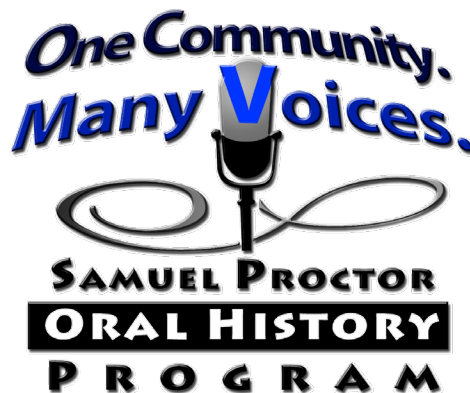


**Reading of Statement
Written by Martha
Henrietta
Harris Johnson**

**Southeastern Indian Oral History Project (SIOHP)
CAT-162**

Monologue by:

**Emma Reid Echols
May 5, 1983**



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CAT 162 Martha Henrietta Harris Johnson
Southeastern Indian Oral History Project (SIOHP)
Recorded by Emma Reid Echols on May 3, 1983
9 minutes | 4 pages

Abstract: Emma Echols reads a statement she collected from Martha Harris Johnson, in which Mrs. Johnson describes her upbringing. Born 1902, she was one of the oldest living Catawba Indians at the time of the interview. She went to school and worked in the industrial mills to bring in income for her large family. She states that her parents, Ben and Mary Harris, spoke the Catawba language. Finally, she discusses how she lives currently, with one of her sons and his wife.

Keywords: [Catawba Nation; South Carolina--Rock Hill; Family histories; Education]

SAMUEL PROCTOR
ORAL HISTORY
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University of Florida

CAT 162

Author: Martha Henrietta Harris Johnson

Speaker: Emma Reid Echols

Date of Interview: May 3, 1983

E: This is Emma Reed Echols, Box 6, Route 260, Rock Hill, South Carolina. I'm recording the oral history of the Catawba Indians. I am visiting in the home of Mrs. Martha Harris. She lives at the top of the hill at the very beginning of the old reservation. Her house is very small, very crowded with things left over from years gone by. A fenced-in yard where she has chickens. She lives all alone except for her son and his wife, who live with her, but they are gone to work most of the time. There is no electricity in the home and so my tape recorder did not work. Their little room was kept warm by a wood fire—she also did her cooking on the top of that wood fire. Since there was no electricity, she did not want to talk into a microphone in her house, but said she would talk to me. This is what she said: My name is Martha Harris. My father was Ben Harris, and my mother was Mary Harris. My grandparents were John and Nancy Harris, and they spoke the Catawba language. I was born on the Indian reservation, on the other side of the hill. All of the children were delivered by a midwife. I had six brothers and four sisters. Ten in all, and that was a lot for my father to feed. All the boys are gone. I remember Robert and Joseph and John and the others. And so, now there are three of the girls left. My sister is Sallie Wade, and she lives in the little house down on the main reservation by herself. Ida Harris can no longer take care of herself, so she is living with a family, Mack Oglesbee, near Lesslie. She has been there for two years. Emmaline died some years ago and my sister, Martha, also died. Everybody remembers my sister being called October. When I was a

little girl, there was hard times—sure was. We had a little bit of corn, and sometimes we had a little cotton patch we made a little bit of money off of. We prepared our own food, grinding the corn. Lots of times we were hungry. We made pottery, not to make money from, but to swap it for food, swap it for sugar or corn or coffee or for a loaf of bread. And people came here to buy that pottery. Many times, we'd work in the field during the daytime, and then we'd sit by the fire and scrape the pottery at night. I well remember my mother. People called her Mary. Her name, Mary Harris. She never learned to read and write. She said that she worked in the fields all day, and then at nighttime, she would have pottery that she had made. She would give each one of us a piece of pottery and we would sit by the fire and scrape and scrape, preparing it for the firing that would take place later. People say that I look like my mother, because I'm small and very dark, and I have small brown hands just like hers. I wish that I could make pottery like she did. When I was a little girl, I went to school. Papa would not let me stay home. He was determined that we would have an education. My father learned to read by working for a Miss Cooke at the top of the hill. She helped him by giving him bits of newspapers, showing him how to pick out work, and then small books. Then he came on the reservation, and in a little shack, he started to teach other little boys to read. Later on, he learned to read very, very well, and to write as well. I have seen my father sit by the fire and work to learn new words after he was taught by the Dunlaps. My father insisted that I go to school, and so, a slate and a pencil was provided. I do not remember the books, but I do know that we didn't have many. We had to learn our ABCs

first, and then finally, we were able to have a little primer. I don't know who gave us the little primer, but I remember that, after I learned my ABC's, I got my hands on a little primer and then I had a little blue-backed speller. Not only did my father insist on us learning to go to school and read and write, but he also taught us manners. He never let any of us say "yes" or "no" to nobody. But "yes, ma'am," and "no, ma'am." If we didn't do that, he went out and got a hickory switch, and switched us around our ankles. When we went to school, we always came home for lunch. We had our big bucket on the little porch that we had for water. We used a gourd for a dipper. This was the only school on the reservation. I went to school here, I think, through the sixth grade. When the mill was opened up, I went to see if I could get a job. I was only thirteen years old, but nobody said nothing about my age. And I started to working in industrial mills. My father needed this help, and so on the little bit that I made—I don't know how much I made, but I brought that money home to my daddy. He needed to buy groceries for the big crowd that we had. One by one they got married, and then my father even had to help with the grandchildren. We lived in a log cabin at first. It seems so long ago and things were so scarce; they were such hard times. I was working at the mill one day. My father came and had with him a boy from Cherokee. His name was Isaac Johnson. My father said he thought it would be a good thing for me to get married, and Isaac would make me a good husband. And so, we were married, and Isaac was good to me. He was a good worker, and he also knew how to cook. Only one of my children lives with me now, my boy, Haddon Johnson. He does not help me to do anything. I bring in my own water. I look

after myself. I broke my hip a few years ago, and so I have to walk with a walker. I no longer make pottery. I just sit and watch people go by. I like to sit out in the yard, and with my walker, I go and gather the eggs from my chickens. And that's a big help on my groceries. I do not have any records of the past, because a fire destroyed all my old records. I wish I had some of my old records, because my father was a teacher, and he had a beautiful handwriting. And so, I sit and I look and I like to have people come to see me. And I like to tell about the past. I was born January 14, 1902. This makes me one of the oldest persons on the reservation. I'm Martha Harris, and I married Isaac Johnson, so I am Martha Harris Johnson.

[End of interview]

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