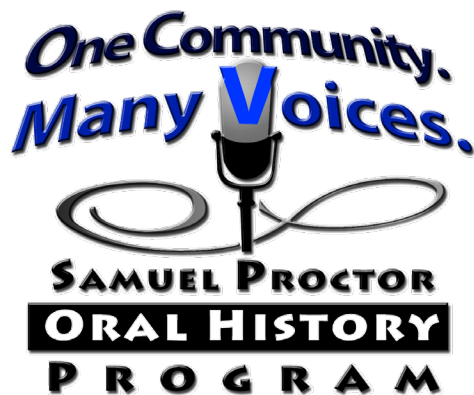


# Jessie Allen Harris

**Southeastern Indian Oral History Project (SIOHP)  
CAT-102**

**Interview by:**

**Edith Frances Canty Wade  
November 4, 1974**



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**CAT 102 Jessie Allen Harris**  
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**26 minutes | 15 pages**

**Abstract:** Jessie Harris discusses his family and remembers growing up on a farm on the old Catawba reservation. He shares that his mother made pottery and that he used to work in a textile mill. He recalls what he did at Christmas as a child and some recreational activities he did as a child. Harris remembers going square dancing when he was young and provides details about his time in the Army during World War II. He closes the interview by remembering Chief Samuel Taylor Blue and saying that he helped the Catawba very much.

**Keywords:** [Catawba Nation; Chief Samuel Taylor Blue; South Carolina--Rock Hill; Family histories; Military participation]

**SAMUEL PROCTOR**  
**ORAL HISTORY**  
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**University of Florida**

CAT 102

Interviewee: Jessie Allen Harris

Interviewer: Edith Frances Canty Wade

Date of Interview: November 4, 1974

W: This is Frances Wade. I live on Route 3, Box 304, Rock Hill, South Carolina. I'm gathering oral history of the Catawba Indians for the University of Florida. Today is November 4, 1974. I'm visiting in the home of Jessie Harris. Jessie, what is your full name?

H: Jessie Allen Harris.

W: When were you born, Jessie?

H: 1899, April 25.

W: Were you born on the reservation?

H: Yeah.

W: Who are your parents?

H: Jim Harris **had to be** and Margaret Harris.

W: Jim Harris and Margaret Harris. Do you have any brothers or sisters?

H: Herman Harris and **Gilda** Harris.

W: You have one brother and one sister. Are they alive?

H: Yeah.

W: What kind of work did your father do, Jessie?

H: They were farmers.

W: You told me something the other day about how your father really took care of you all and you were never hungry. Would you tell me about the pigs and all that?

H: He was a horse trader. Bought cattle, hogs, pigs.

W: And how much did you tell me he could buy a pig for?

H: Fifty cents.

W: Fifty cents. Were your parents Indians, both of 'em?

H: Yeah.

W: Did your mother work?

H: Yeah.

W: What kind of work did she do?

H: On the farm.

W: She worked on the farm also. Jessie, could your mother make pottery?

H: Yeah.

W: Do you remember what kind she made? Did she make large ones or small ones or what kind did she make?

H: She made large ones.

W: We don't see too many large pieces of pottery today, and several people have said that the older people usually made large pots. Now do you remember whether they could use any of those pieces of pottery to cook in or carry water in or anything?

H: They could carry water in 'em.

W: Could they cook with 'em?

H: Not as I remember.

W: Do you remember where they got the clay?

H: They got most of the clay, well, they got it over in Lancaster County. On **north** of what is known as the Nesbitt's place.

W: Do you remember any clay holes in Catawba? Do you know if there's any clay holes on the Catawba Reservation?

H: ... I believe there used to be. They used to go up there and get clay where John Brown lived, way on the upper end up there **was the Blue's**.

W: Up on the upper end of the reservation?

H: That's right.

W: Jessie, I know that you're retired now, but what kind of work did you do before you retired?

H: I worked on the farm at home, when I was at home. I left home in 1917 and come to town. And when I went to work in the textile mill.

W: How old were you when you went to work in the textile mill?

H: I was about seventeen.

W: What did you do in there?

H: Well, I worked in the **card** room, and I was a **draw frame bender** and a **card counter**.

W: And you lived in town while you worked?

H: Yeah.

W: In the time that you were a youth, how did you get around? What did you use for transportation?

H: Well, the transportation back in them days, there was no transportation hardly. No more than a buggy and horse. And I didn't have either one.

W: But could you ride a horse?

H: Well, I was raised on a farm, you know, and we had 'em and I was used to riding, driving. **We kept** one. And on the way, when I was in town if I wanted to go down [inaudible 5:40] go down to a [inaudible 5:44] **and** I'd hire a buggy and horse. [inaudible 5:51] if I wanted to go down right quick for something.

W: Jessie, who were you married to?

H: Married to **Jenny** Sanders.

W: Do you have any children?

H: No children.

W: When you were growing up, do you remember any Indians that could speak the Indian language?

H: Well, I could remember Chief Blue.

W: Well, what about Sally Gordon?

H: Well, Sally Gordon.

W: Could your mother and father speak the Indian language?

H: If they did, I never did hear it.

W: I want to ask you what it was like down on the reservation when you were growing up. Were there very many wild animals down there then?

H: Well, I don't know of any wild animals, but I have had some to follow me in the road at night and still I never did know what it was.

W: Oh. Were there any wild turkeys down on the reservation, Jessie?

H: They would come fly over and stay a while and go back.

W: And what about deer?

H: Deer would do the same thing. They would swim the river and come over the mountain.

W: Well, when we were talking about just across the river, was that part of the reservation too? Across the river?

H: Many years ago, it had been.

W: Well, there is a graveyard across the river that has Indians buried in it, is there not?

H: Yeah. You're right.

W: Did you ever have to work in clay?

H: No.

W: Did you have to help on the farm?

H: Yeah.

W: What kind of work did you have to do when you were a child?

H: I plowed, hoed cotton, hoed corn.

W: Did you have to get wood?

H: Yeah.

W: What kind of a house did you live in?

H: Well, back in them days most of them was log houses. **Known as** log houses. Sealed up, though.

W: Were they sealed with lumber, or cardboard, or how did you have 'em sealed?

H: Lumber **then**.

W: How many rooms did you have?

H: They usually run about three.

W: Did your mother cook on the fireplace, or did she have a stove to cook on?

H: She cooked on a fireplace a long time. **Now in** the later years, then she got a stove.

W: Did your parents live until you were grown?

H: Yeah.

W: Do you remember your mother cooking something called a hoecake or an ashcake in the fireplace?

H: Yeah.

W: Did you think they were very good?

H: I thought they were good.

W: I know that one of the older people cooked an ashcake for me and it was just loaded with dirt and ashes, but she washed it off and it tastes real good. Did you go to school, Jessie?

H: I went to school, got about the fourth grade.

W: Can you read good now?

H: No.

W: Can you remember who your teacher was?

H: Miss Dunlap.

W: Miss Dunlap. And where did you go to school?

H: On the Catawba Reservation.

W: Was it where the old schoolhouse was, or was it the little one-room building down near where Chief Blue used to live?

H: It was **all a** one room building.



W: Were there very many Indians going to school when you did?

H: Yes.

W: Why did you quit?

H: Well, it was something [inaudible 10:39]. We all were doing it, now. All of 'em were doing the same thing. When they got to, oh, about four, five or sixth grade, why, they'd usually quit.

W: And it was just something everybody did. When you went to school, how did you all keep warm?

H: We burned wood.

W: Did you have a fireplace, or did you have a heater?

H: Heater.

W: And who got the wood?

H: Well, us boys would get the wood.

W: How did you get your water?

H: I believe there was a church and [inaudible 11:25] where Chief Blue lived there was a **dam**. We'd get water down there.

W: Well, I remember that as late as when I went to school, we carried water from the spring. We'd take the buckets and go to the spring and get water and—

H: Well, we could do that too. We'd cross over **to** the other way. We used some of **'em around** spring water. In later times, the well. But I wasn't going then.

W: Jessie, do you remember any of the Christmases or holidays that you had? Did you do anything special on those days?

H: Well, about the only thing that I done on a holiday was went to go out and hunt.

W: I remember that too. I remember all of the men used to go hunting on Thanksgiving. Well, did you get anything for Christmas?

H: Yeah.

W: What kind of things did you all—

H: Well, we got the apples, oranges.

W: Did you get any toys?

H: Firecrackers to shoot, and toys of different kinds.

W: What did you all do for recreation? What did you do to have fun? I know that you couldn't—there wasn't any facilities down there, so what kind of recreation did you all have?

H: We'd go out on a Sunday; we'd get together and go down to the river somewhere and play ball.

W: Well, I know that all of the Indians were pretty good ball players. Some of the other people have told me that a bunch of the boys would go down on the river and rattle. Were you ever in that bunch?

H: Well, some of 'em rattled. Yeah, I rattled too. Go swimming [inaudible 13:24]

W: Were you a good swimmer?

H: Yeah, I was a good swimmer.

W: Could you use a bow and arrow, Jessie?

H: No, I **kn**owed how to shoot one, but I couldn't hit nothing.

W: [Laughter] All right. What about the slingshots? I can remember when even the men made slingshots and they were pretty good shots. Could you make a good slingshot, and could you use it?

H: Not that much. I made one one time and the first thing I done was hold it up and shot my finger and I quit.

W: [Laughter] Well, that's probably what I would do too. Jessie, you told me something real funny, I thought, the other day, about your parents didn't have too much. They worked hard, but it was hard to have anything in those days. You told me about how they tried to save and yet provide for you all, and I'd like for you to tell me about that cat.

H: Well, **we** had to **make** syrup. **Had to make**, planting the cane and preparing it and have it made into syrup. When you'd make it'd make about a fifty-gallon barrel, full. Well, one night, my mother just put a cloth over the barrel and the cover wasn't on it. And the old cat went up in the loft and fell down in there. I didn't want to lose any of that syrup, you know, because it was a big living for us. And I just took the cat's legs and **washed 'em** back on and popped **'em** back in the barrel, the same barrel.

W: [Laughter] Did you ever tell anybody you did that?

H: I finally told **at last**, but **not for** a long time.

W: You all had already eaten the syrup.

H: Yeah.

W: Jessie, do you remember anything about the Catawbas drawing money? That's money that the state appropriated and gave to the Indians once a year.

H: I can't remember.

W: You can't remember anything about it? Do you remember ever getting it once a year and getting to go to town, or going to buy a lot of groceries and storing 'em up?

H: Well, **as I was saying**, eighty years I done got up [inaudible 16:17] I can't remember anything about **that**.

W: All right. Well, there's another thing I want to talk to you about, and that's square dancing. Now, I remember hearing Indians tell all kinds of tales about the devil took the fiddle and had the men dancing and all of that. I know a lot of the Indians liked to go square dancing. What about you?

H: Well, I always went square dancing when I got big enough. I'll tell you what you're talking about, you're talking about somethin' that happened in my grandfather's day. That was his tale about that square dance and the devil. So, I couldn't approve of it. I don't know what really happened. But he claimed it really happened.

W: That the devil took the fiddle away from him? Is that what he claimed? [Laughter]

H: I don't know what—it was something **like that**, I guess, **it was true**. But I don't know anything about it.

W: Well, where did you all go square dancing at?

H: Oh, just different homes.

W: You went to the different homes? Were there very many people took part?

H: Practically all the young people.

W: What did you do for music?

H: Well, we'd usually get music from outside somewhere most of the time.

W: Did Charlie Crawford ever come and play?

H: Yeah.

W: Charlie Crawford was a colored man, wasn't he?

H: Yeah.

W: If he were alive, he could tell us a lot about the Indians, couldn't he? Because I remember that he was down in there real regular, even after I was big enough to remember. Well, is it true that some of the Catawbas could play musical instruments?

H: Yeah, they could. Later on, it was somebody, but I can't remember now who it was.

W: I remember my momma telling me that Joe Sanders could play the banjo, I believe. She said that one night he was going over the river to play for the dance, and that as he came along by her grandmother's house he hollered out and said, "How are you tonight, Granny?" She said, "Is that you, Joe?" And he said, "Yes." She said, "Well, where are you going?" He said, "I'm going over the river to go dancing." She said, "No you're not. You're coming in here and go to bed." So, he had to come in and go to bed, and he didn't get to go dancing.

H: [Laughter]

U: [inaudible 19:10]

W: They could play harps? Do you remember anybody that could play the harmonica, Jessie?

H: Well, they played, what I remember is the one that played with **their** mouth.

W: Jew's harps, like?

H: Jew's harps [inaudible 19:31]

W: Well, let's get a little bit more up to date now. Were you ever in service?

H: Yeah.

W: What branch of service were you in?

H: Artillery.

W: That's the army?

H: Army.

W: Did you ever serve overseas?

H: No.

W: What was your job in the army?

H: I worked in the warehouse.

W: In what years were you in service?

H: [19]41 and [19]42.

W: That was about World War II, wasn't it? Where did you serve?

H: Up in Camp White, Oregon. Medford, Oregon.

W: How long were you in service?

H: About nine months.

W: I want to ask you another thing now. Have you ever voted? In the elections?

H: Yes.

W: Do you think it's important to vote?

H: Yeah.

W: Are you planning on voting tomorrow?

H: I don't know. I've been sick so much. Sometimes I do and sometimes I don't.

W: Well, I realize that you're not well and you're not able to get around as much as you would like to. But I'd like to ask you another thing now. Do you have friends among the Blacks and the Whites? Do you get along well with the Blacks and the Whites?

H: Well, yeah, I get along with 'em.

W: The last thing that I'm going to ask you right now is, are you proud to be an Indian?

H: Yeah.

W: Will you tell me why, Jessie?

H: ... Well, I don't know.

W: All right. There was something else that I really wanted to talk to you about before I finished this tape today and that is, do you belong to any church?

H: Mormon Church.

W: You belong to the Mormon Church. I know that you're not able to go now, but I remember when you did go real regular. There was something else that you wanted to tell me about somebody, so would you go ahead and tell it.

H: Well, what I had in mind is what I know. One of the greatest men that ever lived on the reservation, and one of the greatest men for his people was Chief Samuel Blue. Back in the days when I was a young man, I would go up the river. John Brown **it was**, Maggie and Cora and them girls. It was about a two mile walk for me at night. But I was young. Snow could be on the ground, cold with ice. Well, I would wrap my feet up, you know, and go. And they would wait 'til I'd get ready to go and tell me he wanted him to come and minister to his wife. I would come on

down there and tell him. He said, "Well, Brother Ben ain't got no boots and I have boots." That man would go into a house and get his preparations or what he ministered to people with—oil and his overcoat and his boots—and he'd walk up there. And that man has done more for the people on the reservation. I don't know if there would've been a church today down there if it had not been ...

W: For Sam Blue.

H: For Sam Blue.

W: I agree with you. I agree with you, 'cause I can remember when there was only about eight people attending regular and he conducted the service, he blessed the sacrament. He did everything and there should have been several people to do that.

H: He kept down a lot of drinking in the Tribe. I was one of 'em.

W: I'm so glad that you told me this, and this is the type of things that I really want to know. Things that actually about the people, and I'm sure that you know this. I've been talking to Jessie Harris, and he looks just like an Indian, which he is, and he's seventy-five years old. He only weighs about a hundred and ten or a hundred and twenty pounds now, but I can remember before he got sick that he was a much heavier, stockier man. But he's real keen and alert in his mind. His body has just been beset by kidney trouble and diabetes. I'm sure that Jessie has many more things that he might tell me at a later date.

[End of interview]

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