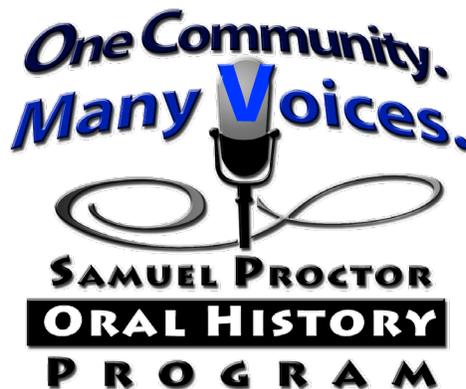


Reverend Mack Oglesbee

**Southeastern Indian Oral History Project (SIOHP)
CAT-161**

Interview by:

**Emma Reid Echols
May 23, 1983**



University of Florida • Samuel Proctor Oral History Program • Paul Ortiz, Director
P.O. Box 115215, 241 Pugh Hall, University of Florida, Gainesville, FL 32611-5215
(352) 392-7168 www.clas.ufl.edu/history/oral

Samuel Proctor Oral History Program
College of Liberal Arts and Sciences
Program Director: Dr. Paul Ortiz

241 Pugh Hall
PO Box 115215
Gainesville, FL 32611
(352) 392-7168
<https://oral.history.ufl.edu>

CAT 161 Reverend Mack Oglesbee
Southeastern Indian Oral History Project (SIOHP)
Interviewed by Emma Reid Echols on May 23, 1983
13 minutes | 5 pages

Abstract: Reverend Mack Oglesbee is a Baptist minister who has been running a ministry in Catawba since the early 1970s. He has brought a few Catawba Indians into the Baptist faith but struggles to retain members due to the community's connection with the Mormon Church. He speaks about the importance of earning the trust and friendship of those around him in order to spread the Baptist gospel.

Keywords: [Catawba Nation; South Carolina--Rock Hill; Religion; Mormon Church]

SAMUEL PROCTOR
ORAL HISTORY
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University of Florida

CAT 161

Interviewee: Reverend Mack Oglesbee

Interviewer: Emma Reid Echols

Date of Interview: May 23, 1983

E: This is May 23, 1983. I am visiting in the home of a minister, Reverend Mack Oglesbee, and he has in his home a very lovely Indian lady. We've just been interviewing Ida Harris. Now, this minister is going to tell us how he happened to get interested in the Catawba Indians. Mr. Oglesbee, tell me how you first heard about the Catawbas.

O: The first I heard about the Catawbas, and them existing here in South Carolina, was back in [19]73 when I was in Bible school in Greenville, South Carolina. I came to Rock Hill in [19]73 and held services on a couple different occasions. Some of the people at that time were not Catawbas but they had kinfolks that had been married into the Catawbas. That's when the name really started to take form. Everybody has always known of the Cherokee reservation, but you never hear anybody talk about the Catawbas. I didn't hear any more or didn't even think any more about the Catawbas until 1979 and 1980, when the Lord burdened my heart to bring the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ to the Catawba Indians. Now, the Catawba Indians have been under the Mormon philosophy about 150 years, and so in return, they have been real slim in relating to the gospel of our Lord Jesus. I'm a minister of a Christian faith, and I have been here since 1980, holding services in my home and open-air services on the reservation since then. I held open-air services at Martha Johnson's house and Melvin Harris's house, which Melvin is a son of Ida Harris—Ida stays with us here in my home. I've got to know a lot of the Catawba just in conversation and meeting on a day-to-day basis. I've had several other Catawbas in my church

services. Right now, I have a steady member, is Haddon and Cathy Johnson, and their family, Joey, Crystal, and Robbie. They come faithful and we really appreciate 'em. Ida Harris, she come to know the Lord Jesus Christ in July 7, 1981. A few weeks after that, I had the privilege to baptize her by immersion, in remembrance of death, burial, and resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ. Now Ida has lived with us since we've been here. For a short spell, she went back and stayed with her son, Wilbur Harris, who is her oldest son. She stayed with him probably about eight months. Ida came back and she started staying with us again in December 1982. We're still holding services in our house, and we plan on holding services in the house until we have a chance to expand to a bigger room, or a bigger building.

E: Your address here is Lesslie, and your box number is?

O: Route 6, Box 317D, Rock Hill, South Carolina.

E: Well, this home is large, and big enough to hold the congregation that you have from the reservation. Now, do you have any problem in explaining to them the difference in your Baptist beliefs and the Mormon belief that they were brought up on?

O: I don't have any problem explaining it. A lot of times, a lot of the ones who are out there now that we're trying to reach have always been Mormons. So, in return, speaking to them about Mormonism is actually a lot of times speaking contrary to them, so it's offensive conversation. This is why it's so important to gain them as a friend, and let them know that you care about them, and you love them, and they do have a purpose in this life, and that they have always had a

purpose. Then they start accepting you. Now, Haddon Johnson, I appreciate him. I've known him for three years—he just watched my life more than my Gospel. Then he realized that I was God-called, and so in return, explaining to him the difference between Christianity and Mormonism isn't hard at all because he has come to realize that I'm a friend, not an enemy to him. He has accepted the Lord Jesus Christ, and we gladly talk about the differences on a real friendly basis.

E: I know they appreciate the fact that you not only minister to their spiritual needs, but you also earn most of your own living, don't you, by working. What kind of work do you do?

O: I had to put part-time jobs together in order to make an income. I work at the Rock Hill Mall four hours a day, six days a week. I drive an *Evening Herald* route six days a week. Then in-between times, whatever odd jobs I can do. Same way as my wife. We just put odd jobs together in order to make our living.

E: Ida seems to be very happy here in your home.

O: We appreciate Ida. Through her being here, she, too—at first, when she first came with us, she accepted us. She knew that we was friends, but at the same time, you can see Ida accepting us more and more. Today, Ida—actually, my son gladly calls her grandmother. When Ida was back out to the reservation for a short time, she made reference to us as her white son. It let us know how her feelings was toward us. Today, Ida, she is precious to us. Her and the girls get a-laughing and carrying on, and her and my wife get a-laughing and carrying on. I enjoy just watching them. Ida is just making herself at home. She decides where

she wants to go, and if she needs anything, she knows where it's at. She helps herself.

E: She gave us an age—I believe it's seventy-eight, but I believe she's probably older than that. Do you have any idea how old she is?

O: Not definitely. Who did Betty Harris stay with? She stayed with Isabel George, didn't she? Isabel George claims that she and Ida are the same age. Isabel claims that she's somewhere around eighty, which Ida says she's seventy-eight.

E: Isabel George is married to who?

U1: She was married to Ephraim George.

O: Ephraim George has passed away.

E: Yes. Ephraim is gone. Now, she's still living?

O: Yes.

E: Not on the old reservation, but on the new reservation?

O: Yes, it would be considered as the newer reservation.

E: Well, what do you see as the future for your church compared to the one on the reservation, the Mormon Church?

O: In my ministry, as I have the privilege to be the pastor, I probably will never see the size—having our church the same as theirs, because of the back history. I guess we see a future of having a sound church, and a good church where they will have the desire to reach their own people. Now, I've had the privilege of having a lot of them in church. But there is such of a close tie in Mormonism to them, that if they go to another church outside of Mormonism, they'll tell 'em that they got "preacher religion." It's a ridiculous thing. So many of them that I've had

here, in services and in preaching and have talked to about their souls, have went back because of the ridiculing and so on. The ones that went back, they definitely want to do the same things that daddy and momma did, and that grandpa and grandma did. It does have a great pull on them. We know that our Lord has got a greater pull than that, but at the same time, the mind has got to come to the realization that we have a better thing. After they have their ups and downs enough times, and we have a chance to work with them with deeply concern, I feel a lot of them will eventually have the privilege to be back into our services on a full-time basis.

E: I heard you conducted a service for Ida's sister, Martha Harris Johnson. I can see that you were a friend of the Indians, and that you ought to continue.

O: Yes. I preach the gospel of the Lord Jesus, and the one thing I've always known from the Scriptures and being amongst people that are different, is that the Lord says to show yourself friendly. Showing yourself friendly has been the number one avenue that God has given us, in order to do the services that our Lord wants us to do.

E: I thank you very much.

[End of interview]

Transcribed by: Sam Johnson, December 1, 2021

Audit-edited by: Callum Karoleski, March 24, 2022

Final edited by: Indica Mattson, July 26, 2022