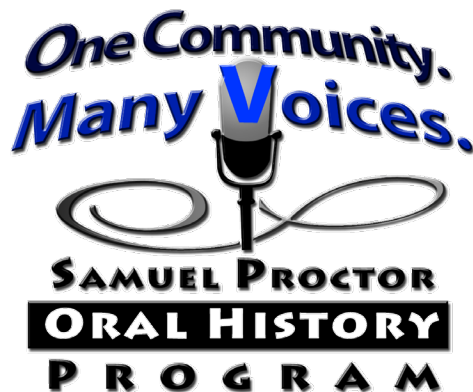


William Blair Simpson Jr.

**Southeastern Indian Oral History Project (SIOHP)
CAT-131**

Interview by:

**Emma Reid Echols
September 7, 1976**



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20 minutes | 16 pages

Abstract: W.B. Simpson lived on the Catawba reservation for about thirty-five years and recalls various members of the community. He describes playing baseball when he was young, and various Catawba players he'd known at that time. His father had owned a general merchandise store, and Mr. Simpson recalled times where individuals had traded pottery for various items. He also described what the houses used to look like on the Catawba reservation, as well as some of its more recognizable landmarks. He believes that the changes happening to the Tribe are for the better, with the members of the Tribe now being able to build nicer houses and get more education and better jobs.

Keywords: [Catawba Nation; Chief Samuel Taylor Blue; South Carolina--Rock Hill; Pottery; Sports]

SAMUEL PROCTOR
ORAL HISTORY

P R O G R A M
University of Florida

CAT 131

Interviewee: William Blair Simpson Jr.

Interviewer: Emma Reid Echols

Date of Interview: September 7, 1976

E: This is Emma Reid Echols at Rock Hill, South Carolina, Route 6, Box 260. This is September 7. I am recording the oral history of the Catawba Indians. I'm visiting in the home of Mr. W.B. Simpson. Mr. Simpson, give me your full name and your address.

S: William Blare Simpson, Jr.

E: And your address?

S: 6639, Rock Hill.

E: Now as I've been visiting around, so many say, "You must go talk to Bill Simpson, because he knows a lot about the Catawba Indians." Now, do you know about the Catawba Indians because in part that you lived in Catawba, didn't you?

S: That's right.

E: How long were you living there?

S: Only about thirty-five years.

E: And your father ran the country store there that had all sorts of merchandise?

S: It was general merchandise, yeah.

E: That's right. Now some of the Indians came in to shop with your father, and I'm sure some shopped at other stores. How would they shop, and what would they want?

S: Well, most of them, when they'd always come down every Saturday afternoon, the ball games and they'd all buy candy and peanuts and ice cream. They never would—I always did say that they wouldn't go home with any money in their

pockets because they'd rather carry something to eat home, you know, candy and peanuts and things.

E: To share with their families?

S: That's right.

E: They always paid cash for their things?

S: Yes, ma'am.

E: Did they buy any staple things from you, like sugar or flour or—do you remember that?

S: Some did, yes.

E: Then tell me about the ball games. You attended some of the ball games with the Indians, I'm sure.

S: Well, we would go up to the Indian Nation and play the Indians up there. Then, 'tmes we would have games with other people. And we would get some of the Indians, the best players, you know, mix them up to play with us. That was the way we played for years and years, because we had a number of the Indians playing with us on all of our games, we played around Rock Hill and Edgemoor and Lando and Waxhaw—different places, you know.

[Break in recording]

E: You knew exactly which Indians to pick? The ones who could hit the ball or the ones could run?

S: Yes ma'am, we sure did.

E: Do you remember any of the Indians you played with?

S: Well, Les George, Douglas Harris, and—well, different ones back ten years, but uh ...

E: Did the Cantys play with you?

S: And Marvin George, he was the pitcher, and one day the Canty's played with us. Mostly Blues, they had a few of the Blues played with us. I believe that was about all—the Sanders, Peter Sanders played there.

E: You got along so friendly with them, you never had any fights, or what?

S: Oh, we never did have any trouble, no ma'am. No ma'am.

E: That's wonderful. Now, just over the hill from your father's store was Dr. Hill's old home, where he rode a horse and buggy over into the Indian reservation. And he was the doctor for the Indians. Tell me what you remember about Dr. Hill.

S: Well, Dr. Hill was the doctor appointed for the state for the Catawba Indians, and he was pretty good. He was a real good doctor, and he knew the Indians. Lots of times they would come down at night—some of them were sick, and Dr. Hill would give them some pills or something to take and tell them he'd be up there the next day. He knew the Indians pretty well, so he would give them pills to take soon as he got there. I believe that's about all I know. But of course, Dr. Hill was the doctor, I reckon for thirty years or maybe more.

E: Now, when he went the next day, how did he travel?

S: Well, in his buggy first, and later on he had a Model T Ford, you know, he drove it.

E: Are they real roads or were these sod roads?

- S: Oh, they were muddy roads, I mean, just hills and hollows, and wasn't any graded roads like they have now, just about like a field road then, you know. Maybe half the time going and coming you'd be getting out of a ditch or something.
- E: I suppose some of the Indians would have to pull him out.
- S: Oh yes, yes, that's right.
- E: I understand that sometimes if it was necessary, he would spend the night with the Indians.
- S: Oh yeah, yeah.
- E: And he always liked his cups of coffee?
- S: That's right, yeah.
- E: His son, E.G. Hill, told me that in desperate cases when he wanted it at night that he would hitch up the horse for him. Do you remember the old horse he drove?
- S: No ma'am, I don't. It was a big old tall red horse is all I remember. I don't remember the name.
- E: And E.G. was paid ten cents to hitch up the horse, which was a great deal of money in that day and time.
- S: Yeah, that's right.
- E: Now, he was not only a doctor with pills and medicines of that kind, but he was a surgical doctor. Do you remember his old bag of surgical—?
- S: That's right, yeah.
- E: He had one bag of medicines, and one was a long bag with—
- S: One was a little long bag with his surgical instruments in it.

- E: You never did go down on the reservation with him any time, did you?
- S: No, no ma'am.
- E: But you made some trips down there. Who did you go with when you went?
- S: Well, it would just be a crowd of boys like E.G. Hill, Frank Bash, when we would go to play ball, you know. Tom Allison, and just different ones around Catawba, you know.
- E: Now, you remember the Indian homes years and years ago.
- S: Yes.
- E: Tell me what kind of houses they lived in.
- S: Well, most of them was just about two- and three-room huts, you know. They all had some sort of huts, there wasn't any wigwams or anything like they used to have years ago. I reckon at that time Sam Blue's house was about the largest house over there. It was, say about five rooms, I guess, or something like that.
- E: How did they heat those houses?
- S: With wood.
- E: With open fireplaces?
- S: Open fireplaces, yes.
- E: And now then, you remember the school and the church. Let's see, let's pick up the school first. What's the first school you remember?
- S: Well, the first school I remember was ... I believe it was right in front of Sam Blue's house one time?
- E: As far as I know, the first school was out on the reservation near the church.

- S: Well, it was, but I tell you why I know where it was. It was right up the back of Sam Blue's house on that road that goes up, well up the side of Sam Blue's house and the new school. That's where it was in the church. Of course, when I was a member there it was right in the front of Sam Blue's house, across the road.
- E: Now, you're thinking of Sam Blue's house which was down on the reservation?
- S: On the reservation.
- E: Yes, that's right.
- S: That's right.
- E: That's my understanding too. And then in the center of that reservation was the old well that so many people used.
- S: Yeah, that's right.
- E: Then later, of course, they built another school. A one room house, and then added two more rooms to a three-room schoolhouse painted white. Well, the later teachers taught and, of course, I guess you remember the Mormon church that was built in, I believe in 1928, made of cement blocks and painted white.
- S: Yeah.
- E: Is that the church you remember?
- S: No, the church I remember was just a frame building—
- E: Oh, that's the first.
- S: In front of Sanders's. The next one was built up, the one that part of it is still there yet, isn't it?
- E: Least some of the blocks that's still there.

S: Yeah, that's right. But I remember when the Mormon elders used to come there to Catawba on the train from toward Atlanta or somewhere in that country, and they would walk from Catawba up to the Nation, which was about four miles or so. They were real nice people. Every once in a while, when they was playing ball, some of the Mormon elders would play ball with them—good ball players, you know. That was way back years ago.

E: No one's ever told me that before. That's interesting.

S: That's right, that's right. Well, now, and they were real nice people, because they still served the same way, you know. They have to come out without pay. And all of them was real nice, well-to-do people, and so, we knew lots of them, but I don't remember any names now. But they would always come down to play ball with us, you know, and they'd be with them. There was always two of them at a time together.

E: Then some of them were teachers, some of them were bishops or ministers.

S: That's right, that's right.

E: Do you remember any of the ones that taught school? Davis, or any of those?

S: I think I remember Mr. Davis pretty well, and there was another there, but I can't remember his name that taught school there.

E: Mr. Hayes?

S: That's it, Hayes, Hayes, that's right.

E: Now, later on, Mr. and Mrs. Dunlap came into the reservation, and were teachers down on the school. Do you remember the Dunlap's at all?

S: No ma'am.

- E: I think that was before your day, and then course they come on up to Mrs. Wheelock, and Ms. Macie Stevenson, and the Lesslies, and some more Mormon elders, and many, many more. And then there's some teachers from Catawba that went up there to teach. Do you remember any of the ones from there?
- S: Well, it seems like Ms. Sparks—
- E: She did.
- S: —taught but that was before my day. I mean, before I could remember.
- E: And Mr. Sparks.
- S: Yeah.
- E: You remember them, of course.
- S: That's right.
- E: And Mr. Sparks, they say, had beautiful handwriting, and he taught them—
- S: He did.
- E: —to write. I think he started substituting for his wife, and he liked it so well he kept on teaching awhile.
- S: Yeah, that's right. I heard about all that, but that was before I was large enough to know anything about it.
- E: The—you'll remember, I know, some of the old people on the reservation. Some of these Chieftains. Let's see, you remember John Brown.
- S: Yes ma'am.
- E: And he ran the ferry.
- S: He ran the ferry.
- E: Tell me, he's quite a character. How much you know about him?

S: Well, I know that he had about ten or twelve children, and he lived down there in a little house right up from the ferry at the river. I reckon twenty-some years that I can remember, he run the Cureton's Ferry. And later on, John Brown died while he was at the ferry in Catawba—I mean the Cureton's Ferry and later on they cut that ferry out and moved it up to the Ashe Ferry above the Seaboard bridge. Later on, Early Brown, John Brown's son, ran the ferry a good many years, and his family, boys and all, run it. He was supposed to cut the ferry out later on. Early moved back up to the Nation, and he died up in the Nation.

E: John Brown, when he was running the ferry, I understand that his wife had a garden, and had some fruit trees and so forth around here. Must have been very industrious good people.

S: That's right. He was good people, and he was strong and tall, slender fellow, but he was stout, and he really made a good family, you know.

E: Do you suppose he could read and write?

S: I couldn't say.

E: I wondered if he could.

S: Yeah, I couldn't say. I would think he could read and write a little bit.

E: Now, what ones of his children did you know—John Brown's children? You knew Arzada.

S: Yeah. Well, in fact I knew several of them, but I've just forgotten them now because Early Brown, Roy Brown, and Ida Sanders's wife, Fletch Beck's wife, and I'm not sure about Major Beck.

E: No Major Beck married Sam Blue's daughter, Lula.

S: That's right, that's right. Yeah.

E: That's different.

S: Yeah. That's right.

E: Then, coming on up you, of course, you remember Early Brown, the son, he was Chieftain for quite a while, and he married Edith Brown, his wife. And Edith is still living on the reservation. Do you remember anything special about Early and Edith Brown?

S: No. Now, he had another wife, but I forget her name. We was down at the ferry, and Edith Brown lived in the Nation, and it seems like his second wife was maybe a Canty. Her name was Emma, Emma Brown he called her, Emma.

E: That's right.

S: Yeah.

E: And the first wife was Edith Brown.

S: Yeah, that's right. They separated.

E: That's right.

S: And then he married Emma Brown, and I think maybe she was a Canty, but I'm not sure.

E: You remember Douglas Harris?

S: Yes ma'am, I remember Douglas.

E: What about him?

S: Well, he was a good ball player. He was a good man, and he played ball with us I reckon for eight or ten years down at Catawba. We'd play against them at the Nation, you know.

E: Then you remember, of course, Raymond Harris?

S: Yes, yes.

E: He's dead now, I believe.

S: Yeah, that's right.

E: And Nelson Blue, the oldest son of Chief Blue, he's still living.

S: Yeah, I knew him real well too.

E: He worked in Rock Hill for quite a number of years, didn't he?

S: Yes ma'am. I don't know what all he did do, but he was a security guard at the Bleachery for a number of years, and that's about all I know about him.

E: Well, now, the one that you going to remember most of all is going to be Chief Sam Blue, I suppose.

S: Yeah, that's right.

E: Tell me what you remember about him?

S: Well, I remember Chief Blue real well, because he'd always—most of the time when he'd come down to Catawba to the ball games, he'd always wear his Indian headgear, you know. And sometimes he had a suit, an Indian suit, you know, he'd wear it.

E: Did he ever do any dances down there before a ball game?

S: Yeah, he'd do the Indian dance, yeah.

E: And let out his war whoop?

S: Yeah, he'd do all that.

E: Do you think he did a great deal of things to help improve the conditions of his people in his Tribe?

S: I think so, yes.

E: Did you ever visit in his home?

S: No, I never been in his home, but I been up in his yard there at his house.

E: Well, in front of his yard was where he would sit in his chair, and lots of people would stop by, and there'd be a regular circle of people talking to him.

S: Yeah, that's right.

E: Mr. Simpson, anything else you remember especially about Chief Blue? You said that he attended the ball games, and of course he had a big crowd of people that would come to visit him in his home, and he was a leader in his church and in his community. Anything else you remember about him, or his wife?

S: No, not particular.

E: Well, let's see another one, what about John Idle Sanders?

S: Now, I remember Idle Sanders well. He was a good Indian, and he was quiet. He didn't have much to say. He had a big family.

E: And his wife was a pottery maker?

S: That's right, that's right.

E: I know you remember when they sold the pottery up and down the streets.

S: They used to bring the pottery down. They'd have it wrapped up in a cloth, big, big cloth in kind of a bundle to carry. They would bring it down, the pipes, and the little vases or little dishes, you know, and all different—with Indian heads on them, and all. We kept a bunch of them in the store all the time because they would trade the Indian pottery for things in the store. But the biggest thing we kept all the time was the Indian pipes. They had some fancy ones, and just some

regular little old small clay pipes, you know. Kind of tan, red and black the way they burn them, cook them. I believe that's about all I know.

E: Did you ever see anyone smoking those pipes?

S: Oh, yes ma'am.

E: They'd get their reeds from the river?

S: Well, they'd get a cane to make a stem for the pipe. They sold those, especially the little ones, you know. So many people smoked it. Small Indian pipes, the old people, you know. Lots of the colored people always smoked back in those days down there, and they'd buy that kind too.

E: Do you have any idea what those pipes or what the pottery would sell for?

S: Well, the pipes, as well as I remember, were about a dime, I guess. They might've been some of them were five cents, but and the pottery would be about twenty-five or thirty-five cents, or something like that, and they made different things you know.

E: Now the women then would bring that pottery with them?

S: Yes ma'am.

E: What women pottery makers do you remember? Alzada Sanders is one.

S: Yeah, well I remember her. But the others, lots of them it was the old bunch that's been dead for years, and I just can't remember the names.

E: That's true. Did you ever know Mary Harris or Ben Harris?

S: I didn't know Mary Harris, but I knew of Ben Harris.

E: Well, tell me what you remember about Ben.

- S: Well, I don't remember much about him. About all I can remember, just remember seeing him a few times.
- E: He was educated, and he had learned to read himself. Now maybe you remember, I don't, they say that there's a Culp family that lived on the reservation that taught him to read. Do you know what Culp family that would be?
- S: No, I do not.
- E: I haven't been able to find out who that would be.
- S: Now, I didn't remember Ben Harris too good, I just heard of him. I remember one old fella was Robert Lee Harris. I remember him. But the only thing much that I remember about him is he was real smart. I think he was educated. He lived to be I reckon eighty--something years old.
- E: He was a fine Indian. Do you remember Moroni George? He went to school in Carlisle, Pennsylvania, and had a big family. Anything you especially remember about him?
- S: Well, I just remember seeing him a number of times and being around him, but I knew he had a big family, and I knew of most of his children, you know.
- E: Now, another person you knew that no one else has known about is Archie Wheelock, who traveled the country with a medicine— I don't know what you call it.
- S: A medicine show. A minstrel show or something.
- E: A medicine show. And you were working on the railroad, and how did you happen to see that show?

S: Well, I was up at Shelby, one time, and the show was travelling through the country. They would stay at a location for a week or ten days, and the show was going on at Shelby when I was there. And I went to the show that night and saw Wheelock, because I knew him personally, you know. They had just a minstrel show, you know, and they would sell and give a big talk, and sell the medicine in the crowds. Then he'd put on another act for the show, and it was a good little show.

E: Did Wheelock dance, speak, or do anything at that time?

S: Not that I remember. Mostly he just talked, and advertised the medicine mostly you know, like that.

E: What kind of medicine was it? I don't believe you bought any, did you?

S: No, ma'am. Cause oh, it cured all ills, I think it was just different kinds of tonics, you know.

E: Well, now, Chief Sam Blue also made medicine and sold it. Did you ever see him selling any of his medicines?

S: No, I don't remember anything about that.

E: He went out in the fields and woods and would get the material and make his own medicines. Wheelock was a very interesting person, and of course he married Edna. He has two daughters, Edna and Doris, who are on the reservation today.

S: Yes.

E: Mr. Simpson, how have the conditions changed today from what they used to be for the Indians?

S: Well, most all of them now have nice cars, and they changed the dress, they all wear real nice clothes. They built nice houses, furnished them nice, and not too many of them live on the old Nation. A good many live there, but they've changed it, built different houses, you know, from what they used to live in, and it's just changed completely from what it was fifty years ago.

E: Then you probably know some that work in at the bleachery [R.H. Printing & Finishing Co] some who are electricians, some who are workers in various fields, do you know?

S: That's right. Yes, ma'am.

E: That's a change for the better, isn't it?

S: Yes, ma'am.

[End of interview]

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