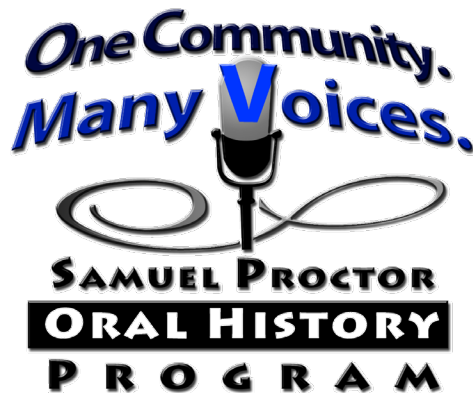


# Mary Wood Long

**Southeastern Indian Oral History Project (SIOHP)  
CAT-186**

**Interview by:**

**Emma Reid Echols  
November 5, 1992**



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**14 minutes | 7 pages**

**Abstract:** Mary Wood Long reflects on the play *Kah-Woh, Catawba*, a play performed at Winthrop College in the 1960s. Long conducted research for the play, which was written by her husband. She also talks about working as a schoolteacher after producing the play and discusses her affection for the Catawba youth.

**Keywords:** [Catawba Nation; South Carolina--Rock Hill; Storytelling; Oral biography]

**SAMUEL PROCTOR**  
**ORAL HISTORY**  
**PROGRAM**  
University of Florida

CAT 186

Interviewee: Mary Wood Long

Interviewer: Emma Reid Echols

Date of Interview: November 5, 1992

E: This is Emma Echols. I live in Charlotte, North Carolina, 5150 Sharon Road. I'm working on the oral history of the Catawba Indians with the University of Florida with Dr. Sam Proctor. I am visiting today in the home of Mrs. Mary Long. She has been my friend for a long time—we won't tell how many years, but she's done so many various things. I remember her as a teacher, I remember her as a friend, and I remember her and Dr. Long and the beautiful pageant they put on. I was there and I was spellbound to see the actors on the stage and the beautiful costumes. And so here is Mary Long, and I will let her give you her full name and address.

L: Yes, we have been friends, and I hope we will be for a long time. I'm Mary Wood Long, 1858 Ebenezer Road, in Rock Hill, South Carolina. I've been interested in the Catawba Indians ever since we came to Rock Hill. William came here at the invitation of Winthrop College, to begin a drama department. Shortly after we came—in fact, it was thirty-seven years ago we came, and this was thirty-three years ago—Harper Gault, the chairman of the York County Historical Association, asked us to do a play about the Catawbas. He said, "You know, kind of a white boy falling in love with a beautiful Indian maiden, and they have some trouble, and she dies, something like that," and so I thought, unh-uh, that won't do. So, William said he would love to write it and produce it. I did the research. Frankly, it took me seven months to plow through all the material that we had here in the Rock Hill public library and to assimilate it enough to create a story, because to me every part was fascinating. I particularly appreciated the notes of Douglas Summers

Brown. Not only her book, but they had typed up all of the notes she had made and had bound them quite nicely. This had some material, of course, that could not be incorporated into her book. Well, after seven months thinking about these people, you become part of the Tribe. They don't know it, but I know it. Then William, during the summer, wrote the play, and Dr. Christopher R. Reynolds directed it, and, as you say, we produced it here at Winthrop at Burns auditorium, three nights to an audience of 9,000 people. It was such a joy to be able to work with the people—I was scared to death. I had never met an Indian before that I could speak to, you know. And I found out they are just like I am. They were scared too, because they had never been in the play before. So, between all of this terror we got it together, and I do remember Gilbert Blue, who is now Chief of the Nation, laughing at me because I put trousers on the men. He said, "We didn't wear pants. We just wore a breech cloth." I said, "I know that, but the public is not going to accept this." So, we did both, and everybody was happy. So, many interesting things happened, and I made some good friends there. Years later, I became a teacher at Rock Hill High School. From going to a general meeting of the Nation two years ago when they had that wonderful convocation, I think I personally taught a whole generation of Catawba teenagers. The various names, you know: Canty and Wade and Harris and all of the other names with which we are familiar. I taught George's two daughters, Wenonah and her sister, and we had a wonderful time together. Somehow or another we looked after each other. I don't know why. Now look, I had two grandfathers born in England, so nobody can say I had any inheritance of this, but it was just a feeling and affinity that I had for the youngsters,

and I'm so thankful they had it for me. They were too young, of course, to remember the play, but we had many good times together. The play incidentally was called *Kah-Woh Catawba*. I found the word "Kah-Woh" in the works of Speck, who traveled around the country and did, phonetically, stories and different things from each of the dialects, the language of each of the Tribes of Native Americans. So, it means, "Thank you, people of the river." And I still say, "Thank you, people of the river," because they have their own culture, but yet we are so much alike. I don't go to the Mormon church, and they don't go to my Methodist church, but we understand each other. I was shocked as a teacher, the first time—years ago, we had to do this—we had to put down race, and so I was writing "B and W," and one little fellow came up and erased it, and he said, "I'm not W, and I'm not B." I said well, heavens, what are you?" He said, "I am an I." So, from then on, I became very conscious that in our community, we had a great number of people who were Indians. So, I followed them through the Vietnam War. I must say most of my young fellows came back, because, I think, Native Americans invented guerrilla warfare. If anybody knew how to take care of themselves, they seemed to have been able to do this. So, I was awfully glad when they would come to see me when all of the shooting was over.

E: Your former students still come to see you, don't they?

L: Yes, they do.

E: Now, I cannot call by name, and I am sure you cannot either, but you know them just the same.

L: I do. In fact, we asked Mr. Rod Beck to help us end the piece on Peter Harris,

which we did for Channel 30. I wanted an Indian coming out of the trees at the beginning to meet the White people, and then at the end I wanted the Indian to go back into the trees. He knew all about what we had done in drama because he has married one of my students. You know, I just keep meeting this everywhere and it is a delight. So, after I stopped teaching, I began to work with WNFC, which is the regional station of our South Carolina educational television, and of course we have met the Catawba Nation in many ways. We did a piece on Thomas Spratt, one of the earliest Scotch-Irish settlers, who couldn't have done a thing if he had not been a friend of the leaders of the Nation at that time, and we talked about them. Wherever possible, I tried to get them in, so to speak, because they are part of our nation's history, and must not be forgotten. So, you asked me to mention what do I see as the future for our Catawba. I see a great deal of pride, because now they are beginning to revive their culture, their dances, their handcrafts. They've always been proud of themselves, but now they are letting us, people who are not of the Nation, know. They are letting us know how proud they are. They have learned dances, which they can do as an exhibition, and have charming costumes. So, I always look forward to seeing that whenever possible. I work on the Parks and Recreation Commission with Mr. Buck George, who is a delightful gentleman, and I have enjoyed his friendship for many years. I begin to see the fact that, unless the Catawba make us, we are not going to write W and B or I anymore. We are just going to write Americans, unless people remind us. However, we are proud of the fact that we are Native Americans. But my national history is different from everybody's because my folks came from Europe, as did everyone's

ancestors. So, we are going to meld unto a nation someday, but we are going to be proud of the heritage. I hope more of our Catawba youngsters will go to college. I hope that it is made easier for all youngsters to go to college. The price of an education now is just exorbitant. So, somehow, I think the will come when a college education can be provide for those who need financial assistance. And then, with the financial background, I see them--

[break in recording]

E: In the play that I saw on the Winthrop once, I was impressed by some of the characters. For instance, the mother with her little children going across the stage. Do you remember that?

L: Mrs. Ferrell.

E: Mrs. and her little children all in costumes, and they sang then in the Catawba language. They tell me it was a love song, and they are going to do it a little bit later. Then, the part played by Peter Harris as a young boy and Peter Harris as an older man, and a part played by Chief Blue himself. Are those the ones you remember especially?

L: Mrs. Echols, we opened the show on my fortieth birthday, and now I am seventy-three [Laughter] and I will have to admit that I vaguely remember detail. I remember the children, because they were such darlings. Also, they had to wear Indian paint because, as you mentioned, the reflection of the light, even though some people did not like it. But there was no hot water, and we wanted to clean the children up, so if they went to sleep on the way home, they could just be put to bed. So, they walked half a block to my house, and everybody took a bath in our bath tub. We

were very delighted to be able to have them as our guests for that little while. I remember how cute they were. I remembered dear Chief Samuel Blue, Gilbert Blue's grandfather. Is that his name? Yes. I remember he was a beautiful man. We are not supposed to say gentlemen are beautiful, but he had such a gentle face. You know how in older age some people become beautiful and gentle. A beautiful head of silver hair. So, I remember he was there. We did have a character from history called Peter Harris. I do not remember the role he played in *Kah-Woh, Catawba*, but I do remember that he became an actor, and went to England, and did very well. And then the manager skipped the country with all the money, and here were three Catawbas left absolutely destitute. They did not know what to do, but the people of good will got together enough money for their passage. These three young men started home, and two of them jumped overboard, because they did not want to face their people as failures. But Peter Harris had the courage to keep on coming. Later he fought for the patriots in the American Revolution, and had a good life. He lived side by side with Thomas Spratt and his family, and he is buried in the Spratt family cemetery. Now this year, in 1992, I had the pleasure again of going to the convocation of the Tribe on the reservation, and I met this beautiful old lady who was the great-great-granddaughter of Peter Harris. I felt that was an honor, because as a human being, Peter Harris was extremely admirable—not treated well by the white people, but he forgave, and he was an admirable person. One thing that I remember from the play, and I wish that I had read it, I should. There is a copy in the Rock Hill Public Library, if anyone is interested in reading. I remember the tragedy of the British giving the Catawbas blankets. They



used them, and from the blankets they contracted small pox. The Tribe was decimated by this dread disease. Question is—and it has never been solved—did the British do this deliberately? But men, women, and children died, and the numbers became quite small. After that, the Tribe never again regained its fighting strength, which it had prior to this gift—if you can call it that—from the British. I remember the wonderful people we had in the play, and the reception, and the fact that I always sat in the back of an auditorium. I figured if I could hear back there, the audience could hear. So, William and I were in the back of the house. The Catawba people who were attending were asked to stand, and when the group down front stood, I just was so proud. So, I do not think—the person who doesn't have a drop of Catawba in them—anyone could care more, unless it is Mrs. Echols.

[Laughter]

E: You are proud of your connection with the Catawbas, and they are proud to claim you, for you are their friend. That I know.

L: Well, I don't know, but I love them.

[End of interview]

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