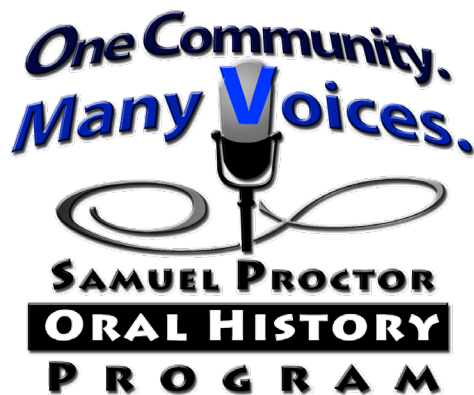


William Fred White

**Southeastern Indian Oral History Project (SIOHP)
CAT-123**

Interview by:

**Emma Reid Echols
October 14, 1975**



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18 minutes | 11 pages

Abstract: Fred White recalls the ferry operated by the Brown family and a story his uncle, Dr. Hill, told him about a train wreck in the area. He discusses the local relations between the Whites and the Catawba, and shares information about Dr. Hill's treatment of Catawba patients. White speaks about a Catawba baseball team that played other teams in the area and remembers his time working at the Rock Hill Printing and Finishing Company for thirty-eight years. He ends the interview by speaking about some of his Catawba coworkers and commenting on how he thinks things have changed for the Catawba over the years.

Keywords: [Catawba Nation; Dr. Edward Glenn Hill; South Carolina--Rock Hill; Health; Communities]

SAMUEL PROCTOR
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CAT 123

Interviewee: William Fred White

Interviewer: Emma Reid Echols

Date of Interview: October 14, 1975

E: This is Emma Reid Echols, Rock Hill, South Carolina, Route 6, Box 260. I am recording the oral history of the Catawba Indians. This is October 14, 1975. I'm visiting in the home of Mr. Fred White in Rock Hill. Mr. White, will you give me your full name?

W: William Fred White.

E: And your address?

W: 1022 Ridge Road.

E: You're living in Rock Hill now, but as a young boy you lived in the little village of Rowell, is that right?

W: I first lived in a house over near Harmony Church. That's where I was born. Later on, we moved to Rock Hill and lived in a house shortly above here, right above this place I'm living now. Later on, we moved to Rowell in 1913 and lived in the home which was formerly my mother's home in 1914 and since then it's been sold. But I was raised up in that area, Rowell, and I started to go into Catawba later on for ball games. I met up with a lot of Indians up there and I heard of a story of a train wreck, happened sometime in the early 1900s. I'm not sure what year, but Dr. Hill was telling this story. The Number Eleven, which was a passenger train, went between Monroe and Atlanta, fell in the—a trestle gave way, which is now known as a dry trestle, which there's no water ever runs under it—But it's a dry trestle over the **Seaboard** Railroad. Well, it's on west of the main railroad bridge. This train was wrecked, and a number of people were hurt and before they could get any help there all the trainmen were killed. Well, they got

stuck a train back of 'em, a freight train, run in on top of these people, and a lot more who was partially hurt was killed then. Dr. Hill tells us a story of a salesman wanted to give him something because he was on his way to Atlanta to sell some goods—he was a traveling salesman—some goods from the **company** he was representing. Dr. Hill said, “All I can give him was an aspirin tablet. That’s the only thing I had to give him.” But later on, they did get some more doctors in there. I wish I had more information on that wreck, because it goes back for a good many years and it’s talked about by especially the older people years and years ago. At that time, they operated the Indian ferry. When I first knew it, Early Brown’s father operated it. At that time also, they were using a pole to cross, and no motor or cable of any kind was pulling the ferry across. Over the years, Early’s father passed away. Early was a young man then and I think at that time he was married. They took over the ferry and it was a state-owned ferry. You go across, it wouldn’t cost you anything, and they put a power motor on there to pull it across by cable which was much faster than it was previously. Then, later on, after the highway department discontinued the ferry, the Indian ferry, Indians took it over and operated it their selves which was used—no motor on this one because, as far as I remember, the motor part was washed away during a flood, the one that was powered by the motor. They used gates, I’d say about four or five foot long and probably about three foot wide. They’d push these gates down in the water and lock ‘em with a bolt or nail or something through ‘em. They’d have two of these and they would pull the cable up and have overhead cable. They’d pull the cable up and push the ferry running off to the left of which way

they were going. It would be upstream-like, and the water pushing on this board would carry the ferry all the way across. And they got about ten foot or fifteen foot of the ferry on the other side near the bank to let off the cable and it would drift over to the bank, most all the time. I remember one time crossing there with Early Brown. He had three little boys, and they must have been six or eight years old, and he asked someone who was with me, says, "You want to see these boys swim?" I said, "Can they swim?" He said, "Oh, yes. If they can't, I'll make 'em swim." He threw 'em off on the upper side of the ferry near the end and they come up under the ferry and come down the river and they started hollering. He said, "Swim back. I'm not coming after you," and that's the way they get back, and those boys were grand swimmers later on, because I remember going back in there later on talking to 'em. Early Brown, later after this period of time, this ferry, I think at that time, they gave it up some way and put in a new ferry and they all got money to build another one. Mr. Ashe used to bring brick **husks** there from the brickyard. In fact, the brickyard at one time was on the same side of the river as the old house now standing beside the river, which was on the west side. The ferry wasn't there at that time, but he made brick in that area because that's where all the clay come from in that part. Then when the clay run out, and **I think they had a flood** that washed part of the machinery away, he moved over to Van Wyck and instead of coming all the way around to Fort Mill, he would come in **then** and decided to build a ferry of his own. And then his trucks crossed straight through which would be much nearer to Rock Hill. That was known as Ashe's Ferry. Well, he didn't have anybody that knew too much about the ferry, so he

got Early Brown to operate that ferry until—I'm thinking, I'm not sure—his death or close to it. He was getting up in years to where he couldn't operate it any longer.

E: How many wagons or how many cars could cross on that ferry?

W: He carried two wagons, two cars.

E: Was there a certain charge for crossing on that ferry?

W: There was a certain charge for crossing the ferry. Seemed like to me it was a quarter or something like that. It was very, very little, not too much. This, at that time, was supposed to be turned over to the state. It was supposed to be a free ferry, but everybody would give Early something. Later on, they did start charging for it.

E: I've read, and I've heard that John Brown, Early's father, had a garden and fruit trees and so forth down there by the river. Do you remember that?

W: I don't know a thing about that. I remember where Early lived up across the hill. The first time I knew Early, he lived on the top of the hill, which would be on the east side of the river from Rock Hill. A big house up there and he had a big family. I've been to his house a good many times and [inaudible 7:05] to get across the ferry at night you had to put your lights on and blow your horn and get up—not down close to the water, but get up somewhere where you wouldn't slide in or anything because there's a lot of water **that's stuck** in there. You'd blow your horn, and Early would come down with a lantern and come on across and take you across any hour of the night and operated all during the day.

E: That was wonderful. Now, you were in his home sometimes. How was his home furnished? Was it very poor or what about the food?

W: It was very, very poor and they, as far as I remember, cooked on a fireplace. They fixed things in the fireplace pots and all. They had plain tables, and there was one big room and very few small rooms. In fact, I think a lot of their children slept in one big room. Early and his wife, I'm not sure about where they were, but I do know there was a real big room in that one house when I knew him.

E: Did you ever go hunting with **Indians as** a boy?

W: No, I didn't and didn't go fishing, either one.

E: But some of 'em did.

W: I knew some people that did but I can't remember their names right this minute. But Early was a pretty good fisherman, and he fished a lot down there when he wasn't taking people across the ferry.

E: What was the relationship of the White people and the Indians as you used to remember it?

W: They were very good relationship. They would come over to Jim Faris's store at Catawba and [inaudible 8:30] Simpson's store at Catawba and John Spark's store at Catawba. They'd come in and buy whatever they wanted to buy and sit down and talk just like any other person would be. A lot of people would ask them questions about "What's going on over the Indian nation?" And they'd say, "Well, so-and-so's sick," and keep up with things like that. They were very well up on what was going on because they kept in touch with people. They didn't stay in their one spot over there by themselves. They come and they visited a lot. Chief

Blue and a lot of 'em used to come over and once in a while, when they were going to Rock Hill, they would dress up in the Indian costumes and go to Friedham's Store in Rock Hill. That's the only place in Rock Hill they would like to trade, was Friedham's Store.

E: Did they ever put on any dances or exhibitions in front of Friedham's Store?

W: Not that I know of. No, ma'am.

E: You mentioned the doctor, Dr. Hill.

W: He was their doctor. He was my uncle, but he was their doctor, and they would call him all hours of the night, which he had to go on horse and buggy which at that time must have been about six or eight miles up there in the nation. But he would get out in any kind of weather and go up there to treat those people. If they ever would come to his place—he had a small office that they'd bring the children and women and men down to his place—he'd prescribe any kind of medication for 'em. Naturally, he didn't have any operating material or tools and all, but he would prescribe various remedies for earache and things of that kind that people now would have to go to a regular specialist for.

E: You're the first one that told me about the little house where he mixed his medicines and sold his medicines.

W: Yeah.

E: I didn't know he had that.

W: Yes, he did, and it was situated right in there. Well, the old house burned down. The big house he used to live in was a large house, must've had six or seven rooms in it. And when it burned down, I'm not positive whether this little house

burned down with it or not. But the present location of E. G. Hill's home—which he's passed away at this time and his brother lives there, Willie Mobley Hill—this is located on the same spot that the house originally was on, because the well was in the backyard, and he's put a pump in since then.

E: Now the Indians tell me that the doctor would come and if he was needed to spend the night, he would stay all night waiting to deliver a baby or—

W: He would. I've heard him say, "Why, I haven't been to bed for a night or two and I've got to go home and get some sleep." But he was very, very good and he had a lot of other practice too. He used to come over to my uncle's, Uncle William, W.W. White. [inaudible 11:19] He used to come over and he was his doctor, treated him, and he would use some very simple methods of stopping hiccups, and various things like that that people today still don't have a remedy for it. But he had something to do to kind of check 'em, to keep people from having some of that.

E: Where did he get his training? He was your uncle, and where did he get his training? Do you remember?

W: I'm not sure where. He went to some medical college. I'm not sure where he went.

E: Probably Emory, I suppose.

W: No, I'm not positive about that, where he went to. I know that if he told me one time I forgot.

E: Now there was an Indian ball team that played at Catawba and some of the White boys played with them and some of them played against them. What do you remember about that ball team?

W: I remember going to those games. In Catawba they played over near the Catawba High School between the Methodist church, which later on was torn down and another church was built. And then when the Catawba played the Indians, we had to go up near the Indian nation in a plain open field out there, just a real red field. And that's where the Indians played over there. That was their field and then Catawba had their field over there, as I said, back of the old schoolhouse at that time.

E: Was there a good feeling between the Whites and Indians—

W: Very good, very good.

E: Who were some of the ones you remember as good pitchers, hitters, or batters?

W: [inaudible 12:48]

[Break in recording]

E: We were talking about the boys on the ball team, the Whites and the Indians. Did they play together peacefully and happily, you think?

W: They did.

E: You don't remember any fights or anything of that kind?

W: Don't remember any fights.

E: You remember how fast those Indian boys could run?

W: Yes. A lot of 'em were good ball players, good pitchers, and they played good ball.

E: Now Mr. White, I'm interested in you. You've been working at the bleachery for how many years?

W: Thirty-eight years.

E: That's Rock Hill Printing and Finishing Company. Thirty-eight years and you're now retired.

W: Started in 1932. I was in the cost department about ten years. During the war, in [19]43, I was put in charge of the billing department because the man in charge of that went in the service. When he come back in 1946, he asked for his job back, and I took up several other jobs until a job come up in the cost department in the latter part of [19]46. I was cost supervisor from [19]46 to 1970. At that time, I have, speaking of Indians, been out over the plant—I'd work up cost over the entire plant—and I bumped into a lot of 'em. Some that I knew personally and others that I have seen in the shipping department, print department, mechanical department, electrical department, and various other departments. They were very good, conscientious people to work with. You could always depend on them being there. I never heard of any complaint of any Indian ever being out, just laying out, **particularly** laying out. They were very capable and the job that they did was very good.

E: What about their language? Did they use profanity or were they clean, nice boys?

W: I don't recall of ever hearing an Indian in the whole time I was at the bleachery ever use profane words.

E: You remember, too, when they could not go to school in Rock Hill. They would have to—there was no bus service for them, school bus service—so they had to ride to Rock Hill with their parents and attend school and then ride home with the people who worked at the bleachery.

W: Ride home, right. That was a mighty big handicap for them because they wanted an education just like anybody else. Once they ever got this set up where they could come to Rock Hill, a lot of those children and the many Indians, of all the Indians here, have branched out and gone into business for their self and worked for other people and they've really done well.

E: You've seen that happen in your lifetime.

W: I have seen that happen.

E: Do you want to name any specific Indians that you know that have done well or just generally?

W: No, uh, Sammy Beck was one that I knew real well. There was another one, his last name was Blue, worked in the shipping department for years. He had a deformed son—well, his son wasn't exactly deformed but he had something wrong. He couldn't walk good, unbalanced some way. It was cystic fibrosis what he had. Anyway, he goes with him now, everywhere he goes. I've seen him out at the Rock Hill Mall sometimes. He walks up and down there, this bad weather. He's out there most every day, you can see him out there. I've talked to him, and he asked me about a lot of people over at the bleachery that I knew and he knew. He's got a daughter that lives in Salt Lake City, and his daughter sends him plane tickets for he and his boy. I'm pretty sure his wife must be dead,

because I never have seen her with him. But she sends him plane tickets, and he goes to Salt Lake City by plane. He takes his boy out there and spends several weeks or maybe a month or so and would come back. Several times during the year she does that, because she's been married evidently real well and she said she has a nice home out there and all. So, she's one of the group that I know of that's done real good.

E: As far as their homes are concerned, as far as their jobs are concerned, as far as their education, do you think they've improved in all those ways?

W: I think they've come a long **way** and I wish I could say as much about some of the White people that I know. If they had applied their self as well as the Indians have applied their self, they would be in a much better position today than they are.

[End of interview]

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