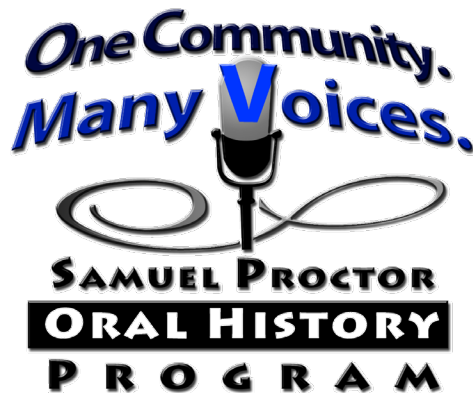


# **Dr. William Long**

**Southeastern Indian Oral History Project (SIOHP)  
CAT-142**

**Interview by:**

**Emma Reid Echols  
October 23, 1977**



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**18 minutes | 10 pages**

**Abstract:** Dr. William Long reflects on his experiences creating plays of the Catawba people. He describes the work and time he had to dedicate to create the plays and stories he heard of the Catawba and how that influenced his writing. He tells stories he heard while researching for the play, as well as its reception by the community. The conversation is mostly focused on the play *Kah-Woh Catawba*, written by Dr. Long.

**Keywords:** [Catawba Nation; Chief Samuel Taylor Blue; South Carolina--Rock Hill; Storytelling; Tribal history]

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

CAT 142

Interviewee: Dr. William Long

Interviewer: Emma Reid Echols

Date of Interview: October 23, 1977

E: Route 6, Box 260. I'm recording the oral history of the Catawba Indians October 23. I'm visiting in the home of Dr. William Long, who for a number of years has been at Winthrop College. Dr. Long, how long have you been there?

L: I retired from Winthrop last spring a year ago after twenty-two years. I was brought here from Chapel Hill to start the drama work at Winthrop. And I have never regretted coming here.

E: Well, I've been a recipient of many of your talented plays. I've enjoyed them very much. But most of all, of course I enjoyed the Indian pageant. Your wife has recorded something of that for us. You wrote the pageant. Tell me about your difficulty writing it.

L: That's very interesting, because in the spring, with a very heavy schedule and with Mary turning the material over to me as rapidly as she could, I tried to write. I divided into scenes and acts, but I had to wait until I got to Manteo, North Carolina, to begin writing. There, of course, I had to help get *The Lost Colony* open. But every spare moment I would have I'd be in my cabin writing on the play. As soon as the show opened, I would spend the entire day out at the cabin typing away. And sometimes I would come out I'm sure and not be too happy. But sometimes I'd be very happy. Like the one Mary was telling you about—the smallpox scene—I just knew that was right, it was just beautiful. Then as soon as I could get somewhat finished and felt that it was all right, I had a girl come in and type stencils of the first part. After we would get three or four stencils, I would mail them to Rock Hill, and Chris Reynolds would have them run off. He

gradually started collecting the script which, as you see, is quite a hefty thing. And as soon as he got an act or two, then he would start going through it and cutting because I write very heavily. In fact, in here there are lots of scenes with as far as I could tell is the Catawba dialect and speech. Of course, he didn't put much of that in because it was too difficult for his modern-day people to try to pronounce. I had left a person here to be the scene designer, and I'd left a person on lights, and they all started working. Once we finally got back here with our first load of costumes everything was well on the way. Then I saw that the scenery wasn't being completed. The girl I left in charge had found many other attractions around. So, I wrote to a former student of mine who had worked at *The Lost Colony*. He could work like mad, and he came and stayed five days. I remember we paid him \$25.00 per day, but he was worth \$150. He helped us get the scenery ready for a fabulous show. There must have been at least fifteen or twenty sets in it. So, by all of these people working away like that we were able to get the show on, and it was so satisfactory, too.

E: What was the date when it finally began? The opening date?

L: You know I can that is—Do you have a playbill? I'll look until I find you one—

E: The newspaper clipping will give it to me.

L: Yes, that's probably so.

E: I'll put it on the end.

L: I have a lot of those, and I'll find you one before you leave here.

Anyway, it was sometime in the last part of September. As Mary told you, it was so pleasing each night to see all of the Catawba Indians stand and get

applauded before the curtain opened. That was very, very pleasant. And to think that we had around ten thousand people here. The next year everybody wanted it repeated. The historical association did not lose any money; they made a little bit. But they were afraid to back it again. They wanted Winthrop to take it over, but we were hardly equipped to do that because we had to carry on our regular program. People don't realize how much it really takes to do a show. The spring before the last, a group came over to ask if I would write one about the Andrew Jackson show. They were amazed to find out that I wouldn't think about even attempting to put on a show for less than \$200,000. Most of these outdoor dramas they \$150,000 or \$200,000. But that never got under way.

E: It would take a great deal of research and hours.

L: We already had that. Ready for the Andrew Jackson show. Ready to go.

E: Do you remember in your pageant on the Catawbas any special features or characters that you enjoyed working with?

L: Well, I think this story interested me so very much. That way back during the last part of King Hagler's reign, we'll say. Interesting thing that the Catawbas always change the Chief's title according to who happened to be reigning. Then when King George was the big guy you know, then King Hagler took over the title of king rather than Chief. That was always very interesting. Anyway, a group came over here from England to get three strapping handsome male Indians to go back and tour with this ballet company in England. Three of them went and toured Europe. Then once the tour was over, they just dropped them in London, and they had nothing. Then some people, feeling very sorry for them, collected

enough money and bought their boat fare to South Carolina. But they were such proud people that two of them jumped overboard and only one came back. He is the one who took over as Chief after King Hagler.

E: His name was? [inaudible 18:43] He died in poverty. He made a dramatic appeal to the South Carolina legislature to please help him because he was in such poverty.

L: Was it Newriver?

E: No sir he was a Harris.

L: Yeah, well anyway I thought that was a fascinating story.

E: It is.

L: The two Indians were so proud that they couldn't face coming back after they had left, and then they allowed people to do them this way. There were so many fascinating stories that we couldn't put into the play.

E: Now that story about the little blanket, and the children getting smallpox was a very touching one.

L: Oh yes. Then there was this witch woman in here. Very fascinating. When we staged that — if you remember how all of a sudden, she just disappears in the production? All the way through there are stories that are so wonderful that they needed to be put into this, but we would have had a six-hour-long play, so we had to cut it.

E: And you remember a lot of those stories.

L: A lot of those. Like the one of the valley covenants. Sadlers Wells of London who sent the three Catawba Indians for the London ballet company. That's in history.

E: Mrs. Brown in her book tells a little bit of that story, but not in detail like you've done.

L: Yes, so we find more and more about that. It was fascinating to get back here. I guess it must have been the thrill and the bigness of the whole thing that kept the people working with us. So many. We had around 150 in the cast. And even now I'll run into a young fellow or young girl and the person will say, "Well, Mr. Long you don't remember me, but I was one of the little Indian children in your *Kah-Woh Catawba*." [Laughter] So, it has meant a great deal to us as well as to the town. Since then when they started talking about having a drama in Columbia, there were many articles and letters in the paper constantly. "We have one that's been tried out already and successful, why don't we do that? Why don't we use William Long's play?" It's too bad they didn't because Liberty Tree fell flat. It was written by Kermit Hunter and done by this fellow at Catawba College in Salisbury.

E: Well, your play is copyrighted? Is it not?

L: Yes, it is.

E: Now, Dr. Long you've told me, I believe privately, that all these were volunteer workers on this play—the actresses, actors, and everybody else, practically. Who got any money from it?

L: The director did. Some of the people who had to work straight through for so many months, but it was a mere token, like enough to pay gasoline bills.

E: I can imagine that.

L: It was about \$100. I stretched out my \$150 or \$200 over six months, plus all that Mary did.

- E: And the back-and-forth trips to Manteo.
- L: Yeah, oh yeah, we had to make all these trips to Williamsburg even to take them all back. By that time, they've forgotten you.
- E: But you know you're not forgotten in Rock Hill because everybody remembers this pageant.
- L: Oh, I know everybody remembers *Kah-Woh Catawba* because it was a beautiful thing. As I have it right here. "Thank you, People of the River."
- E: Do you think that anything of this kind will ever be done again here?
- L: It's too bad it can't be repeated. Billy White, have you run across him?
- E: I know him quite well.
- L: William White, he got the idea two years ago. I was meeting with the committee for the bicentennial. He thought that one of the grandest things in the world was let's do this. Let's get the money and let's put it on again. But then the "come see me" group committee wanted to know well can't you do part of it. They don't realize the tremendous amount of work and money it takes to put on one of these. I wish they did. I would love to see it done.
- E: I would too. What do you ever think about ever updating? The information that you have on the Catawbas has changed so dramatically. Would you ever be able to do one for the present-day Catawbas?
- L: Oh yes, it would be fascinating because I think some of the young boys and girls are just delightful, and it has meant so much to them to be there at the high school with my wife. She just loves them to death. They are frequent visitors out here.



E: They're accepted in your home everywhere.

L: Oh yes, and I think it'd be wonderful like what she told you would be the theme of the modern drama. The coming out on stage of the young Indian boy and then the White and the Black.

E: That's good.

L: Yeah, it would make a beautiful story today.

E: Well, I hope you and your wife will continue doing this kind of thing because it's amazing and wonderful for us.

L: Well, I guess we'll always be doing this type of thing. Last spring the "come see me" committee had decided that they did something for everybody except the children. So, I did the children's play for "come see me" weekend, *Rumpelstiltskin*. Then this fall I figured all of the things that I needed to do like getting this stuff ready for the archives, keeping the house up and the yard. And then I let the Rock Hill Little Theater talk me into directing their first play. So right now, I'm head over heels in work every night directing that.

E: Now how is the play doing?

L: *Our Town*.

E: Oh, good.

L: Thornton Wilder. It's a beautiful show. I've done it before. I did it eleven years ago and I have some of that original cast in this play. History repeats itself. But I would like to see this done again, but I don't know. It would have been nice if it had been done in the theater at Columbia instead of here.

E: I think it's wonderful that you still have the contacts with those individual Indians that you know now as friends, and they recognize you.

L: Yes. Chief Blue was still living when we came here. As soon as we arrived, the minister at the St. John's, John Hart, came to us to ask if we would write and stage a centennial. I think it was the hundredth year of the history of the St. John's Church. And in it we had Chief Blue taking part in the pageant. We wrote it and staged it.

E: Do you have a copy of that pageant now?

L: Somewhere we have it.

E: That would be most interesting to record.

L: Mmhm, it would. I remember the way he was dressed, and he made such a handsome figure. He had lots of his grandchildren there with him, and we played up that part. Just how it was woven into the story I don't know, but it was. I just remember, I'm so glad I got a chance to know Chief Blue.

E: He was an amazing man.

L: Yes, he was.

E: They tell me that he had no or very little education, yet he had a fantastic memory. People would read to him a scripture and he would memorize it.

L: Yes.

E: And on occasions he would quote it all.

L: And I remember we had Billy McDermont start the show. Oh yes, he was Chief Blue and he's sitting there, opening *Kah-Woh Catawba*, and he's telling the children about their heritage.

E: You going to read that for me?

L: Well, it says, "Tell us another, grandpa; my knee hurts; look ..." And they keep talking and finally grandpa tells them, "Quiet, quiet. Now one at a time. I guess I'm just about everybody's grandpa. Him too, him too. Peter is my daughter Emma's boy. See there. My momma is his sister, too. He's my grandpa, too. My momma said she was his twenty-first child. "Twenty-first child? Grandpa, is that so?" "My daddy's gone away, but grandpa was his daddy." "Children, children, I reckon all of you can claim me kin if you like, for I had twenty-three children all total. Now you better hurry and get to school. You've got to get educated." "But today is Saturday, grandpa." "So it is, so it is, I forgot." "What are you doing with your feathers, grandpa?" "I thought I might have my picture taken if any tourists come by wanting a picture." Which is so true, you know. [Laughter] "And you can sit with me if you happen to be around." "What makes them want to take your picture for, and what makes them other children want to see us?" "Some of them for curiosity, son, and some because we're the children of a once great Nation, our own Nation, before the White men came." "Where did we come from, sir?" "We are Catawbas, Sally. That is what the ancient ones tell us about us here in York County and thereabouts for a long, long time. Some say one thing, some another, but I like to think of the one that was told by our great ancestor, Sally Newriver." "Did you know her? Tell it to us, grandpa. What was it, grandpa?" All of them join in. "No, I didn't know her, but she told my grandfather, and he told my father, and my father used to tell it to us. So, to hand it down from generation to generation. If you'll get settled and be real, real quiet, I'll tell you. When you

talk about the ancient ones you have to be real respectful and quiet." Then he goes in to tell the story of how the Catawba Indians happened to be here.

E: That's amazing. That is the opening of your play?

L: Yes, that's the opening of the play. It always sent a chill through all of us to hear this fellow sitting there. It's too bad we couldn't have had Chief Blue, but he had passed on years before then. So, that was a wonderful story.

[End of interview]

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