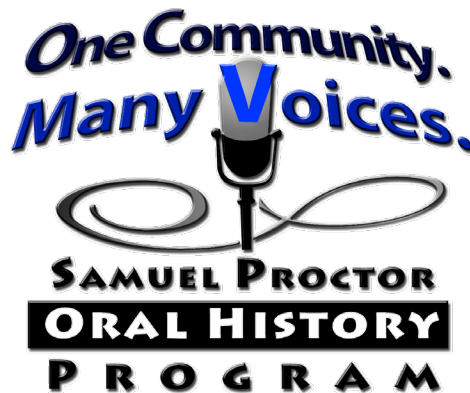


Alonzo George Canty

**Southeastern Indian Oral History Project (SIOHP)
CAT-076**

Interview by:

**Emma Reid Echols
August 1, 1973**



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24 minutes | 20 pages

Abstract: Alonzo George Canty speaks about his life growing up on the reservation. He talks about his family history, his mother's pottery, and his time in school. He discusses his and his father's jobs, the old church, and then his marital history and children. He speaks about some of the people he knew on the reservation, including Dr. Hill, Chief Samuel Blue, Fred Nelson Blue, and Early Brown. Finally, he remembers the story of Thomas Stevens and speaks about the old and new cemeteries on the reservation.

Keywords: [Catawba Nation; Chief Samuel Taylor Blue; Dr. Edward Glenn Hill; Fred Nelson Blue; John Early Brown; Thomas Stevens; South Carolina--Rock Hill; Education; Indian reservations]

SAMUEL PROCTOR
ORAL HISTORY
P R O G R A M
University of Florida

CAT 076

Interviewee: Alonzo George Canty

Interviewer: Emma Reid Echols

Date of Interview: August 1, 1973

E: This is Emma Reid Echols, Rock Hill, South Carolina, Route 6, Box 260, August 1, 1973. I am working on the oral history of the Catawba Indians, and I am visiting in the home of Mr. and Mrs. Canty. Mr. Canty, tell me your full name.

C: Alonzo George Canty.

E: Alonzo George Canty. And what's your address here?

C: Route 7.

E: Route 7. Mr. Canty lives on a part of what I suppose is called the new reservation—

C: Springsteen.

E: Springsteen. And this part of land, you got when the lands were divided up among the Indians. How much land do you have here?

C: About six hundred—not six hundred, six acres.

E: It's six acres. And that's the part for you and your family. You're real proud to have this?

C: Yes, ma'am.

E: Did you build the house yourself?

C: No, had it built.

E: But it belongs to you. That's a wonderful feeling, isn't it, to have something that really belongs to you?

C: Yes, ma'am.

E: And where were you born, Mr. Canty?

C: Born on in the reservation.

- E: Not far from where Frances Wade lives now, is that right—where your daughter lives now, on top of that hill?
- C: Well, it's in [inaudible 1:15] about a half mile, I guess.
- E: You're not very far from the Catawba River, were you?
- C: That's right. Not too far.
- E: Now, who was your father and mother?
- C: Henry Canty and Emma Canty. She was a Harris before my dad married her.
- E: She was Emma Harris, and then she married Henry Canty?
- C: That's right.
- E: Now, do you know any further back, who your grandparents were?
- C: Oldest I know is my granddad, and he was Wesley Harris. Lived on the reservation for a long time.
- E: And do you know your grandmother way back?
- C: Oh, I don't know. I wasn't born when my grandmother was living then. There's a—I guess you'd call her my step-grandmother, was alive. Nan Harris, I think her name was.
- E: As a little boy, do you remember your mother working and what she did?
- C: Yes, ma'am. She worked in Indian pottery, that's what. A little bit on the farm. Worked on the farm a heap, that I know of.
- E: Was the land fertile and good for farming down there?
- C: No, it wasn't. Where she worked on the farm was down in the Indian reservation, wasn't it? That land was poor land, rocky, hilly; that's all it is. Most they have down in there is the river bottom; it's pretty good.

E: The river bottom was better, wasn't it?

C: That's right.

E: Did she sell her pottery, your mother?

C: Yes, ma'am.

E: Did she sell it at Rock Hill, or did people come down there and buy from her?

C: Well, she sold some down there, and then a lot of times she went to the Winthrop College during that time. So, she worked there and around different places. Then finally, the last—things got to picking up and looked better, and they carried some up in the mountains—Cherokee reservation—and sold some.

E: Do you remember what price she'd ask or what she would get for her pottery?

C: No, I don't know.

E: I imagine that it was a very small amount.

C: Very small, sure was. One time I remember getting about ten cents; some of 'em twenty-five, fifty. For every dollar, I'd guess where it went. And later on, after things picked up, it got a little bit better.

E: Did you ever help her prepare the clay or make the pottery?

C: Yes, ma'am. Helped her to fix the clay up, knead it for her, mix it so she could fix the pottery.

E: And you went across the river to get your pottery clay?

C: Yes, ma'am. Went on the Johnson farm to get the clay.

E: Some of your brothers would go with you, or your father would go with you?

C: Some of 'em would go with me sometimes. Sometimes the children—just who was going, no certain ones. It was Mother lot of times.

E: What brothers and sisters did you have at home?

C: Well, there was Henry and Allen and Billy.

E: What was the first one's name?

C: Henry.

E: Henry. And Billy.

C: Allen.

E: And any others?

C: No. I had a sister, Ida Mae; she was there.

E: Are any of your brothers and sisters living now?

C: Two brothers, that's all. Billy, he's dead. And I got two, Henry and Allen, they still live. No sister.

E: Now, where does Henry live?

C: He's uptown somewhere, over there next to the industrial mill. I don't know what street, though. Allen, he lives on over further away. He lives uptown, too.

E: You're the only one in the group living out in the country. I believe you like the country, don't you?

C: I sure do.

E: You have your home here, and you've got your garden. I've passed here many times and seen the good vegetables you have out in your garden. Your boy is always helping you, too. Now, tell me about the early days on the reservation when you were a little boy. Where did you go to school down there?

C: Down at the reservation.

E: Do you remember what the schoolhouse looked like?

C: Well, I couldn't rightly know.

E: It was just a little one-room—

C: Just a little, long school building. They built it for a while, and then they built a little room on. And that's all.

E: Is it, on the reservation now, where that trailer is? Is that the location of it?

C: Where old Sammy Beck stays there now.

E: Samuel Beck stays there now. Yes, I know where that is. That was just a little unpainted, one-room schoolhouse at first. Who was your first teacher?

C: No, I don't know.

E: Did you have Miss Macy Stevenson?

C: Had Miss Macy one time.

E: Then did you have Mr. Davis, the Mormon missionary?

C: That's right. First thing, then we had an Indian man on the reservation, was Ben Harris. He was teaching.

E: Oh, that's good! I want to hear about Ben Harris. What do you remember about Ben Harris?

C: Well, he was a pretty good teacher, and that's all I can tell. He was raised on the reservation, too. Teached school there a good while.

E: You didn't have many books or materials to learn from, did you?

C: No, not more than what the government provides us. Books, papers, pencils, and that was all. Little bit of chalk to write with, I guess.

E: Where did you get your water for the school?

C: We carried it from the well.

E: The well is still there, down at Major Beck's.

C: Right.

E: There was a spring close by also?

C: There's a spring over across the hill there, they call the Box Spring.

E: Is it still there?

C: Yes, ma'am. Still there.

E: And in order, the spring would be closer—?

C: Then they had one down at the old cemetery. We always called it Graveyard Spring.

E: Oh, yes. That's the one that you clear out every year and keep pretty. It's a beautiful—

C: Yes, ma'am. That's the one where Heywood has had.

E: That's right. I've been to that spring, and it's a lovely spot down there.

C: Yes, ma'am.

E: You went home every day for dinner?

C: Yes, ma'am, went home every day.

E: Now, I wonder, did you have to ring that bell in the steeple of the church?

C: Well, I rung it a few times. Yes, ma'am.

E: That was fun, wasn't it?

C: Yes, ma'am.

E: You could hear it all over the reservation, I suppose?

C: Yes, ma'am. You sure could hear it.

E: What did you boys play when you had a recess time?

C: We played around school after. Had an old ball diamond right across the highway from us. Played it a while.

E: What about hunting or fishing? Did you do any of that when you were a young boy?

C: Oh, yes, ma'am. I love to hunt and fish, too.

E: What animals did you kill?

C: I didn't kill many animals—rabbits, birds, and things like that.

E: What kind of a gun did you use?

C: I used a old twelve-gauge.

E: And then you like to go fishing down at Catawba River?

C: Yes, ma'am. Sure do.

E: Early Brown was a good swimmer, I believe. Were you a good swimmer, too?

C: Well, I think I counted I was a good swimmer, but I also could swim when I hit the water and **never did drown**. I swam pretty good, but ...

E: When you went to school down there, did some of the Indians come from across the river to that school, too?

C: No, not as I know—wasn't no Indians that lived over there. Yeah, there was some of them, but I don't think there's any come over there. There's some live across from the old prairie.

E: That's right.

C: But they didn't come over there. I don't think they had any to come over there.

E: You went to school there through the seventh grade, I suppose.

C: Yes, ma'am.

E: Did you remember any of the other teachers? You remember Mr. Sept Lesslie or Mr. —? Who else do you remember, your teachers?

C: We had one teacher come from out West. He did stay kind of a while; he gone back out West to stay. Reverend David, he teached school there a long time.

E: I believe you liked him. You liked him very much, didn't you? When you finished school down there, what did you do then? Did you go to Rock Hill to school anywhere?

C: No, I never did go to Rock Hill. Those days, stayed about the twelfth grade, I think, and that was all. I didn't go to school long enough to make the twelfth.

E: Then you started working? What job did you get?

C: Well, I worked here and yon. Cut cordwood for a living, pulled cotton, plowed, about all I done then.

E: What did you sell cordwood for in those days, you remember?

C: No, ma'am. I was cutting cordwood for another fellow, and he only paid fifty cents a cord.

E: That was hard work, wasn't it?

C: Sure was. Then he went up to seventy-five cents a cord. Then I hoed down the [inaudible 10:44] then plowed for them—and one meal a day, that was dinner—for seventy-five cents a day and one meal.

E: Were you married at this time?

C: Yes, ma'am.

E: Tell me your first wife's name. Who did you marry?

C: Married Fanny Harris, she was then.

E: Fanny Harris. And she was another person that made a lot of pottery, didn't she?

C: That's right.

E: Did you ever help your—you helped your mother, now. Did you help your wife make pottery, too?

C: No, ma'am.

E: You had plenty of children to help do that, didn't you? Now, where did you and your wife, Fanny Harris, live?

C: Lived on the reservation.

E: Who were your children?

C: Heywood, Alberta, and Thelma. The other two was just stepchildren, though, Frances and Helen.

E: Frances and Helen were stepchildren. Now, how's that?

C: Well, they was long before I ever married. That's all I can tell you.

E: Oh, I see. So, you had five children altogether.

C: Three of my own.

E: Three of your own, and then the two others?

C: Yes. And then out West, the same way. I don't own five of 'em.

E: What kind of crops did you raise in your farm down there? You had to raise crops to feed that family.

C: Oh, I raised a little cotton, corn. Sold the cotton.

E: And you went into town to do your shopping?

C: Yes, ma'am.

E: Or did you buy from the country stores out there?

C: My dad used to haul cordwood for to make a living. Wasn't so much then for cordwood, might get about three dollars a load. Make a little bit of living.

E: Did you go to church down on the reservation?

C: Yes, ma'am.

E: Who do you remember of your preachers down there, or your Mormon elders, you call them?

C: Well, it's been so long time I can't think of 'em now.

E: Do you remember the old church down there? Of course, I remember the—

C: Yes, ma'am.

E: —the cement block one that was painted white, but there was one before then. What about that church? You remember it?

C: Yes, ma'am. It was a plank church.

E: It had a bell and a steeple there, too, didn't it?

C: Yes, ma'am.

E: And did you ring the bell in the church when anyone died on the reservation?

C: No, ma'am. They had some of 'em rung it, but I didn't. I never did ring it.

E: Did you have an organ in the church or a piano in the church?

C: Had an organ.

E: Had an organ. Who played the organ for your church services?

C: Well, let's see. Sally Beck played one time and Lula. Lula Beck and Sally Beck.

E: Oh, yes. Did you like to sing?

C: No, I never was a singer. I couldn't sing.

E: But you liked to hear the others sing?

C: Yes, ma'am.

E: Then your wife died when she was fairly young, around fifty-one years old, is that right?

C: I reckon so. I don't know how old she was.

E: Then you married again. Who'd you marry the second time?

C: Jenny.

E: Now, what was her name before she married, before you married her?

C: Jenny Milner.

E: And she was from York?

C: Yes, ma'am.

E: Then how many children do you have by this second marriage?

C: Six.

E: You want to name them for me?

C: One of 'em's Junior, the oldest. And then Judy, Edwin, and Betty, Wallace Lee.

E: Wallace Lee? That's five. One more.

C: Eric.

E: And Eric is the one that's here.

C: That's right.

E: Now, which ones of these are married?

C: Judy, Edwin, Betty. That's all.

E: And Eric—you have two at home with you at the present time?

C: Three.

E: Oh, yes. Junior and Wallace and Eric are at home with you now.

C: Yes, ma'am.

E: Your children seem to have done well. How many of them have finished high school?

C: Let's see, there are almost—

E: Eric's still in school.

C: Yes, ma'am. Three.

E: Three have finished high school. Isn't that amazing to you, that you—you didn't have a chance at a high school, but these three of them have finished?

C: That's right.

E: So many people—

C: You see, they have more things now they're going to school than I did. When I went to school, I had to walk. Now they got a good way to catch the bus and go to school, get their education. When I was down, I had to walk to school to get what little I had.

E: Well, the education you've got, does it help you? You can read, and you can do the necessary figuring.

C: Well, it helps me a little bit. I didn't go too far before I had to quit and go to work.

E: That's right. I'm mighty proud that your children have done so well. Now, you are supposed to be retired now, aren't you?

C: Yes, ma'am.

E: Where did you work at the last job?

C: Over here at the Arcade.

E: Arcade Victoria Mill, is that right?

C: It was Arcade—oh dear, I don't know what; they've changed around. Something like Arcade Conglomerate, or something or other like that.

E: Now, you still working there part-time?

C: Yes, ma'am.

E: And then what do you do else, other than that?

C: Well, work the garden 'round here is all I do. Cut a little grass.

E: That's still a lot to do. As you look back on the past and all these years, what do you think about the future of the Indians? Do you think you've come a long way and there's a lot more chance for your children than you had?

C: Yes, ma'am, I hope there'll be a lot more for 'em. I've come a long way, been raised up rough, nothing too much.

E: How do you think the White people are treating you in the community here? Of course, we had nothing—the government had the job of the reservation and made the rules and the regulations under which you had to live, but what about the people of the community? How have the people of this community treated you?

C: Well, people in the community treated us pretty good, treated all of 'em, I think.

E: When you were in trouble or when you were sick, did they come to help you? In the flu epidemic of 1918, did the White people help the Indians when they were in need then?

C: Well, I don't know, I can't remember. I know that they got help somewhere.

E: Well, I'm glad they got some help.

C: Almost all I think of was Doc Hill. He worked most, a lot. He practically stayed up here most of the time. When we called Dr. Hill, he'd leave his old T-Model and then he'd ride a horse.

E: Did he ride horseback sometimes?

C: Yes, ma'am. He'd get on his horse and ride.

E: And then sometimes he came in a buggy, didn't he?

C: Yes, ma'am.

E: And then later on he came in an automobile?

C: Later he had an old T-Model he'd come up with.

E: How many of your children—your children were all born in the home, I suppose?

C: That's right.

E: Did Dr. Hill deliver your babies?

C: Yes, ma'am.

MC: No, they weren't all born—

C: Huh?

MC: No, [inaudible 18:50] was born in the hospital.

E: Your first children?

C: Yes, the first ones. The first ones all—

E: Dr. Hill delivered.

C: Let's see, I don't believe Dr. Hill delivered [inaudible 19:01] I believe it was Dr. Blackman.

E: Dr. Blackman was the second doctor. He may have done something.

- C: Yeah. Dr. Blackman was on all my six [inaudible 19:12] Yes. Dr. Blackman doctored all six of these.
- E: Do you remember Dr. Blackman or Dr. Hill staying in the home at night?
- C: Oh, yes, ma'am. He'd come up there, he'd stay all night. All day if he had to.
- E: Where would he sleep?
- C: Whoever's home he was at, he would find a place for him to sleep.
- E: I've heard that he liked coffee very much. You'd just make him a big pot of coffee and a pallet.
- C: Oh, yes, he liked his coffee.
- E: How did you Indians pay him? I believe the government paid him, but—
- C: That's right.
- E: Did you all sometimes give him things from your farm or your vegetables? Did you share those things with the doctor?
- C: Well, I think some of 'em shared with him. I don't think I had any to share with him. The government paid him.
- E: But you felt that Dr. Hill was your friend?
- C: That's right.
- E: Mr. Canty, tell me what you remember about Chief Blue.
- C: Well, Chief Blue was a mighty good fellow. He always vouched for the Catawba Indian. Whatever he could help you to do, he was out there trying to do his part.
- E: Did the Catawba Indians love him?
- C: The Catawba Indians sure did love him, yes.

E: They followed him, and even the young people loved him, I understood. Is that right?

C: Yes, ma'am.

E: Now, how were you kin to his wife, Chief Blue's wife?

C: Well, she's my aunt on my dad's—that's my dad's sister.

E: Your father and Mrs. Sam Blue were brother and sister.

C: That's right.

E: Do you remember any of the medicines that Chief Blue used to make? Sick people he would treat?

C: Yes, ma'am, I remember, but I just don't know where—he went in the woods somewhere and got some kind of herbs. Made a medicine of it, but I just don't know what it was made out of.

E: Did he ever bring any medicines to your home, do you remember?

C: Not as I know of.

E: Tell me about Nelson Blue. I believe you said that he was so good to you and almost helped raise you.

C: Yes, ma'am, Nelson Blue and his wife were good to me. They took me and raised me when I was just a little boy. I guess I must have been about fourteen or fifteen years old.

E: That was just your second home?

C: Second home.

E: How long did you live with them, you suppose?

- C: Oh, I stayed with them ... I guess must have been about three or four years.
About three years.
- E: Now, Nelson Blue's wife was not an Indian, but did she understand the Indian customs, or did she speak the Indian language?
- C: No, not as I know of. She understood them, but she never did speak the language.
- E: Did you ever hear Nelson speak the language or Chief Blue speak the language?
- C: I heard Chief Blue speak it a lot of times.
- E: Do you know any of the language yourself?
- C: No, ma'am. Don't know.
- E: All the words are gone, aren't they?
- C: That's right.
- E: Who of the old people do you remember? You remember Early Brown?
- C: Yes, ma'am.
- E: John Brown?
- C: That's right.
- E: Ben Harris?
- C: I remember John Brown. I stayed with John Brown a good while and helped him run the ferry for about four or five years, something like that.
- E: Did you ever hear the story—now, you were too young to know it—but did you ever hear the story of the Indian that came to live with the Catawba Indians and crossed over the ferry going to Van Wyck and froze to death?
- C: Yes, ma'am.

- E: Do you remember Thomas Stevens?
- C: I don't remember him, but I heard my dad and them talking about Thomas Stevens.
- E: What'd they say about him? Do you remember anything they said about them?
- C: They just said he went over there and froze to death somehow. I don't know what kind of place he got into, but he couldn't get out. He got lost.
- E: Where is he buried?
- C: He got lost in some kind of big old gully or cave or something like that, you know. Couldn't find his way back out, and he just froze to death cold.
- E: He's buried, I believe, in the ancient cemetery, the old cemetery, isn't he?
- C: That's right, yes, ma'am. I'd hear my dad talk about they went over there and carried him in a wagon. Went over there and brought him back to the reservation in a wagon and buried him.
- E: Do you ever go visit the old cemetery?
- C: I go down there right often.
- E: Lots of your people are buried there, I suppose?
- C: Yes, ma'am.
- E: Well, where do you want to be buried, the old cemetery or the new cemetery?
- C: Well, I don't know.
- E: It's very peaceful and beautiful on the top of that hill on that old cemetery over there. Do you enjoy going to church at your Mormon church?
- C: Yes, ma'am.
- E: All your family go with you?

C: Yes, ma'am, most of 'em go with me.

[End of Interview]

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