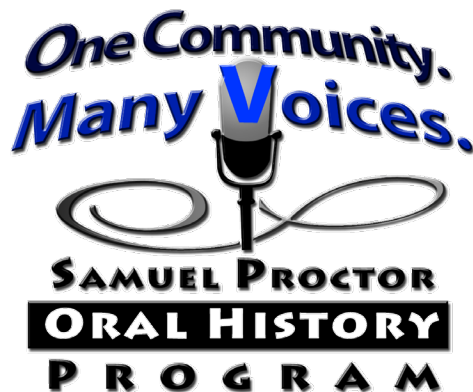


Elsie Inez Blue George and Landrum George

**Southeastern Indian Oral History Project (SIOHP)
CAT-172**

Interview by:

**Emma Reid Echols
September 5, 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

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>

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27 minutes | 16 pages

Abstract: Elsie George and Landrum George are interviewed one after another. Elsie discusses her childhood on the reservation, including the teachers she remembers, her unfulfilled goal to become a teacher, and her married life. She recalls a story about a “wild Indian” her parents used to scare her with, and repeats a story and song in Catawba that she remembers from her father. She discusses food her mother used to cook, and the current revival of pottery making. Then, Landrum George speaks about school memories, including spelling matches and his teachers. He recalls serving in the army during World War II and remembers his time serving as vice president of the local Mormon church.

Keywords: [Catawba Nation; South Carolina--Rock Hill; Education; Oral biography]

SAMUEL PROCTOR
ORAL HISTORY
PROGRAM
University of Florida

CAT 172

Interviewee: Elsie Inez Blue George and Landrum George

Interviewer: Emma Reid Echols

Date of Interview: September 5, 1992

E: This is Emma Reid Echols. I live in Charlotte, North Carolina, 5150 Sharon Road. I'm visiting among the Catawba Indians. I'm working on the oral history of the Catawba Indians for the University of Florida with Dr. Sam Proctor. And today, I'm visiting with Chief Sam Blue's daughter. I say "the" Chief, of course, that's the way everybody speaks of him. She is Mrs. Landrum George, and in a moment, we'll also talk with her husband. Elsie, give me your full name.

EG: Elsie Inez Blue George.

E: And you were born on the reservation?

EG: I was born on the reservation.

E: You're the youngest one?

EG: I'm the youngest one of Chief Blue's children.

E: He had eight, I believe, living?

EG: He had nine.

E: Nine. You remember the oldest son was by his first wife?

EG: Right. Nelson Blue.

E: Nelson. What do you remember about Nelson?

EG: Well, he's been around me all my life, and he just seemed like a full brother—he was just a half-brother, but he still seemed like a full brother to me.

E: And he married the little girl from across the river?

EG: He married Leola Watts.

E: She lived across the river, and her father made her a little boat to come across and go to school. In Mrs. Brown's book over there, Nelson and Leola are listed

together as ones of the fifteen pupils that went to that first, early school. Tell me about your school, where did you go to school?

EG: Well, I went to school down on the reservation, the schoolhouse placed down there now is where Sammy Beck's got her house built. That's where I went to school.

E: Who was your teachers, you remember?

EG: My first teacher, I believe, must have been Rosa Wheelock. I can't remember too much about her, but she must have been my first. Then I went to Mrs. Patton, Mrs. Earnest Patton, and Mrs. ... I can't think of the name ... two of them from Lancaster, I can't think of their names right now. Two sisters, I think they're sisters, taught school a while. Then after that, Mr. Davis—no, there's a missionary taught school, Dr. Blair? I mean, Elder Blair? I think I went to him, but Mr. Davis was my last schoolteacher.

E: You went through the seventh grade?

EG: I went through the tenth.

E: Tenth grade? Then you went on to Rock Hill, then, didn't you?

EG: No, I got married when I was eighteen. [Laughter] Didn't finish school. They wanted me to go on to college and finish my teaching. You know, Mr. Thomas, Senator Thomas from Washington, come down and visit Washington when I was—I helped Mr. Davis teach school. I taught the first and second grades, and this Mr. Thomas come down then, he visit our school. He come in the room where I was teaching, and he asked me, "If you had a chance to go finish your school somewhere, would you go and finish being a teacher?" and I said, "Yes." Which

I'd given my answer right off, because I was young and thought I could, you know. But then, Indians couldn't go to school here in Rock Hill! So he went back to Washington, and he wrote me a letter and said I could go to Oklahoma. Said everything fixed, I could come and go to Oklahoma school and finish my education and be a teacher. My daddy said, "No." He wouldn't let me go, said I couldn't go, so that was the reason I didn't go! [Laughter]

E: But you enjoyed that teaching experience, didn't you?

EG: Well, in a way, I did.

E: Then what'd you do? You got married when you were eighteen?

EG: I got married when I was still going to school. I was eighteen.

E: Where'd you go to live then?

EG: Let me go back to my school days. When I had to teach school, I was going up to school myself. I'd teach in the mornings, and I'd go back in the afternoons and take my subjects. That's what I was doing when I got married. When I got married, I left the reservation and come to Rock Hill to live, over at that industrial mill where my husband's mother lived, and we went there, and they retired. He got a house, worked in the mill and we got a house, and we moved that to ourselves, and I don't know how many years we lived there. Moved back to the reservation, then we moved back to the industrial mill, and we finally ended up here, right where I am now. We've been living here about forty years, I guess.

E: You bought this land?

EG: This is a part of the land the federal government bought for the reservation.

E: How many acres do you have?

EG: We don't have but—it's not quite an acre, is it, Landrum, what we got now? Little over an acre.

LG: An acre, more or less.

EG: [Laughter] More or less. Well, it's more, I believe.

E: You have a beautiful lawn here, and everybody recognizes by the big, big tree you have in your front yard.

LG: I'm gonna sell this place.

EG: We've got a big lot. [Laughter]

LG: [Inaudible 5:48] right over there.

EG: He gets his directions wrong.

E: [Laughter] Tell me what you've done—since you've married, you've lived near the industrial mill in Rock Hill, and you learned to live on whatever money came in, that right?

EG: Right. Well, my husband went in service, and while he was in service, I went to the bleachery and worked a while.

E: Where was he in service?

EG: He was over in—Germany, then.

LG: Europe.

EG: European. Well anyway, he stayed here in the states, I don't know how long. I went to Kansas, Mississippi, and stayed with him and worked in them places 'til he left to go to sea. And when he went oversea, I come back to Rock Hill and I went to work at the bleachery, and I stayed up there until he come home. He was over there eleven months, when the war ended. He [inaudible 6:45] not to work.

E: You Catawbas have always been on the side of the right—helping the Whites in the several of these wars. Your husband is one of those. What do you see—well, first of all, do you remember any old stories your father and mother used to tell you as you were sitting around the fireside, or talking? You remember any old stories they would tell you about the little people, or the old stories from the past?

EG: Oh, I can remember, when I was little, they'd tell me about the Wild Indian.

E: Tell me about that.

EG: [Laughter] The big cracks in the floor like that porch is out there, you know, and I'd be scared to death if you could hear them over there—wasn't nothing but rabbits, though, make that noise. But they'd scare you and tell you it was the Wild Indian to make us behave ourself. Said they'd be up under the house; they could see through them cracks. Now I'd be scared to death, I'd just draw up **trellis**.

[Laughter]

E: [Laughter] And they were rabbits.

EG: [Laughter] He said rabbits make the noises, toads too make some kind of noise, but that's what it was, I learned after I got over it what it was. But they had us scared. [Laughter]

E: You remember any of the music or songs your mother or father would sing? Were they different from—

EG: No, my mother never did sing, now. My father would sing, just Indian songs.

E: But your mother spoke the language.

EG: No.

E: No?

EG: Unh-uh. She couldn't even speak the Indian language.

E: Now, we're all interested in the new settlement, and you say that you waited a long time for this settlement to come, and you hope this one will work.

EG: Yeah, hope so.

E: What do you hope will get out of this one for you?

EG: Well, I hope we can get a better home. Get that fund they gonna set up for they said the elderly people, I think if maybe we live long enough, we might get something out of that, because, like we are now.

E: Now how old are you now?

EG: I'm seventy-eight.

E: And your husband is?

EG: Seventy-four.

LG: Eighty.

EG: I mean eighty-four. He'll be eighty-five in March, and I'll be seventy-nine in March.

E: Well, you've lived a very long and useful life. And all of this community, they love you and respect you, that's what I hear. What do you remember about the celebrations down on the reservation, Christmas or the times you get together for picnics and so forth?

EG: I remember at school closing, we have a exercise—end of year when school was out, Mr. Davis would put on a **rainbow show** and they said they was really good. I was in them, 'course I couldn't tell whether it was good or not, but they was real good. We'd just have people from all of Rock Hill down there. And have it in the old schoolhouse building ...

E: It'd be a combination of acting and music and some dancing too?

EG: Yeah. I remember we had one time what they called a maypole dance. But that was on the outside, and they had streamers hanging from the podiums in the ground. We danced around, you know, in and out, in and out, called a maypole drill. That was real good. But let me tell you about my daddy learned me—I can speak a few Indian things.

E: Yeah! I must hear that.

EG: I went to college one time, Mrs. Mary **Fewer** was our home demonstration, whatever she'd come to school, and teach us how to sew and different things. Something was going on up at the Winthrop and she wanted me to go. And she got me an Indian outfit, and my daddy told me a little story that for the life of me now— [Phone rings] Excuse me.

[Break in recording]

E: Now the story you started to tell me, let's continue it, right now.

EG: Okay. Well, I went up there and my daddy had told me a story, though, in English, but he give it to me in the Indian language. And I wrote it down, it was such a short story, but I don't remember too much about it. But way it went, it was something like this. [Catawba language spoken 10:50] [Laughter] And I think it says that there was a possum, I remember this part about there's a possum laying up on a tree limb, and looked and saw his shadow down in the water, and he got shamed and fell off. That's when he said [Catawba word 11:12]. [Laughter]

E: [Laughter] Well, now, I'm so glad to hear those words. Does anyone speak the language on the reservation today?

EG: No. Some of them might say they know a word or two, they say something, but I ain't never heard—

E: That's the story your daddy told you.

EG: Yeah, that was my plain Indian language there. And I could've learned more if I'd went in to school when him and my aunt was teaching. Professor **Specks** would come down, and they'd be in the room talking. They'd just blab it up, but I never was interested in that, and I could have learned a lot about the Indian language, but I didn't do it.

E: Well, you learned other things along the way.

EG: Well, then this is a little song my daddy used to sing in the Indian language.

E: Oh, I want to hear that!

EG: He'd say [Choctaw song 11:55]. He just keep repeating that over and over, and what they meant, I don't know.

E: You don't know what the words mean?

EG: I don't know what it was.

E: But that's the song your daddy sang.

EG: Yes, he'd sing that and dance. Dance around.

LG: Kick around, kick [inaudible 12:17]

E: [Laughter] Now, anything else you remember about your mother and father? You know, you're telling me things no one else has told me, so I want to hear more.

[Laughter] What did your mother used to cook, what did y'all have to eat?

EG: We had things just like we do now. Beans and potatoes and cabbage and vegetables and chicken.

E: And wild game from the woods, and fish—

EG: Rabbits, mostly. My daddy wasn't much of a fisherman, I don't think.

LG: Best fish you ever—

EG: Well, he did do. He fished, 'cause he used a trap—what you call them, trap blinds?

LG: They have this old mullet fish, you know, they'd sell at the market? And people used those mullets to bait and catch other fish with, you know. You could take that old mullet—Elsie's daddy would come to town and get a mullet or two, **it wasn't priced much**. She'd cook that old wood stove, you know. [inaudible 13:32] That was some old good eating.

E: I'm going to come over in a while and talk to you about that, just in a minute. Tell me anything else you want to tell me **on your tape**.

EG: Well, they had cows, we had butter and milk, and they raised chickens. But my mother'd never eat a chicken that she raised on the yard. Said she just couldn't eat it, said it'd be like one of her children. She'd cook 'em and we'd eat 'em, but she would never eat any.

E: You remember when your youngest brother was killed? Shot?

EG: No. I wasn't born then. I wasn't born 'til 1914, and he got killed in January 1914, and I was born in March. So that's when I was born.

E: Your brother loaned me the little book with that story written down, and you all have that. Anything else you remember about the old days you want to tell us?

EG: I can't recall anything right off—

E: The future, what do you think about the future? Do you think you're on the up and

up?

EG: What do I think about the future?

E: You keep on making the pottery, but so many of them have gone out into the business world, and the electrical and the business world as teachers and nurses and dentists and so forth.

EG: Well, they teach us to keep that in the culture, we want to keep that in the Tribe. 'Course this younger generation learn to make pottery now. Like Early Robinson, that's the first man I never knew to make pottery, all back when I was small there was women making pottery, and that's the way they made a living, most of 'em. But now men are taking it in, learning how to make it.

E: Well, I'm glad to be in your home today and to meet you, there are three of you left now, of the eight children, is that right?

EG: Nine.

E: Nine, yes. We hope you'll have still many years to enjoy this life on the reservation.

[Break in recording]

E: This is Emma Reid Echols, from Charlotte, North Carolina. I live 5150 Sharon Road. I'm down on the Indian reservation, among real wonderful friends of mine, and I'm visiting with Mr. Landrum George. I wish you were here to see what I see. Their home is on the top of a hill with a great big tree out in front. And inside there are pictures all around, but the picture that interests me that is a perfect one for this story is Chief Sam Blue is in the middle, a great big picture. On the left is another picture, and down below is a man shooting at a deer. And the deer and

the woodlands are right there. And the Indians used to hunt that. And on the right-hand side is a picture of the woodlands, and all the Indians love the woodlands. Little boys love to roam in the woodlands and hunt and shoot and find **articles** to bring in. And so, Mr. Landrum here, married an Indian. And I know he's had a happy life, of course I know about that. He not only married an Indian, but he was the Indian Chieftain, now that was quite something. You remember when you were married?

LG: Ma'am?

E: When you were married?

LG: September the third, 1914.

EG: [19]32.

LG: [19]32.

E: And where did you get your name, the Lesslie in there? Was it the named the Lesslie people here?

LG: Lesslie [inaudible 17:30]

E: Now where did you go to school?

LG: I went school at Catawba, down at the little school there.

E: In the reservation. What do you remember about the early school?

LG: Oh, I liked to go to the teacher from out at Lesslie come out and teached.

E: That was Mr. Nat Lesslie, I believe, Nathaniel Lesslie.

LG: **As far as he'd do**, we'd have spelling matches. And they give you a little money, sometimes give you fifteen cents.

E: Well, that was a lot of money!

LG: And sometimes—you had to be a winner to get it, so.

E: Did you get that fifteen cents sometimes?

LG: Oh, I'd get it most of the time. I'd get it from **Doris** Blue, Lula Blue. Georgia Harris. All them was older and higher in grade than me.

E: But you could beat 'em in spelling matches.

LG: When I'd beat 'em, they'd put me to work.

E: Well, did you use a slate, or did you use paper and pencil to write?

LG: Paper and pencil.

E: What teachers do you remember beside Mr. Lesslie? Do you remember Ms. Macy Stevenson?

LG: No.

EG: Mrs. **Devos**. Do you know Mrs. Devos?

LG: Yeah. I remember Devos. Rosie Wheelock.

E: What's the most important thing that you learned in school, as you remember?

LG: Well, I don't know which was important. All of it was important.

E: Then, after you finished school on the reservation, where did you go and what'd you do?

LG: Moved to Rock Hill.

E: And you worked in the industrial mill?

LG: Worked in the industrial mill.

E: Now when did you enlist in the army? You volunteered?

LG: March—I mean, December the seventh 1941, wasn't it, EI?

EG: I believe that's when you went—what year did they bomb Pearl Harbor? 1940?

E: Yes. And so, you left your wife and went—and where all did they send you overseas?

LG: Well, I went to France, Germany.

E: And how long were you in service?

LG: I was in there about six, seven years.

E: I know there was great rejoicing when you came home. What celebration did they have for you, your wife and the family?

LG: Oh, they didn't care nothing.

E: They just welcomed you home.

LG: Good country dinner.

E: Good country dinner. You'd been hungry a long time.

LG: For them meals, yeah. You didn't get that kind of cooking in the army.

E: Were you ever in any real danger in your fighting career?

LG: I had a man laying side of me, had his leg blowed off, covered my helmet up with mud, smoke.

E: Do you get a government pension now, after being in the war?

LG: No, I get two hundred and fifty dollars.

E: That's not enough to live on.

LG: Not enough to feed my wife.

E: That's true. You were Chieftain for several years, what experience did you have as Chieftain of the Tribe? Three years, I believe you were Chieftain, is that right?

EG: **When did you start** as vice president at the church?

LG: I believe Frank **started** Catawba, had his whole Tribe.

E: And what responsibilities or what kind of work would you have to do?

LG: Well, you have to teach 'em the gospel on Sundays, you'd have classes and they're organized.

E: You taught both the men and the women in your classes?

LG: I had both, I taught them men, I had the women, I'd teach women.

E: As you look back on these eighty years of yours, what're the happiest memories that you have living on the reservation and living here?

LG: Well ... I guess when you belong to the church, your memories are just always to be together. As one.

E: That's the most important thing.

LG: Yeah.

E: Of the Mormon ministers that you had, of the elders, who do you remember especially?

LG: Well, I remember Joe **Once**, Chief Sam Blue—

E: Oh, and that'll be your father-in-law. Tell me what you remember about the Chief. He was the Chief.

LG: Well, he was uneducated. He couldn't read and write—

E: But he was a fine **preacher**—

LG: But he could get up and give you a good sermon. And he picked the leaders for the Sunday school and have them teach Sunday school. **That** organization we have.

E: Who married you?

LG: I was married in the church down at Catawba by a Mormon elder.

E: And then where did you and your wife go to live first?

LG: We lived at Catawba down at the reservation.

EG: Not after we got married, we **didn't**.

E: And then after you married you became in the industrial mill and lived—

LG: Then we moved to town and build on the mill village.

E: Mill village. Then you went back to the reservation.

LG: Yeah.

E: Well, you've been back and forth and now you're right on the edge. You call this the new part of the reservation, where your home is now?

LG: Oh, yes. They got a new reservation.

E: Well, what do you look forward in the new plans the government is making for you now?

LG: Well, I'm looking for a home. Place to stay.

E: Yes. And we hope they're going to have medicine, medical care, things of that kind that you need.

EG: You're having one of your hot spells coming on, ain't you. You're getting right red.

E: Well, you have lots of visitors who come here to see you, and they respect and remember you as a fine man, and an Indian Chief. And it's been a pleasure for me to meet you today.

LG: Well, I'm glad to see you again.

EG: Well, now, he never was an Indian Chief. Don't get that mixed up—he was the vice president of the church, he never had been the Indian—

E: It was his brother.

EG: It was his brother that was Indian Chief.

E: I'll straighten that out. Your brother was the Indian Chief, and you were the elder in the church.

LG: Yeah.

[Break in recording]

E: This is Emma Reid Echols. I want to make a correction. According to Mrs. Brown's book, Ephram D. George was Chieftain of the Catawbas from 1952 to 1954. And during World War II, his brother, Landrum L. George, was a soldier in the United States Army and was in Germany. Served there for about eleven months, or maybe more. This is a correction. We do not have a record, I'm sorry to say, of those who served in the Korea and Vietnam wars, and I'm sure we'd like to add that to the record.

[End of interview]

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