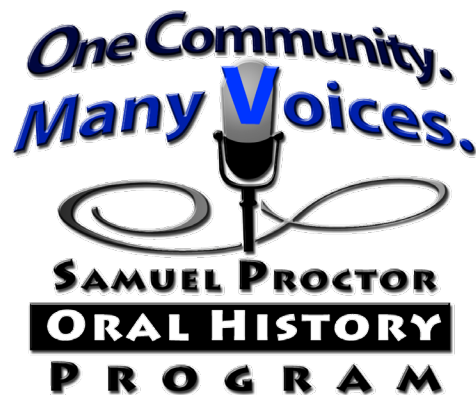


# **Evelyn McGhee George**

**Southeastern Indian Oral History Project (SIOHP)  
CAT-170**

**Interview by:**

**Emma Reid Echols  
September 10, 1992**



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](http://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 170 Evelyn McGhee George**  
**Southeastern Indian Oral History Project**  
**Interviewed by Emma Reid Echols on September 10, 1992**  
**18 minutes | 11 pages**

**Abstract:** Evelyn George is the daughter of Edith Brown and one of the most renowned potters in Catawba. At seventy-eight years old, she continues to produce and sell her pottery, as well as teaching pottery classes to younger generations. She learned to make small pottery pieces when she was a teenager and began selling her works at the age of seventeen. She remembers from the past her mother growing food in their garden, which she canned or dried in order to preserve it. She also recalls all the older people making their own salves and medicines with material from the surrounding woods. Even though she could not get a college education, she is insistent that they go to college and get better jobs than were available to her when she was young.

**Keywords:** [Catawba Nation; Edith Bertha Harris Brown; Early Brown; Chief Samuel Taylor Blue; North Carolina--Charlotte; Pottery; Education]

**ORAL HISTORY**

**P R O G R A M**  
**University of Florida**

CAT 170

Interviewee: Evelyn McGhee George

Interviewer: Emma Reid Echols

Date of Interview: September 10, 1992

E: This is Emma Echols, Charlotte, North Carolina, 5150 Sharon Road. I'm visiting in the home of Evelyn George, and she's considered one of the great pottery makers of this generation. On Tuesday, August 25, Alan Norwood of the *Charlotte Observer* visited her, and I am quoting from the *Charlotte Observer*. He said, "The reservation starts just past the chain-link fence. 'It's hard to tell whether you are on it or not,' said Winona Harris. 'At the present time all you get is a feel of its poverty.'" Then he goes on to say: "The poverty is there, but it is not hugely different from other hard-hit pockets. Many of the roads are little more than tractor trailers back into the woods. To see the Catawba culture, finally, take one of the tracks back to Evelyn George's house. She's a Catawba potter, one of those who produce what Thomas Bloomer, a senior editor of the Library of Congress, has called the best example of aboriginal art in existence east of the Mississippi. "Catawba potters don't use wheels or kilns. They build items from native clay, using only their fingers and simple knives and scoops. Then they burn them in wood fires and open pits. George's work isn't delicate, but it's lovely. She talked as she worked at the clay in her lap. 'This knife and the one belonged to my mother. We rub the pieces with the rock before we burn them. I have my mother's rock, which was handed down from her grandmother.' Now George teaches pottery to succeeding generations at the former schoolhouse. The courses there are at 7:30 Monday nights. George also teaches native dance, at the age seventy-eight, and others share skills in similar classes." The news story says, "The Catawbans hope to use any settlement money to start a business." I

hope the negotiations can reach a settlement that will be fair to all. Evelyn, when I drove up to your little house here on top of the hill, I knew exactly where I was, because I was here a number of years ago to visit your mother. She was Edith Brown, a lovely, beautiful lady. And all around were flowers. The *Evening Herald* wrote that article about her, and the picture was this lady, Edith Brown, surrounded by flowers. So today I'm back at the same little house, and I'm visiting her daughter Evelyn George. And now she carries on the same pottery making that her mother did. The bookcases over there are filled with pottery that she will not sell. She has pottery here on top of the stove, she has pottery over there on the table, and there are at least a dozen different kinds of pottery all around. There's a basket over here to my left. I guess she hasn't unwrapped it after she's fired it. Is that right, Evelyn?

G: That's right.

E: Tell me, Evelyn, how old are you?

G: I'm seventy-eight years old.

E: And your mother was Edith Brown, and your father was...?

G: Early Brown.

E: Early Brown. He was one of the Chieftains.

G: He was, and he operated the ferry across the river.

E: That's right.

G: That took the cars back and forth.

E: I have a picture of your father, a splendid picture, and I'm proud to have that. Now I hope that I can get a picture of you too sometime today. [Laughter] When did you start—first of all in school?

G: When did I go to school?

E: Yeah, and where, and who was your teacher?

G: I went to school here on the reservation when I was six years old, and our teacher was Brother Davis.

E: From Gaffney, I believe.

G: Well, he was from Columbia.

E: Oh, was he?

G: Yeah. Then he lived here on the reservation, him and his wife, in a little building they built for him to live in, the schoolteacher. And I went to school in the school runned from the first grade to the seventh grade. When you finished the seventh grade, well, you couldn't go outside of the reservation to school.

E: There was no other school for you?

G: And so, I didn't get to go to school. I went through the seventh grade, and that was all.

E: Then when did you begin making pottery?

G: Well, I played in the clay when I was little, and then I started fooling with my mother's clay. She didn't like for us to fool with her clay. We could rub it for her, but she didn't want us wasting her clay. And so, you better see about your **beans**. She didn't want us fooling with her clay and messing it up because she had to get out there and work in it real hard, and she didn't have no help with her

clay. Then when I got old enough, maybe I reckon about thirteen or fourteen years old, I started building some little, tiny pieces. Then I didn't get to sell any pieces or anything until I reckon when I was about seventeen or eighteen years old. I worked with my aunt, Fanny Kinney.

E: Fanny Kinney. That's a new name for me. I don't recognize that one.

G: Well, do you recognize Lonzo Kinney's name?

E: Yes, I do.

G: Well, that was his wife at that time. I built pottery then with her, and he would take them to Cherokee and sell them. They wouldn't get but ten and fifteen cents for them, or twenty-five cents. And that's all they ever made off of their pottery.

Then I went to Ohio in [19]33, [19]35, and [19]34, and I worked up there. I worked at a state park up there in Ohio when them two girls was little.

E: When were you married?

G: I got married in 1930.

E: Now, your husband is not living?

G: Yes, he's living, but we don't live together.

E: Yeah. And you have two girls?

G: I've got three girls.

E: Who are they?

G: That's Joanne. Fay is the oldest girl of the three.

U: [inaudible 7:30] [Laughter]

G: That son of mine you met out there, well, my oldest son was backed in the back, Howard. You probably know Howard. And Charlie is the second son. Howard's the—

E: Well, you do mighty well taking care of all that big family.

G: [Laughter] Well, they take care of themselves now. I just have myself to take care of. But they were three girls and five boys.

E: A big family.

G: Yeah.

E: You had your small garden around here to help out.

G: Yeah.

E: And down here at the river you can have fish, and the boys can do some hunting, couldn't they?

G: Yeah, they hunt. They go fishing too, a lot.

E: You don't remember any of the—

[Break in recording]

E: Now I've got the two buttons down.

G: Now I was talking about when I started making pottery. My first child was born when I first started making pottery that I could sell. I made pottery before, when I was a little girl, you know—

E: But you began selling it—

G: Yes, when I was seventeen.

E: Tell me what prices you'd get for your pottery and what kind you made.

- G: Well, we made canoes, little gypsy pots, and peace pipes, and little ducks. We didn't really make great big old huge pieces, but they'd take them and go to Cherokee, and they wouldn't get but ten or fifteen cents for them.
- E: Did the Ellis ever go up to Winthrop College?
- G: Yes. My mother—I have a picture where my mother, and Liza Gordon, and Uncle Roy Brown, and Irvin Gordon was up at Winthrop College. The pottery is sitting on the ground, and they's standing inside the fence. And that's of my mother and Liza Gordon.
- E: You have a picture like that.
- G: Yes.
- E: I want you to show it to me after a little bit. I think maybe I have it.
- G: Well, it's—I don't got it at home. Dr. Harris got it up at her office.
- E: Oh yes. And then you kept on making pottery. Did the price go up for you?
- G: Yes. Now you're getting to the price.
- E: What do you get for your pottery now?
- G: Well, I have them ranging from ten dollars up to seventy or seventy-five.
- E: And those are great big pieces?
- G: Well, they not—they just about that size, right over there with the handles on it.
- E: Is it a disappointment after you fired them, to find that you'd broken some of them?
- G: Yes. You want to quit. You want to quit building. [Laughter] Because you can't do anything with that clay anymore after it breaks, after you put it in the fire. Now, if



it breaks before you put it in the fire, you can soak it over and build out of it. But you can't after you burn it.

E: That's right.

G: That's just gone.

E: What's your favorite piece that you make? The gypsy pot?

G: The gypsy pot and the wedding vase.

E: I see you have some that have little decorations, like little ferns on them.

G: Oh yeah, that's the design we put on them.

E: Yeah. You do that with a little nail?

G: I do it with the tip end of my spoon or the handle of my spoon.

E: You have your own rubbing stones that came from your mother?

G: Yes, I've got my own rubbing rocks, and I have one that my mother gave me. And it was her grandma's.

E: Those are not valuable except that you cherish them because they came from the past, don't they?

G: Yes.

E: What good things do you remember from the past?

G: Well, I think in the past we had good times, because we worked for our food that we had on the table. Mother would raise a big garden, and she would can everything. She would raise chickens and hogs, and she had a cow. I remember all them good things from then. And I used to have to churn so she could make butter.

E: Did she dry some of the meat and dry some of the vegetables or fruits?

G: She'd dry her fruit. Put it up on the roof of the porch, and when it dried, they'd take it out and put it into little bags and tie that up.

E: What else old people do you remember that—on the reservation were great people? Who do you remember?

G: I remember my granddaddies on my mother's side and on my father's side.

E: Tell me about them.

G: John Brown was my granddaddy, Early Brown's father. He had a big crowd of children. He had a houseful of children.

E: He lived right down on the riverbank, didn't he?

G: He operated the ferry across the river, too.

E: That's right.

G: And when he got sick, well, my daddy took over and operated the ferry. But my granddaddy was real—he was the Chief one time, John Brown. But my daddy was never a Chief.

E: I've heard that around your grandfather—the Brown home, that they had fruit trees, which was rather unusual.

G: Yeah. We had fruit trees. They went out in the woods and got their own herbs to make the medicine. I remember Mama would go out and get stuff and she'd come back, and she'd say, "This is for the backache." And it was a heart leaf, shaped in a heart leaf. She would dig that up, and bring it back, and make medicine. And she had stuff, she'd go out and get and it was for the headache. They made their own medicine back then, and they had a huge pot that they called the medicine bowl that they made out of clay before my mother came

along. You know, my other great ancestors way back. They had the medicine bowl, and they had the gypsy pot. The gypsy pot is made to put a wire through each handle and hang it up in the fireplace and boil your food in it.

E: That's right. Did your mother ever cook some of the medicines on the stove and make salves or ointments?

G: Yes. She made salves for sores, you know, and mixed up for the cold, medicine for the cold. They made all their medicines. Back then, well, I don't remember going to a doctor. Only when I got old enough that I can remember real good, I just had to go to a doctor to get a tooth pulled one time. I don't remember going to the doctor 'till I had grown.

E: Did you have White friends on the reservation, too?

G: Yes, we had some White friends, they didn't live on the reservation.

E: Who were some of the White friends you remember?

G: I remember Jack **Cullins** and his family. He had some boys and some girls and his wife. They lived at the edge of the reservation and worked for other people on the outside. But they'd come to our church because they belonged to our church. We were good friends to those children.

E: Do you remember Chief Sam Blue?

G: Yes.

E: What do you remember about him?

G: That was my uncle—my great-uncle. That was my daddy's daddy's brother—half-brother, Uncle Sam. We always called him Uncle Sam. He was an elder in the

church. He took great care of the church. He seen that we would come to church. If we didn't come to church, well, he'd come to see about us—

E: Oh, that's right!

G: And see what was wrong. He wanted us all to stay in church. We just had a little church out there in front of Lula's.

E: Made out of little white cement blocks, wasn't it?

G: Yeah. Well, the first one wasn't. The first one was just a little board—made out of boards. They moved it across the road and put the schoolteacher in it—made a place for the schoolteacher to live, and they built that white slab church.

E: Now, who would be teaching in that school then?

G: Well, the teachers that would be teaching—whoever they'd bring in to teach the children. They wouldn't be Indian people, but they would be Mormon people.

E: Yes. You're pleased with the settlement. And what effect will it have on you? Will it have medicines?

G: They say for the elderly people they'll do all they can for the elderly people, and they'll pay for their medicine and things like that. But me, it probably won't benefit me in the way that it will the young people.

E: You're seventy-eight?

G: But the young people, I'm proud that they gonna get an education. They're going to get to go to college and all of that stuff. If they do that for them, I'll be happy.

E: As I have visited around among you, I remember when you had difficulty going to the high schools in Rock Hill and problems. All that is changed, and today I find in the schools that the children are proud to be an Indian—a Catawba Indian.

G: Yes.

E: And you're proud as well.

G: Yeah. I'm proud that they can go and that they can get an education, even though I didn't. But that's one thing that I'm glad that they're going to do for them. Let them go on to college and get them a good education and have their own jobs and things like that.

E: The sun is shining out here on your lawn and on your flowers and your garden, and I hope that the sun is shining on the future for you as Catawba Indians.

G: Thank you.

E: Is there anything else that you would like to add to that tape today?

G: No, I guess I don't see—[Laughter]

E: Well, it's been a joy to be here with you.

[End of interview]

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