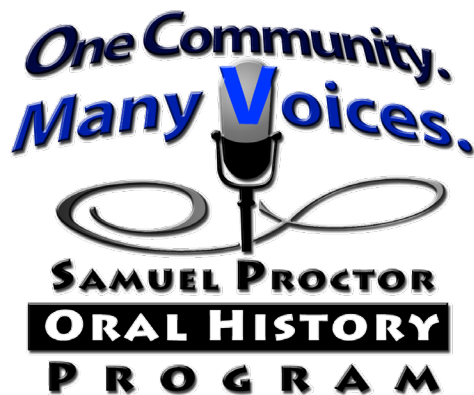


Edna Wheelock Brown

**Southeastern Indian Oral History Project (SIOHP)
CAT-066**

Interview by:

**Emma Reid Echols
October 14, 1972**



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>

CAT 066 Edna Wheelock Brown
Southeastern Indian Oral History Project (SIOHP)
Interviewed by Emma Reid Echols on October 14, 1972
21 minutes | 16 pages

Abstract: Edna Brown talks about her family tree, including her father, who was an Oneida Tribe member, and her mother, who was a Catawba. Her parents met at the Carlisle Indian School, where her father played football under Jim Thorpe. She discusses her education on the reservation before moving onto her pottery. She then discusses her grandchildren, the Influenza Epidemic of 1918, and a common tale she heard from Catawba Elders. She explains what her church believes about healing, and she concludes by sharing her understanding of how the Catawba came to settle along the Catawba River.

Keywords: [Catawba Nation; South Carolina--Rock Hill; Tribal history; Mormon Church]

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

CAT 066

Interviewee: Edna Wheelock Brown

Interviewer: Emma Reid Echols

Date of Interview: October 14, 1972

E: This is Emma Reid Echols, Route 6, Box 260, Rock Hill, South Carolina. I'm visiting in the home of Mrs. Roy Brown. I'm working on the oral history of the Catawba Indians. This is October 14, 1972. Mrs. Brown, tell me who you were before you were married.

B: My name was Edna Wheelock.

E: Edna Wheelock. You are married now to Mr. Roy Brown.

B: Yes, ma'am.

E: Now, what is your address?

B: Route 6, Box 383, Rock Hill.

E: Where were you born?

B: I was born right here in this house here, on the Catawba reservation.

E: This is one of the old houses on the reservation, is it not?

B: I would say this house was around seventy-five years old.

E: Tell me about your mother and your father. That's a very interesting story about your mother and father. How did they meet and so forth?

B: They met in the Carlisle Indian School. My mother was from here, and my father was from Oneida, Wisconsin, and they met.

E: He was a full-blooded Indian?

B: He was a full-blooded Indian.

E: From what Tribe?

B: Oneida, Six Nations.

E: Oneida, Six Nations.

B: Six Nations.

E: They met at Carlisle, Pennsylvania. Do you remember anything about how your mother was educated before she went to Carlisle?

B: She was raised by a aunt. They sent her to Cherokee, North Carolina, to a boarding school. She went from Cherokee, North Carolina, boarding school to this school in Carlisle.

E: There's where she met Archie, that right?

B: That's right.

E: Were they both finished from that school in Carlisle?

B: My mother didn't. She took sick—the climate there—and she took sick, and she had to come home, but my father did.

E: He played football while he was in that school, isn't that right?

B: Yes, ma'am. He played under Jim Thorpe.

E: Under Jim Thorpe.

B: Under Jim Thorpe.

E: I understood that he was a very famous football player?

B: Yes, ma'am. He was.

E: Your father and mother were married where?

B: They were married here. My mother came home, and he followed the following year. I don't know just exactly how long he come on down to be married.

E: Where did they meet? They lived in this house then?

B: No, they didn't live there. They lived up there where my sister lives now.

E: Oh, where?

B: They lived up there, and then my father built this house later. I think my sister was born up there. I was born here.

E: You're really back home when you've living in the same house here you were born in.

B: I couldn't live anywhere else.

E: Tell me about what you remember as a little girl on the reservation. Tell me what you remember about your school days and your play time.

B: My first schooling was in—we lived in—my father worked at the Southern Railroad Company, and we lived in Rock Hill, and they wouldn't let us go to the public school. So, my first ABCs was learned by a private teacher. I went to—let's see, I would've been—when I was seven. I started when I was six, and when I was seven, my family moved back to the reservation. My mother taught school, and my mother taught me on up to about the fourth grade.

E: Do you remember who was the teacher that you learned your ABCs under?

B: Seem like to me her name was Miss Hollis.

E: Hollis.

B: Seem like to me, if I can remember right, her name was Miss Hollis.

E: I believe you and Edna, your sister, both had those private teachers, did you not?

B: We did. See, they wouldn't let us go to public schools at all.

E: When you went to school here with your mother, then what happened after that?

B: When she quit, we went to—the Mormon Church sent missionaries here.

E: You saw the pictures that we had around of the old school. What did the old school look like on the inside?

B: It just was filled up, crammed to the ceiling. It had these rows of seats, as far as I can remember, there's about four rows of just benches with the desk in front of 'em.

E: Did they have a back to them?

B: Yes, back to the benches.

E: Were two to each desk?

B: No, just one.

E: Just one.

B: Just one.

E: Did you use slate, or did you have paper?

B: We had paper. We used pencil and paper.

E: But on the old ones, I'm sure.

B: Yes, I imagine they did, but we used pencil and paper.

E: What about lunches?

B: We always went home for dinner. We'd go home.

E: You got water from a spring, I suppose, back of the schoolhouse?

B: I believe that we carried water. They got their water from a well. There was a well right down the road next to the church. I think that's where they got water. But almost every family here got water. Our spring was right over here. I carried many a bucket of water from there.

E: Good, clear, cool water.

B: Good, clear water. What we drink now tastes like tin. Not good like it was.

E: Did you go to high school?

B: No, ma'am.

E: You didn't go to high school.

E: I got married real young.

E: You are still making pottery, you told me. What do you remember about—did your mother make pottery?

B: Yes, she did. I've got some pieces back in my cedar chest that my mother made.

E: Oh, you have?

B: I have.

E: You remember your mother making pottery. You have some of her pieces?

B: Yes, ma'am, I have about four pieces of hers.

E: Did she teach you how to form the pipes and the pieces that you make?

B: Yes, I learned from her.

E: What did your mother teach you about forming the clay and making it into pieces?

B: Well, she just taught me how to—I always watched her when she'd form the clay up and shape out the pieces. I rubbed 'em for her with the rub rocks when I was old enough to help that.

E: You still have your mother's rubbing rocks?

B: Yes, we have some of them.

E: You wouldn't take part with those, would you?

B: I've got one rubbing rock that one of my great-aunts gave me. I guess it would be a hundred years old. I got one rock that my—

E: You are making pottery today. Do you bake it the same way your mother did?
How'd your mother bake pottery?

B: We had open fireplaces then. They would build a fire in the middle and line the pottery around in it. Build a little fire in the middle, and they'd just keep increasing the heat, and these pieces warmed up gradually. And then, when they got hot enough, they'd build a fire on to 'em. Now, we heat ours in the stove, then carry them outdoors and burn them in the pits. That's the difference now between then. See, I don't have a fireplace.

E: Do you get pretty colors in yours?

B: Yes, ma'am, I get pretty colors in mine.

E: What kind of wood do you use?

B: Oh, Roy gets me oak and hickory and the green wood. The green wood is what spots them. The dry wood won't spot them good. The green wood is what does it.

E: It depends entirely on the wood what colors you'll have?

B: Mmhm.

E: Where do you get your clay?

B: Across the river, over in Lancaster County.

E: I guess Roy brings your clay for you?

B: Yes, he went over there, hasn't been a month ago.

E: Tell me about this work. You're gonna make some for Carowinds, I believe?

B: My sister is.

E: You may make some later?

B: Yes.

E: You're still making pottery?

B: Yeah, I have some shaped out now, but when I found out I had to go to the hospital, I just packed them away. I didn't fool with them anymore till I got ready to. When I get better, I'll take it up again.

E: I'm interested in your family. You've got such a fine family, and they've all gone ahead in their education. Tell me, your first husband was who? Your first husband, what was his name?

B: Thatcher.

E: Thatcher. What children did you have by Mr. Thatcher?

B: Peggy and Harold.

E: Peggy and Harold. Peggy married—

B: Alfred Harris.

E: Alfred Harris. From that family, what grandchildren do you have?

B: I have Teddy, Kenneth, Vicki, Terry, Alice, and Daryl.

E: Those six grandchildren, what ones have finished school or college from that family?

B: Kenneth finished at BYU, and Teddy has one year in BYU, and he's a Mormon missionary right now. He told me when he returns from being a missionary, two years in a mission field, he'll resume his education at BYU.

E: Then Vicki is at the high school?

B: Vicki graduated from high school, and she's a secretary at York General.

E: The others are still in school. One finished this—

B: June Thatcher finished two years ago. She's a ward secretary at York General. Steve finished last year, and he's working at U.S. Plywood. And Pam—Pamela Thatcher—is a senior this year.

E: Isn't that a wonderful record?

B: The last three I named are my son's children.

E: You didn't have a chance to go to high school yourself?

B: No.

E: But your children managed.

B: Every one of 'em.

E: Then you think it's a much better day for the Indians now than it used to be?

B: Yes, I do. You can go to high school and college or anything like. It's a lot better than the days when we were coming up. It's just like I told you, my father had to hire a private teacher for my sister and I to go to school.

E: What about the health conditions on the reservation? In 1918, I believe it was, they had such a bad flu epidemic, and so many people died on the reservation. What about conditions today? Is it much better today?

B: It's much better today. It's very much better.

E: Roy Brown, your second husband, almost died during that flu epidemic.

B: That's right.

E: Were you sick at that time, too?

B: I didn't have it bad. I had a light case of it, but I didn't have it bad. I was about eight years old in that time, and I had a very light case of it.

E: I believe the Red Cross sent out from Rock Hill and sent food out here, and some of the White ladies of the community helped serve it. Do you remember anything about that?

B: No, I don't.

E: Some of the older ones have told me about that. Those were bad days. Tell me what you remember about any of the older people, the older Indians. Do you remember any of the things the older Indians used to tell, the stories, the tales they would tell?

B: [Laughter] Well, lot of them used to tell us about—some of 'em used to tell us about—they called 'em "wild Indians" to try and scare us. They'd say little wild Indians would get after us. They would say they were little people, like little elves. Sister's husband, Andrew, his grandmother used to tell him that if he would sit over a crack at night, these little wild Indians would get his feet through the crack, and he was scared. He said he was scared at night to sit over a crack. He'd get on one board—in those times, there would be cracks in the floor. He said he sat on one board right still while his grandmother told him stories.

E: That was Mrs. Blue that was telling those wild stories?

B: No, she was Brown.

E: Oh, Mrs. Brown. Did other people tell about those little people, too?

B: Yes, everybody. They used to say if you would leave your baby's diaper pan out after night that the wild Indians would bother the babies at night, and they couldn't sleep.

E: Did they have any stories about birds, owls and birds, at all?

B: No, I don't believe.

E: You all make so much of your pottery in the shape of little animals, turtles, and things like that. Did you ever hear any stories of the animals associated with these pottery pieces you make?

B: No, you just make them, just shape 'em however I imagine, I guess.

E: You remember your grandmother, don't you? Did she make pottery, too?

B: My grandmother on my mother's side left when my mother was a small child and went to Florida. I don't think I saw her but one time in my life. She came back one time. If she ever made pottery, anything like that, I don't know, because I only saw her one time.

E: I would love to see that piece of pottery that you said your mother made. Could you get it right now?

B: Mmhm.

[Break in recording]

E: Mrs. Brown, this is that little turtle that your mother made. It's marked, "Catawba River Mud Turtle." A very small little fella with his head perked up in the air and his eyes looking out at you, and inside he's hollow. Your mother died what year?

B: She died June the twentieth of [19]35.

E: And this is her piece. The other one here is a little tiny duck. I suppose that's what it is. The little duck's wings are decorated as if she's done it maybe with a little nail. It's black and golden yellow for the tail. This one interests me a great deal. This is a little pot that the colors are beautiful. They're grey and black. I've

seen lots of 'em fluted at the top, but this one is fluted in seven places. I notice you are fluting yours in eight. Your mother made this one, too, did she not?

B: Yes, ma'am.

E: But now, this one is the most unusual of all. This is a pipe. I've seen lots of Indian pipes, but I've never seen a design like this. It's in a little tiny checkerboard, and it's done perfectly—the little checkerboards on the top of the cockscomb. Is that what you call it, the cockscomb?

B: It's a spear pipe.

E: Oh, it's a spear pipe. Across the top of the spear and on the pipe itself. The hole is very, very small to draw the smoke with. Do you make this same kind yourself?

B: Yes, ma'am.

E: What will you put this design on with?

B: Something round, like a shoe button or anything that I can get that won't scratch. Any kind of smooth object that won't scratch.

E: That is very lovely. I'm so glad to see these things that your mother made. Mrs. Brown, tell me, what does your church believe about healing?

B: Well, they believe anointing our heads with oil and laying their hands upon them, like Jesus did when he was on earth. Anointing, giving us a special blessing, and a prayer. Now, I'll get that before I go to the hospital. They'll come and they'll anoint my head with oil, and they'll give me a blessing that I'll come through that. They'll ask for the Lord to bless the surgeon to guide his hands, and he'll make a big—I'll be protected through that. That's the kind of blessing that I'll get before I go to the hospital.

- E: What do you say to the elders? Your elders will come to your home?
- B: The elders will come to my home. By the way, my grandson that graduated from BYU is an elder, and so is the one on—he's an elder, too.
- E: That's wonderful. Your husband had a unique experience—course you don't remember that, 'cause he's older than you. But during the flu epidemic, he was very ill. Tell me what happened.
- B: Well, same thing as Chief Blue. Chief Blue was his father's brother, and he come anointed him and prayed for healing, and they brought him back to life, they said, after they—
- E: They thought he was dead.
- B: They gave him up for dead. They come with a minister. That's what we call it, "administer" to him. They lay their hands on his head and anoint his head with oil, and he come back to. He'll be sixty-seven in January.
- E: Does he remember that, or was he just too sick to remember all that?
- B: He was too sick to remember. He don't remember.
- E: But there were so many that died during that flu epidemic.
- B: Yes.
- RB: We had seven that died.
- E: Seven in your family, Mr. Brown, died. Do you remember any stories that were ever told about the old man, Thomas Stevens? Of course, it was beyond your day, but maybe your father, your mother, or your grandparents told about Thomas Stevens, the old man who froze to death?

B: I don't know anything about him, only just that he froze to death. That's all that I ever heard of it.

E: You keep the ancient cemetery, the old cemetery, in good shape. You also keep the new one rather than—

B: My father and mother were both buried down at the old cemetery. And that's where I want—my request—to be buried down there with them. I don't want to be buried in the new cemetery. I want to be buried down there with my father and mother on the river.

E: That's right. That's a beautiful spot down there, isn't it?

B: It is.

E: Then the Catawbias also have another tract of land on the river where you all have recreation, things of that kind?

B: No.

E: Oh, you don't?

B: The only recreation we have is through the church. All our recreation is planned through the church. We have it up there in the schoolhouse auditorium.

E: What kind of recreation do you have for the young people or for anybody?

B: They have just a little bit of everything. They have dances. They take trips to King's Mountain, take 'em on trips to King's Mountain. Back in July, we all went to King's Mountain for a swimming party—young people went swimming—and we all took a picnic lunch and spent the afternoon and walked the trails. The church plans all kind of things like that for the young people and the old combined. The church sponsors all our recreation.

E: What connection do you have with the Cherokee Indians?

B: One of my distant cousins married into the Cherokee.

E: Is that the Owl family?

B: Mmhm.

E: I noticed that a Mrs. Owl is the editor of the Cherokee newspaper. I saw an article by her the other day. Do you ever go to Cherokee to visit?

B: Yes, I go there once in a while. I haven't been there since I've been sick 'cause I been sick so long. But my cousin Lola Owl—this year, she's gonna be ninety years old in December, and she come down to see the Thomas woman just before she died, and she was here when she died. The day she died, she was here. She's ninety years old, and she drove the road from up that hill.

E: That's amazing. Are you really proud to be an Indian? So many tell me they are proud.

B: I am. I am proud to be an Indian.

E: What quality do you see in your people that you're proud of?

B: Well, in fact, we always said we know where we come from. We were here when Columbus discovered America, we were here. So, we know where we come from. We were here.

E: Yes. Do you ever hear your father or your mother or any of the old ones tell how this Tribe of Catawba Indians happened to be here on the Catawba River?

B: No. I have heard that they had a big fight with the Cherokees, and this is where they run back and settled, down this way. They had a terrible battle with the Cherokees, and they run back here to settle.

E: Do you think your children and grandchildren are learning the history of your people, or is there enough written about the history of your people?

B: No, they're not learning. They're not learning, no. I haven't got a grandchild that can make a piece of pottery.

E: Is that right? But you're still making it and still studying it?

B: Yes. I had just got to a place where I was feeling just a little bit like making some after the serious illness I had. Then I got sick again and had to go back, so I couldn't.

E: Well, I'm sure when you come out of the hospital, you'll be making pottery again.

B: Yes, ma'am. All's well, start again.

[End of interview]

Transcribed by: Rayyan Merchant, October 20, 2021

Audit-edited by: Lauren King, March 21, 2022

Final edited by: Evangeline Giaconia, July 19, 2022