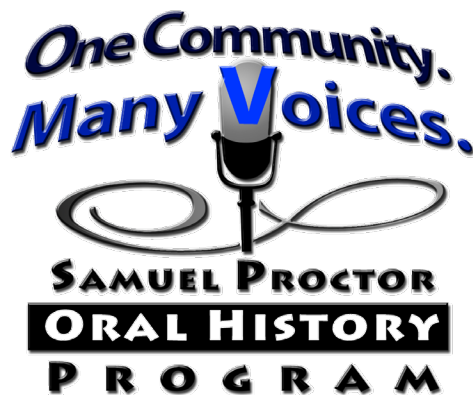


Wally Canty

**Southeastern Indian Oral History Project (SIOHP)
CAT-068**

Interview by:

**Leaborne Lee Whitesell
November 17, 1972**



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39 minutes | 13 pages

Abstract: Eighteen-year-old Wally Canty speaks about his family and about living on the reservation before moving away as a small child. He describes what it is like being a Catawba at school, sharing that his favorite subject is history and that he feels that more people should know the history of indigenous people. He recalls his father telling him how the Catawba lost much of their land to the state of South Carolina, and he would like to help the Catawba get their land back and do something with the land that would benefit the community. He describes how the younger Catawba are more educated now and discusses their interest in reviving Catawba traditions. Canty closes the interview by saying that he believes things will return to how they were when the Catawba had their land, and he expresses that he would have liked to live in those days.

Keywords: [Catawba Nation; South Carolina--Rock Hill; Land tenure; Tribal history]

SAMUEL PROCTOR
ORAL HISTORY

P R O G R A M
University of Florida

CAT 068

Interviewee: Wally Canty

Interviewer: Leaborne Lee Whitesell

Date of Interview: November 17, 1972

W: This is an interview with Wally Canty in the conference room of the library of Rock Hill High School. Leaborne Whitesell doing the interview.

Wally, were you born on the Indian reservation?

C: No, ma'am, I was born in York General Hospital.

W: How old are you, Wally?

C: I'm eighteen years old.

W: Did you ever live on the reservation?

C: Yes, ma'am, I lived on the reservation for about five years.

W: Did you go to school there, now?

C: No, ma'am, not as I can remember.

W: You lived there during the early years of your life when you were little?

C: Yes, ma'am.

W: Who are your parents, Wally?

C: Mr. and Mrs. Alonzo Canty.

W: How many brothers and sisters do you have?

C: I have five sisters and four brothers.

W: Where did you live when you moved to town?

C: Well, when we moved from the reservation, we moved to a community called Springdale. We've been livin' there ever since then, 'bout ten years.

W: Uh-huh. And that is not far from the reservation, is it?

C: No, ma'am. That's about four miles from the reservation.

W: Do you remember living on the reservation at all?

C: Yes, ma'am, I can remember some things.

W: Do you remember whether or not you liked it better down there than you did when you moved?

C: Well, I liked it down there, but since I moved out in the new community and everything, I made more friends and stuff. I learned lots more about the people.

W: Where did you go to school?

C: When I went to elementary school, I started out in Lesslie Elementary School. Then I went to school there for seven years. And from there I went to Sullivan Junior High. I went to school there for one year, then they transferred me to Castle Heights Junior High. I went to ninth grade there. And from there, I went to Rock Hill High School. I been there ever since then, for two years.

W: Do you remember when you started to Lesslie?

C: Yes, ma'am.

W: How'd you like it?

C: I liked it very well. I made lots of friends and seemed like the people liked me a lot. I don't know, they just treated me real nice, I guess.

W: You didn't feel that you had any problems because you were an Indian?

C: No, ma'am. Seemed like everybody looked up to me as me bein' an Indian, you know, it's one of a kind. It's really great to be one. I'm proud of it. Though I am half-White, too, and I'm proud of it.

W: You think bein' an Indian made you something that the kids wanted to kinda help out?

C: Yes, ma'am. I think so.

W: Did they ask you any questions?

C: Well, yes. They asked me all sorts of questions: How much Indian did I have in me, what my parents' names were, same with my great-uncles and aunts.

W: Do any of your parents have Indian names?

C: No, ma'am, not as I can remember. I never heard 'em say.

W: Did you have any peers you'd want to use Indian names for them, or have you thought about it?

C: I really haven't thought about it.

W: What do you recall from your childhood the most?

C: When I was little, we played lots of softball. Used to gather 'round on Sunday afternoons to play a game or two. Played a lot then. Lots of fun.

W: Were you good at it?

C: Well, I'm not no pro at it, but we did have some very good games. The Mormon church that I go to, we had a softball team. We won for about three years, the championship.

W: Where did you have to play first, starting out? You play with teams here?

C: No, ma'am, I don't believe we ever played a team in Rock Hill. We always played other Mormon churches out at Charlotte and some out at Blackburg, I believe. I guess.

W: And then you won from all those?

C: Yes, ma'am, we won. We beat them, and then we had to go to the championship. And whoever won there would go to wherever they had held other—

W: A national championship, now?

C: Yes, ma'am.

W: Was it the state championship you played in?

C: No. We played our last game in Spartanburg or something.

W: And did you lose that one?

C: Well, in a way we lost, and in a way we didn't.

W: [Laughter] Oh, right?

C: They really took it away from us because we didn't have the right numbers in our group.

W: Uh-huh. You lost on a technicality then, rather than your playing ability?

C: Yes, ma'am.

W: You think Indians are good at sports?

C: I think so. I believe that they—just like anybody else—they good at whatever they the best at. Whatever they like to play, they can be the best at that.

W: Are there other sports besides baseball or softball that you think Indians are good at?

C: Yeah, football. Lots of 'em like to play football. We play football now.

W: Do you enjoy playing football?

C: Yes, ma'am, I like it a lot.

W: How about track? Do you run track?

C: No, ma'am, I never tried out for track. We run a lot; we used to just run upriver and play there and stuff like that.

W: Indians have a reputation for being good runners, and I think that [inaudible 6:21] has a lot to do with it.

C: Yes, ma'am.

W: What's your favorite sport though, since you play a lot of sports?

C: I think it'd be softball.

W: Softball. Are you playing here at high school?

C: No, ma'am. I never participated in high school activities.

W: Why is that, Wally?

C: Well, I really haven't had the time to. I drive a school bus. In the evenings I get home late, and by the time I get home, it'd be too late to go back to school to practice or anything.

W: Are you a junior here today?

C: Yes, ma'am.

W: How long have you been driving a school bus?

C: I've been drivin' a school bus for about a year and a half now.

W: Do you enjoy that?

C: Yes, ma'am. It's lots of responsibility, but the kids on the school bus, they learn to respect you and play by your rules, you know. I don't know. The kids, they just like you, I reckon so. The things that make 'em look up to you more.

W: Do you enjoy workin' with little kids?

C: Yes, ma'am. I love to.

W: They don't get on your nerves too much, all that yellin' and carrying on on the bus?

C: No, ma'am. It's just natural for a kid to holler and stuff like that. It doesn't bother me, but when they do get too rowdy, I have to control them. They seem like they know a point where they can go and when to stop.

W: How many miles a day do you drive?

C: I drive about sixty, anywhere from sixty to sixty-five miles a day.

W: And you are late, then, getting home in the evening?

C: Yes, ma'am. It's about five o'clock, five-ten o'clock.

W: What time do you have to leave in the mornin' to pick these kids up?

C: I leave at six-thirty in the mornin'.

W: Kinda early. A long day for you, isn't it?

C: Yes, ma'am. It's a long day, but I enjoy it.

W: What subject do you like best in school, Wally?

C: I like history the best.

W: Do they ever discuss in history classes the history of the Indians?

C: No, ma'am. They talk about it sometimes but seems like they talk more about other parts of history. Most likely, slaves and stuff like that. I never hear too much about the Indians in history.

W: Do you think maybe they don't know as much about that part of our history?

C: I don't believe they do. Teachers, I don't think they know that much about it, tell you the truth, because I don't believe the Indians left too much of a history back then to tell.

W: That seems to be true, Wally. Would you like to have something to do with the Indian history, involved in the oral history courses?

C: Yes, ma'am, I'd love to. I think people in the United States and other parts of the world should know more about the Indian.

W: Would you like to tell the people about the early history of the Indians?

C: Yes, ma'am. Well, I remember what my father told me about it. It happened a long time ago. It's the Chief before Sam Blue was Chief. He signed a agreement with the South Carolina state government, you know, to lease our land out to them for so many years. I believe it's what is called a ninety-nine-year lease. And he leased it out, and then somehow or another, we just never got it back. We lost all of it, our land. The government paid us so much money for each acre of that land. See, but that wasn't enough. They wouldn't like to have our land back, nothin' like that. We'd like to start somethin' again, get our land back, somethin'.

W: Do you think that the state of South Carolina would have trouble proving that they bought the land from you?

C: No, ma'am. They should have, well, somethin' like the contract proving that the Chief signed. I remember the ninety-nine-year lease is up now. It's been up, say, for about twenty-five years now. We haven't heard anything.

W: The state of South Carolina, then, has never shown a receipt for the land?

C: No.

W: Is there still some proof that the state of South Carolina simply rebought the land from the Indians?

C: Yes, ma'am.

W: There's another problem now, and that is with the six hundred and fifty acres. What do you think's going to happen to that?

C: Eventually, it'll be divided up, I think. Or either the government will take it back or pay the Indians back who are livin', pay rent, there nowadays. I remember my father tellin' me clearly, he said back before they divided the land up, you know, and leased it to the government, he said we owned as far as Mecklenburg County and York County and Lancaster and Chester County. That was up in the thousands of acres. Now, we finally don't have but six hundred and fifty acres. I think it'll be divided up, too, unless we can get something done about it now.

W: Would you like to see something done about this?

C: Yes, ma'am, I do. I'd like to try to help do something about it. I've known but a few people going to the government and tellin' 'em about it, askin' them what could they do about it. The government didn't give 'em no answer.

W: What would you like to do? Say, in fact, let's start at the end now and work our way back up. What would you do about the six hundred and fifty acres if you could have control and decide what's fair? What would you do?

C: Well, I think I'd like to go back to the earlier days, you know. Rebuild it as the Indians did it. Some places, like in Cherokee, I'd like to build it like they have, where we could sell art and stuff.

W: Make it a sort of a community business or something for the community there?

C: Yes, ma'am. That'd bring out a lot of people. All sorts of people would probably come from over the world in order to see it. That'd keep the Catawba Indians alive, I think.

W: There is some mention now of Carowinds in this part between Charlotte and Rock Hill, and that there is a Indian village there. Have you heard about this?

C: No, ma'am, I haven't.

W: I was just wondering if maybe you were aware of it. They're going to be selling pottery there, and what were your ideas on that?

C: I haven't heard a thing about it. I have heard of Carowinds, but I haven't heard a thing about the Indian village.

W: Do you think the Indians your age are becoming concerned about the lands now, maybe when they didn't earlier?

C: Yes, ma' am, I think they are, 'cause we're learnin' more now. We got a better education than our parents and our grandparents did then. And really, I don't think they knew what they were doing when they released the land up there. I really think—tell you the truth—I think the government cheated 'em out of it. Really took the land away from 'em. But see, they don't have no real good education, and they didn't know what they was doin'. And the young people today, some of 'em have high school educations or college educations, and they know more about it. They know more about the government and stuff. I believe it could be better if we try.

W: You think they know that you're gonna hang onto to at least that six hundred and fifty?

C: I wish we could. I hope we can hold onto it. I think that it should be more than that. I think we can get our land back or somethin'. But it'd cost a lot to pay up to proving without the papers.

W: Yeah. What do you think about going back to, say, pottery making? Do you like the idea of making pottery?

C: Yes, ma'am. I love to help my parents make pottery. I got a sister—older sister—she makes pottery, and she says she goes to North Carolina and sold it a lot.

W: Do you think that—somehow in the last few months—that making of pottery has become more and more accepted now by the young people and that there's more of it now?

C: Yes, ma'am, I do. It's lots of fun to make pottery. The young people enjoy makin' it. They enjoy to see how the old people make it.

W: Well, now, how come you boys are makin' pottery? When did you start?

C: I really don't know how to make it all that good, but I have made some. And when I go to see my sister, and they'd be makin' it, I help them do it.

W: It seems that among the older men, they say they didn't make pottery. That was mostly women. But among these younger ones, it seems that several, you know—the number's growing.

C: Well, I reckon what you can say about the younger people is that they really tryin' to bring the Catawba Indians back to life by doing some of these chores that they did a long time ago. They're trying to build it back up.

W: Would you be willing to spend some of your time writing if you thought this would be helpful?

C: Yes, ma'am.

W: Do you color your pottery?

C: No, ma'am. I don't think I do. Don't remember, tell you the truth.

W: Do you like the way it looks? Do you like the colors of black and gray?

C: Yes, ma'am, I do.

W: You think that's prettier than red, green, yellow, and colors on the outside?

C: Yes, ma'am.

W: Do you know why the Catawbas don't paint their pottery?

C: No, ma'am. My grandparents just made it that way, and we just done it like we do.

W: You like it that way.

C: Yes, ma'am.

W: Is there anything else that you think that the young people are learning to do now, trying to do?

C: Well, I know some of the Indian boys—late last summer and part of last winter—we helped put on Indian dances in different parts of the state. We're learnin', we're tryin' to learn some of the old Indian chants.

W: That's very good. Do you work at this every now and again?

C: Yes, ma'am. I reckon we put on a dance 'bout two or three times a year.

W: You do? Do you try to explain this with the people in Rock Hill to let them see what's going on?

C: Yes, ma'am. We put on one dance down here at the nature museum.

W: Are you making costumes and things that night?

C: Well, that's one of the stuff we haven't got. We really don't know how to make 'em. We can't get the material and stuff to make 'em out of. But it's a big problem. That's one of the problems that we have.

W: What do you see in the future for the Catawba Indians?

C: I think, naturally, we'll go back to the old days. I think the history of it will backtrack itself. It'll be kinda like it was a long time ago. I think I'd love to live in those days.

W: You think you'd like to live, you mean, when the land was wild?

C: Yes, ma'am.

[End of interview]

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