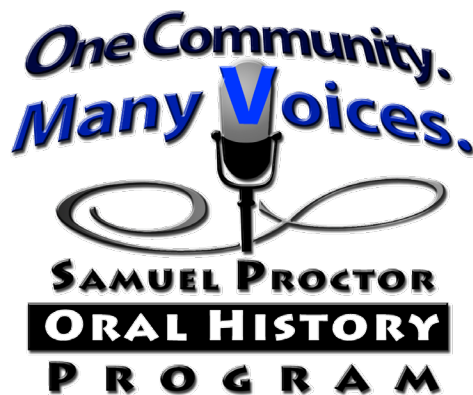


Carson Taylor Blue

**Southeastern Indian Oral History Project (SIOHP)
CAT-173**

Interview by:

**Emma Reid Echols
September 21, 1992**



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CAT 173 Carson Taylor Blue
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31 minutes | 21 pages

Abstract: Carson Blue recalls growing up on a rural part of the reservation and how he used to play by the river as a young boy. He was one of the first Catawba children to join an integrated school in 1951, which opened him up to physical and verbal bullying. Blue then talks about the repercussions of ending the federal trust relationship but how his family retained the land acquired in 1959. Blue's grandfather was Chief Sam Blue, but he died before he could get to know him as well as his older brothers did. Still, he recalls the stories he heard about his grandfather and the positive impact he had on the Catawba people.

Note: The audio for this interview ends abruptly, resulting in a truncated transcript. The original transcript does transcribe the entire interview, but is unable to be verified using existing audio.

Keywords: [Catawba Nation; Chief Samuel Taylor Blue; South Carolina--Rock Hill; Tribal history; Oral biography]

SAMUEL PROCTOR
ORAL HISTORY
PROGRAM
University of Florida

CAT 173

Interviewee: Carson Taylor Blue

Interviewer: Emma Reid Echols

Date of Interview: September 21, 1992

E: This is Emma Echols. I'm from Charlotte, North Carolina, 5150 Sharon Road. I'm visiting among the Catawba Indians, doing the oral history for the University of Florida under Dr. Sam Proctor. And today, I'm visiting Carson Blue. He's one of the grandsons of the big Chief, Chief Sam Blue. He's got a lot of things to tell me, and I don't know how to begin, but let's begin with his name. Tell us your full name.

B: Carson Taylor Blue.

E: Your father's and your mother?

B: My father was Henry Leroy Blue. He's the son of the late Sam Taylor Blue. Which is born on the Catawba Indian Reservation. It's present state, I was born in the same place. Grandson of the late Sam Blue. My early childhood, you know, I was born on the reservation in a little makeshift—I guess you'd call it a cabin, not so much a home. It was my home, too, but it was more like a little shack. We lived there for about two or three weeks, and moved to the upper end, the expanded reservation that was purchased in 1943. We moved on an old freedom farm tract that was bought by the Department of Interior for the Indians as part of the reservation. And that's where I was raised, which is still reservation, so I was born and raised on the reservation, but more or less towards town then down the river. But I spent a lot of time, probably ninety percent of my time, on the river down with the boys in the neighborhood.

E: What was your school down there?

B: I was educated in a public school in 1951, at Northside Elementary. That was about the year they discontinued the Indian school on the reservation and began to move 'em out into public schools. I was one of the first ones of the smaller children to attend public schools. Wasn't allowed to ride a school bus, but we could attend public school.

E: Who else of your friends went to Northside then?

B: Well, most of the kids on the reservation still went to Lesslie Area because it was closer to them than Northside was to me. The only ones of us that went to Northside were the Billy Canty children, who lived next door to us.

E: And Buck George was a little later?

B: Buck George was earlier than I. He went to Northside earlier. 'Course Buck never lived on the reservation. He always lived uptown. But he spent a lot of time on the reservation with the boys. He always attended public school uptown because of his location. Of course, he went on to Clemson University.

E: How did they treat you at Northside and later on at the public schools in Rock Hill?

B: Well, to start off with they were real kind. Normally the faculty is going to treat you as such. The children wasn't as nice. They would make fun of the color of your skin and say, "You dirty little Indian." Treated you almost like a Black. Not quite as bad, but still you didn't get the treatment that you would if you was in the non-Indian community, kind of like substandard people, and we had to just kind of fight our way through grade school. You'd leave in the afternoon and go walking home down the railroad track, and you'd have to go through two ethnic

groups—Blacks and Whites [Laughter] you might say—and you had to do battle with them just about every day going home. Now, in the mornings Dad would bring us to school in his car, him working second shift, but we had to get back home in the afternoon by walking. If it rained, they had what they called a rainy-day schedule. I think you remember that?

E: Yes.

B: You got half a day. Your parents come get you, take you home. That was my early education in grade school at Northside Elementary. The school bus began to run that route, I guess, probably in the late [19]50s. We were permitted to ride the school bus then, but we had to ride in the back. Didn't get to ride in the front. We had to sit in the back. Of course, it got better as the years went on. People began to mellow just a little bit more, and they began to accept you as one of their own. But it was almost like putting a wasp in a beehive—they just didn't want you in there for a while. So, you just kinda, I guess, cut your own trail and remember you were gonna be there and you had to be content with yourself. I did manage to make my years out at Northside Elementary, then went to Rock Hill High. Didn't have too much problem there, but there was still some. It wasn't completely different, didn't banish you—

E: What teachers do you remember at Northside?

B: Oh. I guess my first grade teacher was Mrs. Wayne.

E: Oh, yes. She's my next-door neighbor in Charlotte. Now, she'll be interested in hearing this.

B: She probably would. Mrs. Wayne was first. Miss ... I can't think of her name now. Brawly?

E: Yes.

B: Miss Brawly was second grade, and Miss Ash was either third or fourth. And Miss Spencer, Miss Thomas, Miss Roddie Parker.

E: Miss Parker.

B: Miss Parker.

E: She made a big impression on everybody.

B: If you went to Northside Elementary and you were under the tutorship of Miss Parker, if you didn't learn English and grammar, it was nobody's fault but your own, because you didn't leave her class until you were well instructed in that particular part of education.

E: She was upstairs at the old building, and Miss Leslie across the hall from her.

B: Yeah, right. I had Miss McFadden and Miss Busby. Or course, I had R.O. Riser for the principal, and Mr. Duke is assistant principal. I remember Mrs. Echols.
[Laughter]

E: You were not in my class. [Laughter]

B: No, I wasn't. I remember Mrs. Hood, the music teacher, and Miss Wooten, the nurse. I remember a funny a story about Miss Wooten whenever we first **met** because she checked all the children that come in for vaccination, you know, pre-school. She asked me, "Where do you get your mail?" I said, "Out of the mailbox." [Laughter]

E: [Laughter] That's a good answer.

B: And she said, "No. What is your address?" Well, being a young kid I didn't really know what my address was. It turned out to be Route 3 something. I don't remember now exactly what it was, but we had to travel quite a ways from my own place, which is Baskin Road now, over to, I guess, the Sturgis Estate, as it's called now. Mr. Jim Sturgis had a farm back over there in the country, and he had sheep and cattle, chickens and ducks. He was involved with the Ralston Purina people, I think, in some kind of joint venture as far as doing some farming in respect to them, egg farming, such as that. But all the mailboxes were all located over next to his place. The rural route ran by his place. It didn't go off any roads. Ended up one horse wagon side road they didn't travel, so we had to travel at least a couple miles to the mailbox to get our mail. That's why I told her, "I get it out of the mailbox." If you remember where **Lantram** Elsie lives now, the mailbox is far over on the paved road across over there, so we had to go over there to get our mail. Of course, in later years it changed its route, and begin to come by, which is Garrison Road now. They traveled that road and went over to the lock store. It used to be the 21 Bypass Grocery on that side of the route. You still had to walk probably 'bout a mile to get it because it didn't come by the house then. 'Cause that road by the house was a dead-end right in front of the house. It stopped there. We were the only people on that road. In later years, the Cantys moved out about a half mile from. Mr. Bud Plyler lived on top of the hill—and Mary Plyler—then Herbert Blue lived over the other hill. Everybody was living on top of hills. You remember Mr. Baskin, the old Black gentleman that was, I believe, he was a retired school professor. That lived ... I guess he probably lived

three or four miles from our house. **Presley city lagoons** are located where he used to live. He was an old retired Black gentleman that taught school. He lived by himself, and we'd go over and spend a lot of time with him. He'd give us fruit off his trees, read us stories, let us play his piano and drink out his well. We just had a big time with him. We had the farmer Harris family that moved in later over there, and Moroni George family moved in. The families began to move in after we moved up. I guess we were more or less the pioneers for this upper end of the reservation, and as we moved up, they began to move up and occupy spaces. Then Douglas Harris moved over next to the railroad track, close to the **ailment** containers and his son Floyd moved in. We began to occupy. Then Aunt Sally Gordon, she lived there right beside the railroad track, which is my grandpa's sister. Her and her husband lived over there. Louis Gordon. She had a son named Irving Gordon that married Gladys Thomas. We all lived right there in that one area. That's basically who we had in the neighborhood. Then Woodrow and Virginia Trimnal built the house adjacent to Uncle Herbert, which is her daddy. Then the **Cabaniss** family moved in on the other road which now is Princeton, through Woodvale. They moved over there. So that was pretty much the bulk of the Catawba Indians up on this end. As time progressed, others did move in and occupy lands around. In 1959, when they had the division of assets, a lot of people acquired land closer to town because of its value, or maybe because of accessibility. Very few of them occupied it, they all sold the lands to different people and that's why it's been dispersed right now. Galleria Mall is sitting on a large parcel of land that was owned by Catawba Indians. I'm sure if

they had any inclination of what it was gonna be like in 1992, they would never have sold it to them for, probably, three hundred dollars. Was basically what the price was. I think the share of land in this part of the country was three hundred dollars a share. Compared to the land in the reservation down at the old home reservations, it was like thirty-five dollars an acre.

E: And you and your father are on what we call the “new” reservation?

B: We live on the reservation that was acquired in 1943 by the federal government under directions of the Cherokee. We was under a memorandum of understanding. We wasn't under a full federal trust relationship. That is one of the reasons why, I guess, it was done away with, because some of the people were unhappy with the way they were being treated. A group of 'em got together and decided that we wanted to get out from under this. One of these silver-tongued politicians came down and sold them a bill of goods, and they bought it hook, line, and sinker, and ended what plus federal relationship we had with the government. Left us out to fend for ourselves. Some made, and some didn't. The majority of them did. We still own the exact amount of acres that we acquired in 1959, less what the highway right-of-ways have taken. We never did dispose of our land. We still have it all. You probably will not be able to find a half a dozen people that acquired land in 1959 through the division of assets that still have the same amount of acreage. Most of them have disposed of it, and mainly for monetary purposes. It's not so much that they had to, they just wanted to have the money.

E: Now, your address is on Baskin Road?

B: 1863 West Baskin Road.

E: And your father right next door?

B: Right.

E: He's real proud to have his land, too.

B: Right. We had a choice: we could either take land, or we could take money for our portion of the settlement. A lot of 'em took land because it was very interesting. The jingle in the pocket meant something, but it was short-lived. The ones that took cash instead of land wound up with nothing in about six months—some less than that. Some swapped the land for automobiles that probably broke the next week. A lot of 'em just got swindled out of the land. A lot of 'em were taken advantage of by their own family members. They could see farther down the road than what was really happening, so "I'll give you this for that," a few years from now I can sell it and make a big bundle. That's what happened. A lot of Catawbas were taken advantage of because of just ignorance to the fact that the projected plan for 1992 wasn't in the specs. Nobody mentioned it. Therefore, nobody knew what was gonna come about. The mistake was made by the government by not protecting the Indians or telling them what the outcome would be of this division of assets, how much they would lose, what would be the cost. They didn't say that. They just said, "You need to go ahead and do it, 'cause it's in your best interest. You can save property. You can mortgage, build a house on it." They named all the pretty things you could do with it, but not knowing that people are uneducated to the facts of how to deal with our society in the monetary sense. They had no sense of what the value was worth or what it

would hold for the future. So they just disposed of it as a quick fix. "I just need it right now. I'm not worried about when my children get to be adults, are they gonna have anything?" They also had a schooling back in 1959 that was under this program, and a lot of people at that time were eligible to attend school because they were already out. Maybe had never finished, but they were out for various reasons, either quit or finished. A lot of 'em applied for these schools, which I think were held in Columbia. Trade school they called it. Everybody that was not eligible at that particular time, that was still in elementary or high school, they never got a shot at that. It was a one-shot deal. So just a few people got the training, and the bulk of 'em just got what was left, and there really was nothing left. A lot of parents took their kids' inheritance, namely their money or their land, and disposed of it before the child turned twenty-one years of age. So, when he became twenty-one, he had no educational benefits, and he had no land. It was done away with by the parents. And some of it was probably done because of poverty or just a desire to have money. But it was a bad deed. Nothing was protected for the future generations—land or money or education or health service. Nothing was protected; it was all gone. Left. My grandfather, Chief Sam Blue, he tried to teach his posterity, the old ways. A lot of 'em learned it, a lot of 'em didn't. A lot of 'em thought it was silly to even try to learn how to speak another language or to retain the language. I remember him trying to teach some of the kids, and they'd laugh at him. Well, when they did that, he probably just thought, there's no need for me tryin' if you're gonna laugh at it, so a lot of them didn't learn because he wouldn't teach them. He died in 1959 or [19]60. I was in

the seventh grade at Northside. We would see him every Sunday. When we left church we stopped by his house every Sunday afternoon, and we would see him every Sunday evening when we came back in for church. And go in during the week and visit with him. Because like I said, I was a young lad, and he was an old man then, eighty-six. As far as teaching me what I would love to know, our time just didn't go together. He was earlier than I was. The boys such as Gilbert and all the rest of them, my brother Bobby and Lavonne and all those guys in the sixty age group, had the privilege of being with him in their early years when he was a younger man. They had an opportunity to learn his language, his dances, his stories. I didn't get that because of the time frame. I was younger and they were older, so naturally they got it and I didn't. But I do remember some of the things he told them and some of the stories he would tell. I remember going to watch him dance on Saturday nights. He would blow his harmonica and do the fox-and-hound chase and he would do his war dance dressed up in his bonnet and his regalia. He would put on a good show, and everybody loved him. He was an uneducated man. He couldn't sign his own name. He couldn't even read his own name. He just didn't have the education. But he could quote you any verse of scripture you wanted out of the scriptures. His children read to him, the ones that did have education, and he learned it from them. He was called to be a very high spiritual leader in the church, and he questioned how was he going to teach these people if he couldn't read. They promised him that a way would be provided, he just had to be faithful and keep the faith and trust. His children read to him, and he learned scripture by them reading to him. He could stand at that

pulpit and preach to you all day long and quote you verse after verse. You could open that book, and it would be exactly what he said. Not a word would left out. He just knew it that well. But he was a prophet to his own people, whether they realize it or not, but he was. I guess the hardest thing in the world to do is to be a prophet to your own people, particularly when everybody's got a different opinion. Back when my grandfather was Chief for so many years, he was the law on the reservation. What I mean by that is if there was a problem, whether domestic or otherwise, they would go see my Uncle Sam or Grandpa or Daddy, whichever the case may be. Any decision that he rendered, there was no question about it. That was the way it was, and they would go about their business. If there were sick among them, instead of going to the doctor they would go get Uncle Sam to come down and give them a blessing, and they would take care of it because their faith was so strong. And it worked. We still have that same faith today, but some people don't practice as much as they should, but it's still there. And his legacy still remains. One thing that he didn't get to see happen and he worked hard for is the same thing we're involved in presently—is the land claim. Thirty-two years ago, when he died—I'm sure he does know today, but thirty-two years later what he tried to do has finally come about. And his grandson's the one that's making it happen. Nephews, cousins, are the ones—you know, his immediate family—that are seeing this wrong corrected what happened way back in the 1800s that he tried when he was a young man to correct. So, the fight that he fought, we continued it, and we'll bring it to a close, thirty-two years after his death. I'm sure he would be a proud man to know today that his grandsons and

immediate relatives are seeing that this injustice is being corrected that he fought so hard to try to get done. He was a well-respected man, loved in the community by everyone. Nobody that I know of disliked him, even though there were some people that were highly jealous of him. He went to the extent of killing one of his sons—shooting him out of a tree—because of jealousy. I think you probably have got that story in that little book there. But he was a great man, and he'll always be remembered as such. He was probably the best leader that the Catawbas had that I can remember. Now, there was other good leaders. I'm not saying there weren't any good ones. There were other good leaders, but I think he did more for his people than any of the rest of 'em. He gave 'em something that I think they would never have gotten otherwise. I think the reason the Catawbas are still here today and surviving as well as they are is because of their religious background and what you are taught: to be self-sustaining, trust in God and have faith and do the things he asks you to do that you know to be true, and follow the leadership of great men like Sam Blue. Hadn't been for the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, the Catawbas would not be in existence today. They would probably be just in a history book, not knowing they were living together as a group. They would probably just scattered all over creation like a lot of other Native Americans are that don't have a base to claim as home. I honestly believe that. I would never know because it didn't go otherwise, but if we can look back and take a poll of all the people that are on a reservation, they would probably give you some of the same sentiments, that the church and Chief Sam and some of the other great leaders are the reason the Catawbas are still here today.

And the reason that pottery is still being made today in its original form. We are trying our best to retain what little bit of culture and crafts we have and build on. We have people that are being trained today to make the pottery as it was done years ago, that's being trained by those Elder members of the Tribe, namely, the ladies. There is such a craft to the art, and they're passing it on down to their children and grandchildren and cousins, next of kin. It's been handed down I suppose then. They're passing down their tools to make it with—their rubbing stones and their scraping knives. It's just a tradition that's being carried on. It won't die out. A lot of people thought maybe it would have. I'm sure the politicians would have loved to have seen the Catawbas go away. The fact remains we're still here and will be for some time to come. I'm proud of my heritage. You can't put a price on it. And it'll be passed on to my posterity, and I'm sure they'll hopefully retain the same respect for it that I do and will try to honor and reverence it to make sure it is maintained throughout history. I don't see the Catawbas ever vanishing off the face of the earth. They're such a great asset to this community and probably one of the most sought-after Tribes to gather data on to see where they originated from. But we know where they came from. If Columbus were here, he would probably tell you, "I met them when I got off the boat." [Laughter] So that tells you something.

E: You have a remarkable memory for the names and places and events. Of the ones that influenced you the most, you were telling me 'bout your father. Who of the White people have influenced you especially? You mentioned your schoolteachers. And anybody else?

B: Well, my mother being a non-Indian. She has a large family, and I was greatly influenced by her family members. She had uncles. Her father, which would be my grandfather her side, and her brothers and sisters were a big influence on me, particularly her brother, who resided here in this area. His name was Collie Buck, and as a teenager I worked with him as a carpenter. He taught me a tremendous amount of knowledge just about woodwork. Basically, between him and my dad, they taught me the basic fundamentals of hard work. Honest, hard work. I lived on a farm my whole life, and milked cows eighteen years every morning and every night. I gathered hay. We didn't have running water in our home. I would draw water from the well, gather kindling. We'd make outside privies every time we had to make one. When one would fill you had to move it. We did things the old-fashioned, hard way. I didn't know I was poor until somebody told me I was poor. I just thought it was the way of life, and I didn't see anything wrong with it. On a Saturday, I didn't go out and play video games or run down the road in a car around here. We got our slingshots and a pocketful of rocks or marbles or whatever and couple raw potatoes, and we went to the woods. We'd kill birds, rabbits, squirrels. We'd catch crawfish. We'd eat off the land. We'd eat berries. We didn't go back home to eat. We stayed in the woods all day. We went down to the creek banks or riverbanks and catch catfish. We didn't have to run down to the store and get a soda pop or a candy bar. It wasn't available. So, you created your own activities. That was our style when we wasn't in school. When we'd come home from school in the afternoon, we had to do our chores before we did anything else. Then we had to do our homework. So, there

wasn't a whole lot of time for play during the school days. But Friday afternoon come, we took off to the woods, and we'd stay in the woods until Saturday evening. Time to come in and get ready to go to church Sunday morning. Our home was heated with fossil fuels, namely wood. We had a wood cook stove, a wood heat stove. We eventually converted to coal and wood together. Electricity was a simple light in the center of the room with a pull cord on it. Floor was a wooden floor. Sometimes we could afford to buy a piece of linoleum rug and lay it down. That was a big deal, you know. Saturday was a big day. The folks would go to town and buy whatever the staple goods they could get.

E: You didn't have much money to buy with.

B: Very little. Very little. Take a nickel back then and get a long way with it. You could go a long way with a nickel bar of candy. [Laughter] Soda pop was six cent. That gives you some idea. So, if we got a candy bar or a soda pop, that was a big deal. We always come back home from church on Sunday and come up next to the highway and stop by an old fella's store named John Lock. I don't remember if you remember John Lock or not. We used to call him Uncle Johnny. He had an old country store. And this old drink box, the type where you put a chunk of ice in and pile your drinks around it. Big ol' jars of cookies, candy, licorice, gum drops—the old type. You know, rag cheese. We always stopped by his store and get a treat, either going or coming, and on Saturday occasionally Dad would take us down, we'd stop at Uncle Johnny's and get a big, long, black stick of licorice and chew on it, pretending it was tobacco. [Laughter] Even though we didn't use it, it was just a pretension. We done a lot of things as kids to

try to imitate the people that was around us. 'Cause we're all creatures of habit, and we do things we see other people doing.

E: Tell me about who you married and what family you have.

B: I married a girl from Chester. She was a non-Indian. I guess, in all honesty—

[End of interview]

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