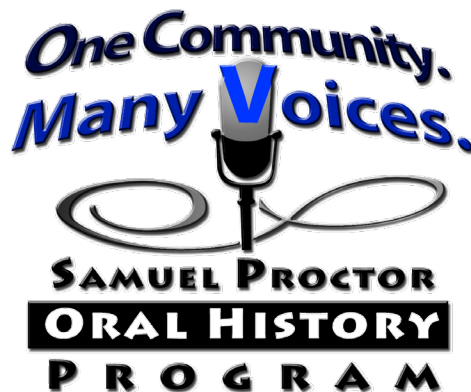


Evans McClure "Buck" George Jr.

**Southeastern Indian Oral History Project (SIOHP)
CAT-177**

Interview by:

**Emma Reid Echols
October 3, 1992**



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18 minutes | 11 pages**

Abstract: Buck George was a star football player for Clemson University and at the brink of retiring from his textile job of 34 years. When asked about his time as a student, he recalls being scolded for riding down the banisters of his school's fire escape. He then recalls going to Clemson University and then moving back to Rock Hill, where he raised his two daughters. He recounts some details about Catawba life on the reservation, such as medicines, hunting and fishing, and hearing a great horned owl's call. He talks about his lifelong friends and his father, who had to go to move to North Carolina and then Kansas to finish school. The interview finishes with George recounting details about his great-great grandfather's pottery.

Keywords: [Catawba Nation; Billy George; North Carolina--Charlotte; Family histories; Pottery]

SAMUEL PROCTOR
ORAL HISTORY
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CAT 177

Interviewee: Evans McClure "Buck" George Jr.

Interviewer: Emma Reid Echols

Date of Interview: October 3, 1992

E: This is Emma Echols from Charlotte, North Carolina, 5150 Sharon Road. I'm working on the oral history of the Catawba Indians with the University of Florida, Dr. Sam Proctor, and I'm visiting in the home of Buck George. Some years ago, I was teaching school at Northside, and I had quite a number of Indian children in my class. They couldn't wait for the bell to ring so they could go out on the bleachers at Northside School and see Buck George play football. So here I'm interviewing today Buck George, and I'm going to let you tell them about yourself. Give us your full name and your address.

G: My real name is Evans M. George. Evans McClure George, and my nickname is Buck, so everybody goes by Buck. They don't really know me by my real name, but just by nickname.

E: And your address?

G: 1119 McDow Drive, Rock Hill, South Carolina.

E: Where are you working now, what's your—

G: I'm working at Celanese—Hoechst Celanese Corporation. And I've been there thirty-four years, and in about another month I'm going to retire, December 1.

E: Can't imagine you retiring. You're going to find something else to do, I know that.

G: Yes, I think there's plenty of things coming up now that I'll be able to do.

E: Now, let's go back into your early days. When you were a little boy, where did you go to school, and what do you remember about the reservation?

G: Well, I went to school at Northside School. It was right near the Industrial Mill Village, and I was raised up on the Industrial Mill Village. We lived at 23 Barrel

Street, and I went to Northside School all the way through elementary school and then to Rock Hill High School. When I finished Rock Hill High School, I went over to Clemson University.

E: Who do you remember of your teachers at Northside?

G: [Laughs] Oh, I remember a lot of 'em. Mrs. Sanders, and I remember you, Mrs. Echols, and I remember Mr. Riser and Ms. Wilkinson, and there was...

E: Did you go to—Ms. Sue Wayne? Did you go to school to her?

G: I don't remember Ms. Wayne.

E: You had some others. You remember Mrs. Parker, I suppose?

G: Oh, yes.

E: And Miss Leslie maybe?

G: Miss Leslie taught me in the seventh grade. And I came out of her class one day, and she was always standing at the top of the big fire escapes at the end of the building, and the children marched down those fire escapes to go home. So, one day I came out of that room—the first person out of the room—and I was in a hurry to get home so I could come back and play some on the—hurry to the playground and play. So, when I was the first one out of the room, instead of walking down the flight of stairs, I grabbed the banisters and slid down, all the way to the ground. It was about thirty feet or more down to the ground. I took off running, and I was almost at the edge of the school grounds when I heard all these people hollering at me. I looked around to see who they were hollering at, and it was me! I looked back up there and standing at the top of the fire escape was Miss Leslie motioning for me to come back. So, I came back, and she made

me walk up and down those steps five times, and every step I say, "Haste makes waste. An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure." [Laughter] So I always remember that.

E: And then you went to play football.

G: Yeah.

E: Who was your coach at that time? Do you remember?

G: Well, the coach at high school was Walter Jenkins.

E: Oh, yes.

G: And there was a Coach McCall and Avery. We had three coaches, and the head coach was Walter Jenkins.

E: Who was your principal at that time?

G: Mr. uh...

E: Well, that doesn't matter. We'll think of it later. How did you happen to choose Clemson for your college?

G: Well, there was a man here in Rock Hill that—Harper Gault—that had been talking to me a good bit and asking me about it, and I had inquiries from Clemson about going to Clemson. Between Marshall Walker and Harper Gault asking me about Clemson, I called Marshall up one—Harper up one day—and told him that I'd made up my mind, I was going to Clemson. And before I knew it, they had me over there. [Laughter] They came by and got me and took me on.

E: And so, Marshall and Harper Gault had been your friends all these years?

G: All these years.

E: And they're both still living and they're still your friends. You've kept those friendships. What did you like about Clemson after you got there?

G: Well, it was a hard school, all right. Coach Howard was a tough coach, and I saw some things that I'd never seen before as far as being away from home. I got to do some traveling that I never would have gotten to do without that, and the football enabled me to get the education without having to pay for it.

E: After four years at Clemson, then, you came back to Rock Hill to live and to work?

G: Yes, ma'am.

E: You've been here for all these years?

G: I've been here all those years.

E: You raised your family here. You have two daughters. Tell me what they are doing and where they're living.

G: Wynona is a dentist, and she is practicing here in Rock Hill. She finished Clemson University and then went to the medical university down at Charleston. Finished there in the Dental—School of Dentistry—and came back to Rock Hill and is practicing dentistry here in Rock Hill. The younger daughter, Wanda, went to Georgetown University in Washington, D.C. She finished Georgetown in the School of Foreign Service, left Georgetown and went to Clemson University and got a master's degree in economics. And left there and went to Georgia State University in Atlanta and got a degree in law. She's practicing law in Atlanta.

E: You have a dentist and a lawyer in your family.

G: Yes, ma'am.

E: How many grandchildren?

G: I got four grandchildren. Three girls and one boy.

E: Do you tell them that you're proud to be an Indian and some of the things you remember?

G: I sure do.

E: Although you didn't live on the reservation you spent a lot of time down there on the reservation. Tell me about that time.

G: I can remember our—my—aunt that I went to visit a lot down there, and I can remember going out down to the spring. It was down the hill, behind their house, and we would go to the spring—an open spring—and get our water from the spring in buckets and carry it back to the kitchen and set it up on the shelf in the kitchen. That was the way we got our water. The houses were very—seldom the doors was ever locked. You know, we had the front porches in the area, and the yards were always swept clean. There's no grass in the yard, and it was always swept clean. We never worried about anyone ever coming into the house or anything.

E: Did you go swimming or fishing in the river?

G: I can remember my dad when I was very, very young swimming in the Catawba River with me on his back. I can distinctly remember that.

E: That would be something to see. What about the wild animals? Did you do any hunting?

G: I did some hunting when I was a little bit older, thirteen or fourteen years old. When I was real young, there weren't too many real animals like deer and things

on the reservation because most of them had been run out of the area or either killed off.

E: Do you remember the birds? They tell me there were big owls across the river.

G: Oh, that's a real good feeling to be down in the bottom lands on the Catawba River and hear one of those great horned owls call its mate up the river. You could hear it for miles, and it echoes. It was just a—it's just a wonderful sound.

E: How did it sound? Do it like it sounds.

G: [Owl-like noises] You could hear it all the way up the river when it comes off.

E: Are there any of those horned owls there now?

G: Yes, there's a lot of them down there. There's some bald eagles on the river now, they've come back. There's plenty of deer in the area, there's coon, there's rabbits, there's squirrels. All the wildlife has come back into the reservation area.

E: You go down on the reservation now often?

G: Yes, I go very often. In fact, I was down this morning.

E: You still have so many relatives and friends, don't you?

G: I have relatives. Most of the Catawbans in some way or another are kin to me, and I have a lot of friends down there, too.

E: Did you ever hear your father, or your mother tell any old stories? Old legends about the people there or the animals?

G: I just know that they talked about—I've heard some of 'em talk about when the old Indians. When they would be on a trail and the enemy would be after them that they would put poison along briars and things along the trail, that when they got scratched with the briars, it would make them sick. And after they got sick,

then they would fall back on 'em and overcome their enemies by trickery, so to speak. They often used animal hoofs and things on their feet to either get away or to walk out through where some animals had been so that they disappeared, and you couldn't find them that way.

E: Did your family make any medicines that were made on the reservation?

G: They did have some medicines, but there's a few who still know some about it. My daughter is trying to get together some facts about this, and there is some herbs that they still use down on the reservation.

E: Some of the old ones, like Albert Sanders, know where those plants grow, don't they?

G: Yes. They use something called bear root down there on the reservation. They'll dig it up and make a tea out of it and they use sassafras for tea. There's several different things, but most of that the younger people have kind of let it slip by. And there's an interest now in reviving some of that, and they're trying to get together some of the facts and do this. I mean, I saw—just the other day I went to a class where they were working on some baskets, and I saw some beautiful basket work being done there on the reservation in one of the classes.

E: Oh, tell me who was doing that basket work?

G: Well, Faye George is the one that's teaching the class. She—my daughter Wynona—got Faye to teach the class to 'em, and my daughter is in that class taking the basket weaving with them. Carson Blue's daughter is in there, and the Plyler man is in there. He's about—oh, I guess he's forty-five years old—and I saw a beautiful basket that he was making.

E: What Plyler was that?

G: This is...Olin Plyler's younger brother. I can't think of his first name right now.

E: But he's a Plyler?

G: He's a Plyler.

E: Some of them, of course, are making pottery, and some of them are making baskets. Now that's interesting. Now, after you started work here in Rock Hill, you still maintained your connections with the reservation and the people there. What do you see in the future for them when this new grant goes through?

G: Well, if the settlement of the claim comes through, I can see a lot of good things that could come out of that if it's worked right and that we are able to get it written into the claim that we can progress and have industry come onto the reservation. I see a lot of things coming out of it, very good things.

E: Did you help in the moving of the schoolhouse—the old schoolhouse down on the reservation?

G: No, ma'am. I did a few things for my daughter, but mostly she didn't—she would call me to help her out on some of the contacts that she made, but other than that she did most of it on her own.

E: She's going to tell me more about that, because I have an appointment with her. What about the celebration coming up in November? Are you going to be there?

G: Yes, ma'am, I sure will, and—

E: What's the date?

G: I think—I'm not sure. We just voted on the date at the last meeting, but I don't really have it now but it's—

E: You'll have pottery making and dancing and exhibitions of all kinds and a lot of visitors.

G: Right. The year before last, we had somewhere in the neighborhood of five thousand people came to the first one. One of the things that I was doing there was I was trying to serve up some refreshments and things for the people that were visiting, and I ran out three times and had to make special trips to get some more refreshments for them. We had about five thousand the first year, the second year I would say it was somewhere between five and six thousand, and they're looking for an even bigger crowd this year.

E: I'm interested in your relationship to White people because you've made friends everywhere. Tell me of some of the White people that you count your friends.

G: Well, there's many of them here in the city of Rock Hill and in Charlotte. Bradley Clapam and Ann Clapam, we've had a relationship goes all the way back to high school. Most of my high school friends I still keep up with. I went to a class reunion not too long ago and had some reacquaintances with most of them. Harper Gault was a longtime friend, and he still lives here in Rock Hill. He's in a nursing home now, but he's still a very good friend. Marshall Walker, I've known him for a long time, and he's a very good friend of mine. I have a very good relationship with—

E: I was interested in seeing downtown this morning the notebook that your daughter kept, and in it the children were writing on how they were proud to be a Catawba Indian. They were proud of their heritage, they were proud of their culture, they were proud of their skin, they were proud of their accomplishments.

Is this a wonderful thing that the children are being taught to be proud to be an Indian? What do you think of that?

G: Yes, ma'am, I do really think it's something that they should be taught about their heritage and taught that they can be proud of their heritage, and most of them that I know are. When we were coming up—when I was little and coming up as a young person—there was a lot of prejudice, and some of the Catawbias didn't get to go into schools like they do today. In fact, my dad was raised up on the reservation here, he went to Cherokee, North Carolina, to school. He was sent to Cherokee to go to school there, so he finished high school in Cherokee, North Carolina and went from Cherokee to Haskell Institute in Lawrence, Kansas, in order to get his education. His roommate was **Arnold Chenute**, who was later the Chief of the Cherokee in North Carolina.

E: What did your father—what was his business when he got that education?

G: Well, he came back, and he was in textiles. He worked as a supervisor at J.P. Stevens Company at the industrial cotton mill.

E: And that's the same place you're working at now?

G: I'm working in textiles, but I'm with Hoechst Celanese in Rock Hill, South Carolina.

[Break in recording]

E: Your great-grandfather made little pieces of pottery that you're telling me about. Tell me a little about those little pieces of pottery. Who was your great-grandfather, and what did he make?

G: My great-great-grandfather was Billy George, and he made some—I saw some pieces of pottery that he had made. It was very small pipes, very small, and the color of it was black with a kind of a grey smoke color going through the clay that made it very beautiful, and it was very shiny. Elsie George still had some of that pottery just a few years ago. In fact, she may still have it now. My aunt Lucy Starnes—I saw a double-barrel pistol, a very short pistol that belonged to Billy George. And I was hoping that someday I might get a hold of that pistol myself, but one of the granddaughter's husbands became—she married a gun collector, and he has that gun now. But—

E: Well, maybe some of these—

G: Billy's and some of the other Catawba's names are on the statue, the memorial there in Fort Mill. It was where they were honored back in the early—at the turn of the century. That statue is still is in that memorial park in Fort Mill.

E: That's your great-great-grandfather?

G: Yes.

[End of interview]

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