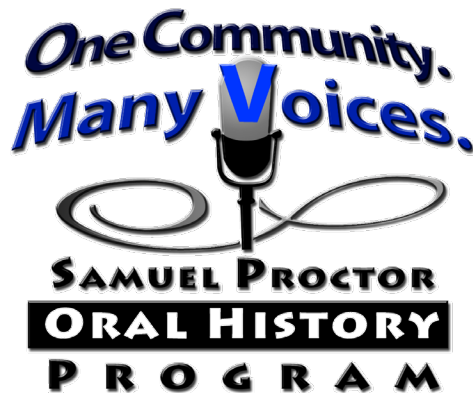


Moroni Taylor George

**Southeastern Indian Oral History Project (SIOHP)
CAT-132**

Interview by:

**Emma Reid Echols
September 2, 1976**



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CAT 132 Moroni Taylor George
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22 minutes | 19 pages

Abstract: Moroni Taylor George, son of Moroni George, talks about his upbringing and schooling in York and his time in the navy during WWII. He details his childhood and the recipes for some of the remedies used by his family for common ailments, with some input from his sister Missouri. He talks about what would be done when there was a death on the reservation. He and his sister then speak some of the words he knows from the Catawba language. They then speak about his children and the future of the Catawba.

Keywords: [Catawba Nation; South Carolina--Rock Hill; Indigenous languages; Communities]

SAMUEL PROCTOR
ORAL HISTORY
PROGRAM
University of Florida

CAT 132

Interviewee: Moroni Taylor George

Interviewer: Emma Reid Echols

Date of Interview: September 2, 1976

E: This is Emma Reid Echols, Route 6, Box 260, Rock Hill, South Carolina. This is September 2, 1976. I am visiting in the home of Mr. George in York. I am working on the oral history of the Catawba Indians. Mr. George, would you tell me your full name and your address.

G: Moroni Taylor George, 17 Georgia Avenue, York.

E: You live in a beautiful home here. I have already gotten a picture of it. What happened two years ago when you lost the roof?

G: A tornado come through, tore the roof off the other house, we had to rebuild completely.

E: Well, you've got a lovely, lovely home here.

G: Thank you.

E: I've enjoyed seeing your father and your mother. What is your work here in York?

G: I am a lieutenant on the police force. The city.

E: How long have you been doing that?

G: Going on thirteen years.

E: Thirteen—that is almost a record, isn't it?

G: Yes, it is.

E: Do you know of any other Catawba Indians who are doing that kind of work?

G: No, I don't know of any others.

E: Well, I am amazed at the different types of work that you are doing. Gone are the days when you used to live on the reservation and make pottery or cut pulp

wood or work in the mills. You all have branched out and are doing amazing things now. Let us go back and see what you remember about the past. When you were a little boy, six or seven years old, do you remember being baptized?

G: I was baptized when I was eight years old.

E: Where?

G: In the Catawba river. At the reservation.

E: Were any other boys baptized at the same time?

G: Yes, they do.

E: Who else?

G: Melvin Hands. I can remember him being baptized. I don't remember the others.

E: Was there a Morman elder who did it?

G: Yes ma'am, there was.

E: Do you remember his name?

G: No, ma'am.

E: Well, that's been a long time ago. You went to school on the reservation, I believe. You probably started when you were six or seven years old, and your teacher was probably Elder Davis, is that right?

G: Yes, ma'am. Elder Davis was the first one that I went to. Then there was a Hays down there when I left.

E: I believe they were very strict, were they not—like, conduct in the school?

G: Yes, they were.

E: Did you ever have any trouble along that line?

G: Yes.

E: Well, most little boys do, hadn't they?

G: Always.

E: [Laughter] Did you boys have specific things to do in school, like ringing the bell or bringing in the wood for the fire?

G: I did bring in the wood some. I never did ring the bell. A lot of them did.

E: Then you played ball, I am sure, at recess time did you not?

G: Yes.

E: Did you have bought balls and bats, or were they homemade equipment that your mothers made for you?

G: It was just homemade stuff, cut mostly out of the woods. We would play ball or what we used to call, stealing sticks.

E: Oh. Stealing sticks!

G: Yes.

E: How did you play that?

G: Well, it take so many old ones on a side and so many of the other ones. They had sticks and you try to get over there and get the sticks and get back without getting caught.

E: You played baseball, I am sure?

G: Very little, **I played baseball.**

E: Well, later on some of the boys had a team down at Catawba Junction. You played with Mr. Ernest Patton. He had a team. Do you remember?

G: I do not remember playing ball down there. Marvin George played down there and some of the rest I imagine.

E: They tell me that you Indian boys could run so much faster than anybody else. You could always win on a ball game. Your father was a farmer and raised a lot of things on the farm. Do you remember helping with the cotton or the corn or peas?

G: Yes ma'am, I helped hoe the cotton. We would go out all over the reservation and pick peas [inaudible 3:36] in the wintertime.

E: Well, that was good. What kind of animals did you have on the reservation?

G: We had horses and mules, and two or three cows. About all I can think of.

E: That would furnish your milk and butter, buttermilk, things of that kind. Your mother would make good cornbread, I'm sure, to go with it.

G: Yes, ma'am.

E: You also had to provide firewood, did you not?

G: Yes, I helped cut wood ever since I been big enough.

E: Do you remember selling the firewood, or what would you get for the firewood you would sell?

G: Well, now, my father used to go off the reservation and get wood and haul it to town for stove wood. Back then, everybody was using wood stoves. He'd sell stove wood for them to cook with.

E: As a little boy what do you remember about Christmas time? Your father was trying to sell some of that wood to get things for Christmas. What kind of a Christmas would you have?

G: It was a pretty good Christmas back then. We didn't have too much.

E: You left the reservation when you were fairly young, I believe when you were

about—how old were you when you left the reservation?

G: We left when I was about eleven years old.

E: Would that be about 1936?

G: Yes.

E: Then you moved to York. Now, tell me about your home in York.

G: Well, we moved to York, just outside for a while, stayed down in—we moved over to the Inman farm and share-cropped.

E: Now something interesting you told me, yesterday, if you had been a citizen, you could have bought your own land and owned the farm. Your father had been a good farmer with all of your family to help him, but because you were not citizens, you could not buy land.

G: No, we were not. We couldn't get the title or the deed to the land. Not until 1944 when they passed a new law.

E: So, you had to be share-croppers?

G: Yes.

E: How did you come into town to buy the groceries on a Saturday or a weekend?

G: Well, we went to the store out on Inman farm to pick up our groceries.

E: Ride a mule?

G: Ride a mule.

E: How did you get the groceries across the—?

G: We put them in the little sacks and put them on each side of the mule and carried them back.

E: I suppose you had names for your mules, didn't ya?

G: Yes, but I can't remember.

E: When you were a young boy coming along, what kinds of games did you play?

G: We played marbles and ball, baseball some.

E: Now, that was before the days of radio and TV, but I suppose you have these old wind-up phonograph records, did you not.

G: Yes, we used to have one of those. We had those when we lived on the reservation then after that. When we lived on the reservation after that we used an old crank up gramophone and records. It would make music. We had dances at the house sometimes.

E: At your house?

G: Yes.

E: Do you remember sometimes that down on the reservation, probably in front of the church, you would have dances. Chief Blue used to lead them in the bear dance?

G: I remember them having them down there.

E: Did you ever join in any of these little dances?

G: Nope, I never did.

E: Now, your mother did an amazing thing. She made lovely pottery and it is most unusual for both boys and girls to help with the pottery, but did you help your mother with the pottery?

G: Yes, I helped what I could. I helped scrub the pottery and I would help burn them when the time came to fetch wood.

E: Now over here in your home, you have a little bookcase just filled with pottery

that your mother made. I was really impressed that all the bottom shelf of that is real light colored, golden yellows and orange, instead of the black pottery. Does your mother have any special way of making that light pottery?

G: Not to my knowledge. Now, we would burn different kinds of wood. Just oak wood and then pine bark, we'd do that.

E: I guess you boys would have to bring that in.

G: Yes.

E: What about going to church, what was your church?

G: We went to the Mormon church down on the reservation.

E: Do you remember the church, I imagine, that was made of cement blocks and painted white. Is that the one you remember?

G: Yes.

E: That was a very nice building inside, and would seat the crowd very nicely, and it is heated with two wood burning stoves, is that right?

G: Yes.

E: Did you see any girls when you were young at the parties or the dances?

G: No, I was never much at parties or the dances.

E: You waited to make sure found the right one?

G: I was the bachelor type.

E: You were the bachelor type. Now you boys had to get your hair cut sometimes. Who would cut your hair?

G: Well, a couple of the Indian men down there cut our hair on the reservation. Douglas Harris and Willie Sanders would cut our hair.

E: Do you remember anything special about your mother and your daddy, the things that they would do for you? Who shined your shoes? Who bought your clothes? All of that sort of thing?

G: We had to take care of our own clothes. It seems like mother would wash them for us, but we didn't get but one pair of shoes a year. Two pairs of overalls and a shirt. Two shirts. Once a year, and that had to do us the whole year around.

E: Your mother kept your rooms clean, did she not?

G: Yes.

E: Now, you looked like you have been very healthy. I do not believe you have had many very serious illnesses. But if anyone was sick on the reservation, you could not go to the drugstore and get prescriptions. What kind of home remedies would you use?

G: Mother used to make cough syrup out of pine needles and rabbit tobacco and **mungun** leave, take and boil that and then put a little sugar in it, make like a syrup, or a cough syrup.

E: Now, that is most interesting. Chief Blue use to make medicines also, but I didn't know your mother did it. Now what would you do with rabbit tobacco?

G: Well, we used rabbit tobacco for a head cold. We would put it in a pan, and we'd heat these white flat rocks in the fireplace in the wintertime and get under a sheet or a quilt or something. When those rocks would get hot, we would put it in there and it would sting you when you inhaled it. It would break the cold loose in your head.

E: What would you do when you stubbed your toe or cut your hand?

- G: Pour kerosene on it and wrap it in a clean wrap.
- E: Some of the Indians used to take the turpentine that came from the pine trees and mix it with some camphor and turpentine, then put it on the back of the stove and it would melt down and make a salve. Did you ever make any of that?
- G: No, ma'am.
- E: Now, Chief Blue used to sell also a kind of tonic that he mixed up and sold in bottles, it had an alcohol content. Did you ever make any of that?
- G: No, ma'am.
- E: They tell me that down on the reservation, Albert Sanders says that he knows where some of those old herbs are today, and that he would like to go and find some of the old herbs that were used. You haven't been down on the reservation recently?
- G: It's been a good while since I've been down there, other than to supply food and stop for one or two of them there.
- E: What would you do if anyone had any pneumonia?
- G: They fixed poultices **out of** ...
- E: Onions?
- G: Well, they used onions and—
- E: Quinine?
- G: Quinine and mustard. They would make a poultice with it and put it on.
- E: The cure would be almost worse than the illness to me. Missouri, I believe, was bothered by eczema, what would they do for eczema?
- G: I don't know.

E: Well, she is here, let me just ask her. Missouri, what would you do when you had eczema?

M: Momma said she took a cucumber and cut it in half. Then rub it on me and tied it back together. As it dried up, my eczema did.

E: Now that is very interesting, thank you. I know you remember about when there would be a death on the reservation. Tell me what they would do when there was a death.

G: When there was a death on the reservation, they would ring the bell at the schoolhouse and each lick they would signify the year, for each year that they were old. If they were two years old, they would hit that bell two licks, regardless—that's the way they counted. So, they would ring that bell on a death.

E: Sometimes they would have to ring it a lot of times for an old person, wouldn't they?

G: Yes, there was.

E: Now that was the schoolhouse. I understood at the church, they didn't have a bell, but they had a rim of an old tire—

G: They had an old automobile rim, an old hub and a piece of iron, it was hanging from a limb on a tree, and they would beat that.

E: That would call you to come to a dance or come to some sort of a party or church. Now, in your church, did the Whites or the negros ever worship with you in your church? Do you remember?

G: There was some Whites.

- E: Not any negros. Now, when sunset time came, what did the negros do?
- G: Negros weren't allowed to be caught there, sun going down.
- E: They had to get off the reservation—
- G: Had to get off the reservation.
- E: I don't imagine there were very many of them on the reservation.
- G: Not too many. Some of them had rented, or the Whites that had rented the land, had these negroes working for them.
- E: Yes. When you traded, where did you go to buy your groceries or get your provisions?
- G: We used to go over in Lancaster County, which is across the Catawba River, to a little old place called Van Wyck. Mr. Master ran the store over there and bought and traded there.
- E: What Master was that, do you remember?
- G: I cannot remember his first name. Bob, Bob Master.
- E: Good, I'm glad to get that name. After there was a White agent appointed for the Indians, they would give the Indians a certain amount of money each year. You would use that for provisions and clothing?
- G: Yes, each year a Catawba Indian got somewhere between twelve or fifteen dollars a head. That would come from the State of South Carolina. The families used that to buy their clothes and food.
- E: From that fund also had to come your medicines **and** the doctor bills, right?
- G: Well, the medicine and the doctor bills were things that the federal government backed up.

E: I guess you remember the doctor, don't you?

G: Yes.

E: Doctor Hill?

G: Yes. I remember a little bit about Doctor Hill, and then Doctor Blackman was the next one **got** out here.

E: They were on call. They would come to you whenever you needed, didn't they?

G: Yes.

M: Dr. Patton was the last doctor, wasn't he?

G: Yes, Dr. Patton was the last.

E: Do you remember anything at all of the language?

G: Very little of the Indian language.

E: Tell me any of the words you know. Do you know the word for baby?

G: Baby was [Catawba word 14:08]

E: And salt?

G: Salt was [inaudible 14:11]

E: I am sure you know the word, "I love you."

G: No ma'am, I cannot remember that one.

E: Let us see if your sister knows. Missouri, do you know the name?

M: [Catawba phrase 14:19]

E: Say that again.

M: [Catawba phrase 14:21]

E: And that means I love you?

M: I love you.

E: I would like to learn that. What was the word for meat?

G: Meat was [Catawba word 14:30]

E: Alright now between the two of you, we do have some of those words. You remember that Sam Blue spoke the language, I suppose very fluently, and he would be the last one that would really speak it fluently at all.

G: **That sounds right.**

M: **That's what he knows.**

G: [inaudible 14:50]

E: I would like to know what you remember about Chief Blue. Everybody remembers something different.

G: Well, I remember him talking that Indian language, and he would do the Indian dance. He would have been to church and things, going to church and stuff.

E: They tell me that when he had a whole crowd of children, he got all his children there and they had some of the grandchildren too. They filled up several rows in the church. Any child misbehaving, Chief Blue would correct anybody, whether they belonged to him or not. Is that true?

G: Yes, that's right.

E: Well, he must have been quite an interesting person. Now, in your family, how many children were there?

G: There were seven girls and two boys in all.

E: Today, you all are scattered. All nine of you children are still living, do you have any idea how many children and grandchildren you have?

G: No, I do not know.

E: Let me just pick up just a minute. Let me ask your wife. Do you know how many grandchildren there were?

G: Not right off without counting them.

E: We will do that a little bit later. Now I think you all had special foods to eat, down on the reservation that we did not have. You had milk and butter, did you keep that milk and butter in the spring?

G: We had a box built in the spring with a lock on it. They kept milk and butter in it.

E: Now was that the spring, the old spring, down below the old cemetery?

G: No, this was a different one.

E: Different one. There could have been more than one.

G: Yes.

E: Well, tell me some of the other things. What would you do with watermelon? Did you ever like to put it in biscuits?

G: We liked to eat biscuits with watermelon. We had to do that to make a meal of it a lot of times.

E: Well, that would be good. What about your cornbread? Sometimes your mother would cook it I believe over an open fire.

G: She cooked what you call the ash cakes, and would wrap it in the wet brown paper, and put it in the ashes and bake it that way.

E: Did that taste better than other kinds of cornbread?

G: It tasted good.

E: Now what about sweet potatoes? Would you bake them in that same sort of ash?

G: Baked them in the ashes, yes, ma'am.

E: Same sort of thing. When you told me a moment ago about them ringing the bell when there was a death or funeral procession, how were the processions formed?

G: They had a one-horse wagon. The corpse was on the wagon and everybody else had to walk behind the wagon to the cemetery.

E: That would be the ancient cemetery, the old cemetery?

G: Yes.

E: What was the first kind of car you had?

G: First one my father had was an old T model, touring.

E: Your father told me yesterday he was stopped for speeding when he was driving with a mule and a buggy—mule and a wagon?

G: Yes, he was in a one-horse wagon.

[Laughter]

[Break in recording]

E: Mr. George, when you moved to York, you were eleven years old. You entered the York school—been to school on the reservation, and then you came to York schools, and you were here for a number of years. Were you accepted in the schools here?

G: Yes ma'am, we went to York schools with no problem at all.

E: No problem at all. Then you were in school for a number of years, yet you went to the navy, right?

G: No, I went through fifth grade and left. Farmed there for a while, and then during

World War II, I went into the navy.

E: Now, where were you in the navy? Where were you stationed, or where were you sent?

G: I was aboard a ship in South Pacific.

E: Did you see any action, any dangerous action?

G: No, ma'am.

E: Now when did you meet your wife?

G: Oh, I met her in early [19]40s, I do not remember just when it was.

E: When you came home from the navy, were you ready to get married?

G: **We** got married while I was in the navy. I came home on forty-eight hours leave and got married and went back overseas.

E: Now you married a White girl, what was her name?

G: Evelyn McAbee.

E: A York girl?

G: Yes.

E: Well, that was a very fortunate move when your daddy moved to York, was it not?

G: Yes, I reckon it was, [Laughter]

E: [Laughter] How many years in the navy?

G: I spent nineteen months—nineteen months and ten days. I signed up for the duration and six months.

E: Then when you returned home you would have a chance for some extra training. Where did you go for training?

G: I went to Clearwater starting off in third grade. I then went from third grade through high school.

E: Good for you. Got your diploma and then you were really equipped to do something. Then what did you do?

G: Well, I worked around the mills for a while and did a little wrestling.

E: Are you the only Indian that as far as you know that is a professional rassler?

G: Only one that I know of.

E: And you are the only one that I know that is a policeman too. How long have you been on the police force?

G: Going on thirteen years.

E: Now when you came to York to establish a home with your wife, where did you live first in York?

G: We used to live up on 321, north of York.

E: Then how long have you been in this home?

G: This one here was just built three years ago.

E: A tornado, I believe, tore your home up here, but you have got a lovely home here. How many bedrooms do you have?

G: Three.

E: Three bedrooms and a large, very lovely home.

G: Thank you.

E: Now how many children do you have?

G: Two boys.

E: Two boys and no girls?

G: No girls.

E: Your one son is in high school?

G: No, he finished this past year.

E: The other boy?

G: The other boy is married and has two children of his own.

E: Do you feel that you children are having advantages and opportunities that you did not have?

G: Yes ma'am, I think they have.

E: Do you feel like—are you proud of the long way the Catawba Indians have come?

G: Yes, I am very proud of what they have accomplished.

E: What other occupations do you know they are doing? You know them more than I do. I know that they had electrical work, and mechanical work, and policemen. I know they are at hospitals as nurses, as technicians, as secretaries. What other kind of work do you know they are doing?

G: I reckon they are doing just about the same thing as anybody else.

E: Well, a great many opportunities opened up for them I know. Mr. George, you live in York, and you are about twenty miles away from the reservation. You have your father and mother here, your sister and other members of your family close by. Do you ever go back to the reservation, and do you enjoy going back to the reservation?

G: Yes, ma'am, I enjoy going back. I don't get back very often. With the job I have now, I work right after sundown.

E: You sometimes take your father and mother back to see your kin folks down there I suppose.

G: Well, I hadn't been able. I would like to take them back in, but they do get back there.

E: Well, I am glad they do.

G: My wife takes them.

E: The roads have greatly improved on that reservation have they not?

G: Yes, they have, because there was nothing but dirt roads when we left.

E: There's still a lot of your kin folk down there that remember you. Lots of 'em tell me that they want to get together at some big picnic or family reunion. Would you like to have that kind of thing?

G: Yes, I would enjoy that. They used to every fourth of July, have a catfish stew down and the whole family would go out and enjoy the get-together.

E: That would be nice, wouldn't it?

G: It sure would.

E: In fact, you might meet a lot of your Catawba Indian friends that you didn't even existed?

G: I would probably meet a lot of them I should know now.

[End of interview]

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