

# Viola Harris Robbins

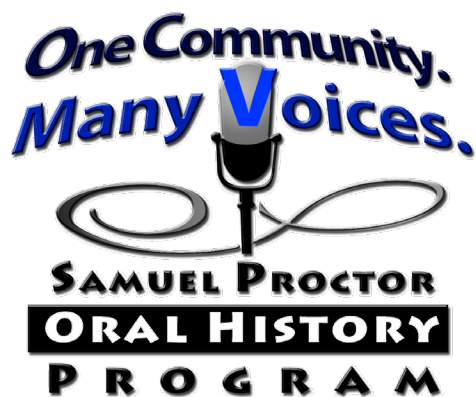
**Southeastern Indian Oral History Project (SIOHP)**

**CAT-106**

**Interview by:**

**Edith Frances Canty Wade**

**January 13, 1975**



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**17 minutes | 13 pages**

**Abstract:** Viola Robbins recalls her marriage to Earl Robbins, and she talks about their children, especially her son who died of polio. Then, she talks about her childhood home and the chores she used to do with her siblings, as well as her experience at school. Robbins describes her family's financial troubles after her father died when she was a child and what that meant for events such as Christmas. She talks about her three sons who are carpenters and her daughter who works in a woman's home far from the reservation. Her daughter is planning on getting married and Robbins discusses her complicated feelings about the matter.

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

**SAMUEL PROCTOR**  
**ORAL HISTORY**  
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CAT 106

Interviewee: Viola Harris Robbins

Interviewer: Edith Frances Canty Wade

Date of Interview: January 13, 1975

W: This is Frances Wade. I live on Route 3, Box 304, Rock Hill, South Carolina.

Today is January 13, 1975. I am gathering oral history of the Catawba Indians for the University of Florida. Today, I am visiting in the home of Viola Harris. Viola, what is your full name?

R: Viola Harris Robbins

W: Do you not have a middle name?

R: No.

W: When were you born, Viola?

R: Yorktown on the reservation.

W: On the reservation. In what year and month were you born?

R: It was [19]21.

W: 1921?

R: Yeah, and on the twelfth of October.

W: Who were your parents, Viola? Who was your mama?

R: Maggie Harris.

W: She was a Price before she married?

R: Yes.

W: She is not an Indian, is she?

R: No.

W: Alright, what is your daddy's name?

R: **Davey** Harris.

W: He is an Indian?

R: Yes.

W: Who are your grandparents, Viola? Who was your momma's daddy and  
momma? Do you know?

R: Ruthie, her name was Ruthie.

W: Ruthie Price was you grandmother?

R: Yes.

W: Alright, who was your grandfather on your momma's side? It was probably **Pinta**  
Harris, I think. Do you know who your grandparents are on your daddy's side?  
You don't know?

R: I don't know.

W: All right. Viola, who did you marry?

R: Earl Robbins.

W: Is he an Indian?

R: Uh-huh.

W: When did you marry? Do you know the year you got married?

R: ... I don't know.

W: If you can't remember, that's all right. Can you remember whether it was  
summertime or wintertime when you married?

R: It was in September. The twenty-seventh.

W: Is Earl an Indian?

R: Yes.

W: Did you meet him on the reservation?

R: Yes. [Laughter]

W: Viola, there's something I would like to ask you, while we're on this subject; when you were young, did you get to go off the reservation and meet other people?

R: Some.

W: You didn't get to have boyfriends off the reservation, did you?

R: No.

W: How many children do you have Viola?

R: Four.

W: Would you give me their names and their birthdays, if you can remember them?

R: Barney, he was born in June, the sixteenth.

W: Can you remember the year?

R: 1950.

W: 1950. All right.

R: Frank was born July 11. Barney is three years older than he is, let's see ...  
Barney is twenty-four.

W: You mean Barney's three years older than Frank and he was born in [19]50. That would be [19]53 then, wouldn't it?

R: Brad, he was born February twenty-sixth. He'd be nineteen. I think Frank's two years older than him.

W: He'd be born in [19]55 then.

R: Yeah, [19]55. And Margaret, she'll be eighteen tomorrow. And she's born in—

W: January the fourteenth.

R: Yes. **I should've remembered that.**

W: Well, that's all right. Viola, you have another son, don't you, that died?

R: Yeah.

W: What was his name?

R: Earl Bruce.

W: How old was he?

R: He'd be twenty-nine.

W: How old was he when he died?

R: Two years, nine months.

W: He had a disease that no other Indian down here has had.

R: Yes, polio.

W: Polio. And he died. I know that you were born on the reservation and that you lived there until you were grown, didn't you?

R: Yes.

W: What kind of a house did you live in when you were growing up?

R: Well, I can tell you right where I was born. You know there where Aramis and Theo used to live in that old house on top of the hill? Do you remember?

W: Yes, I remember that well.

R: Well, that's the house I was born in. That's what my momma said.

W: Do you have brothers and sisters?

R: Uh-huh, I have three sisters and one brother.

W: Who are they?

R: Lola.

W: Lola Campbell, now.

R: Riola.

W: Riola Harris.

R: Verdie Sanders.

W: Do you have any sisters dead?

R: One, Ruthie.

W: What about brothers?

R: One is dead, Douglas.

W: Douglas. And was Douglas not the Chief of the reservation at one time or was he not? Can you remember?

R: I think so. I don't know!

W: Well, I'm not sure either, but we'll find out if he was. Viola, what kind of a house— now, I know what kind of a house you lived in, but would you just tell me, so I have it on tape, the kind of house you had growing up? Was it a log house?

R: It was a log house. We stayed over there in my uncle's house for a long time, just us three.

W: How many rooms did it have?

R: It had, I believe, two. I believe it was.

W: Did it have glass windows, or did it have wood shutters for windows?

R: Wood shutters.

W: How did you heat your house?

R: Wood.

W: Did you have a big fireplace?

R: Yeah.

W: How did you get water?

R: We carried water from the spring.

W: How far in school did you go?

R: Sixth grade.

W: And you went on the reservation?

R: Uh-huh.

W: How did you get to school?

R: We walked.

W: How far was it from school?

R: It was about two or three miles, something like that.

W: It was a good walk, wasn't it? Do you remember who your teachers were?

R: Davis was one of them, Brother Davis, I believe.

W: J. C. Davis.

R: And Hayes.

W: Willard Hayes.

R: I don't remember but those.

W: What subjects did you like best in school?

R: I liked reading. [Laughter]

W: You liked reading best. Did you like school?

R: Well, sort of. [Laughter]

W: What did you like most about school?

R: Well, we'd go to school, and we'd have play with other children. Enjoy playing with others and meeting up with friends.

W: That was a good thing. How did you get the water during the day to drink?



R: At school time?

W: Uh huh.

R: It was like from a spigot, I believe.

W: Did you ever have to carry water from the spring?

R: Yes.

W: Well, we did too. Viola, why did you quit school in the sixth grade?

R: Because momma couldn't dress us like we should, we just decided to quit.  
Momma, she wasn't working and couldn't buy for us like she should.

W: Your father was already dead?

R: Yes, he died when I was six years old.

W: How did your momma really support you all of those years?

R: We'd get a check once a year from the state.

W: That would be through the Indian program?

R: Yeah, and she'd get a small welfare check, too.

W: She didn't really start that welfare check until you all were grown, now did she?

R: No.

W: I was thinking she didn't. Viola, when it was Christmastime, or holidays, did you get anything for Christmas?

R: Unh-uh. Just from the church over there. They'd give out, you know, bags from the trees, you remember that?

W: Yes, I remember. That too, was from the Indian project, wasn't it? They would bag up fruit and take it around to the homes or else you'd come—

R: Come get it. Uh-huh.

E: Did you ever have special things to eat on Christmas?

R: Unh-uh. No, mamma couldn't get it for us.

W: All right, when you were growing up, did you have to work in the cotton fields?

R: Yes.

W: That was one way your mamma had to support you.

R: Me, mamma, and Riola all worked in the fields and picked cotton.

W: Viola, I know that it was hard for you when you were growing up, and it's much easier for your children now. But there's one other thing that I want to ask you, and that is can you remember any old stories that you might've heard people tell about Indians, when you were growing up?

R: I don't remember.

W: I realize that if you had the time to really think about it, you'd probably think up something. Do you think that your children have a greater opportunity now than you did when you were coming up?

R: Yes.

W: In what ways, Viola?

R: They work, you know. They got jobs, different kinds of work and are better at looking out for themselves than we did.

W: What kinds of jobs? Are all of your sons working?

R: They're carpenters.

W: All three of 'em's carpenters?

R: Yes.

W: Do they make a good wage?

R: Yes, they make pretty good [inaudible 6:19]

W: And he makes a good wage, doesn't he? Is your husband able to work?

R: **He's not** been working.

W: Is he able to work, can he work or is he sick?

R: He must be sick. I don't know but he's not working.

W: Do your sons help you?

R: No.

W: I want to talk to you about your daughter. You have one daughter?

R: Yes.

W: She doesn't live with you?

R: Unh-uh.

W: Viola, can you tell me how long she's been gone?

R: Three years.

W: She's been gone three years. How was it that she happened to move with this family?

R: Well, she live right down the road here. You know, right by the **books**, you know, I mean next two **books** really in this house. She got to working at the nursery, making a little bit of money on the side while she was going to school so she could have money to make out. She told me, "Ma, Linda wants me to stay with her for a while," and I says, "Okay then." I told her, "You behave yourself, now." And she said, "Well." She said she was gonna work for Linda and make a little bit of money. That's what it was.

W: So, she has been gone ever since. Now she doesn't live close to you, where does she live?

R: She live out down on McConnell highway, I don't know, it's probably way out.

W: You can't remember the lady's name that she lives with?

R: It's Linda **Barnafoot**, I believe it is.

W: Has Margaret continued to go to school?

R: Yes.

W: She's finished high school?

R: She's gonna finish and get married.

W: She's gonna get married, you told me, this Friday?

R: Uh-huh.

W: And you have not met the man that she—

R: Not yet.

W: Is she going to have a church wedding?

R: She said no. I asked her. That's what I'd want for her to have, you know.

W: Yeah. Is she going to bring her husband to be to meet you.

R: Yes, she said she was.

W: Well, that's real good. Viola, do you make pottery?

R: No, not now.

W: Have you made pottery?

R: Yes.

W: This is what I wanted to know. How many Indians are really making pottery, or know how to make?

R: I know how to make it. I haven't made none in a good while.

W: Are you proud to be an Indian, Viola?

R: Sure, I am.

W: In what way?

R: I'm glad to be an Indian because my daddy was an Indian.

W: All right, your daddy was an Indian. You're not ashamed to tell other people that you're an Indian, are you?

R: Unh-uh.

W: Do you think that the culture of the Indians ought to be preserved? That the pottery making and all that should be continued?

R: Yeah.

W: Would you like for your daughter to know how to make pottery?

R: **Yes. She already did.**

W: Now, when they divided this reservation, you're living on part of the reservation that was divided, **are** you?

R: Yes.

W: Did you think it was a good idea to divide the reservation?

R: Yes.

W: Why do you think it was a good idea?

R: You're talking about this part up here, or that old part?

W: The part that they divided.

R: Now?

W: Uh-huh.

R: Well, see, the Indians didn't have nothing, did they?

W: Well, no they didn't.

R: I reckon that they should need it, you know?

W: Yeah, and do you think that you all have made improvements by being off?

R: Yes.

W: You know that we once again have a Chief and a council, councilmen, and secretary. Well, we have a Tribal Council is what we have. Do you approve of it?

R: Yes.

W: Do you think that much benefit will come from it?

R: I think so.

W: Have you attended any of the meetings?

R: No.

W: Do you know really what's going on concerning it?

R: I sure don't.

W: Well, you should really take advantage of it because there's job openings for some of the Indians. There might be an arts and crafts shop opened down on the reservation and there's great possibilities. I'd certainly suggest that you come down there when you have the opportunity, the next meeting they have. I've been talking to Viola Harris, she is fifty-one—

R: Fifty-three.

W: You're fifty-three. I'm making you look younger. Viola doesn't look too much like an Indian. She's a tall, slim lady with her hair has been completely black but it has tinges of gray in it now. She's a very likable person. She lives on what was

part of the reservation that was divided and as she says, they have certainly made progress. She told me she was born in a two-room house. How large is this house you are living in? How many rooms does it have?

R: Four.

W: It has four. So, she has made progress and her children are certainly taking advantage of the jobs that are available. They're not afraid to work.

[End of interview]

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