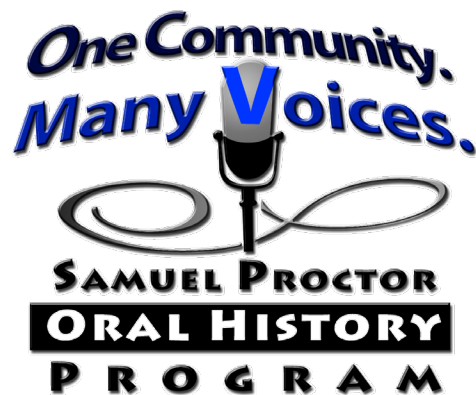


# Moroni James George

**Southeastern Indian Oral History Project (SIOHP)  
CAT-096**

**Interview by:**

**Edith Frances Canty Wade  
October 1974**



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**CAT 096 Moroni James George**  
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**24 minutes | 12 pages**

**Abstract:** Moroni James George, the oldest living Catawba at the time, discusses his time in different community leadership roles and his interactions with agents from the federal government. George shares how members of the community helped each other in times of need, such as during the Flood of 1916 and during the Spanish Influenza Epidemic. He mentions that his mother and father were the first Catawbas to join the Mormon Church. George shares how before he was born, some Catawbas traded their land for goods like horses and blankets. He remembers some of the people who would go around the reservation and administer to the Catawbas, and discusses when he went to Columbia, South Carolina, for an operation.

**Keywords:** [Catawba Nation; Chief Samuel Taylor Blue; South Carolina--Rock Hill; History; Health]

**SAMUEL PROCTOR**  
**ORAL HISTORY**

**P R O G R A M**  
**University of Florida**

CAT 096

Interviewee: Moroni James George

Interviewer: Edith Frances Canty Wade

Date of Interview: October 1974

W: Uncle Roni, in 1918 there was a big sickness down in Catawba. Several people have told me that the Indians took the flu. Do you remember anything about that?

G: **Yeah.**

W: What can you remember about that?

G: Well, John Brown had a pretty good family. How many of 'em died out that one time, **Haddie?**

H: Huh?

G: How many kids was it died out of John's family? Time the flu went around when we lived up there in Rock Hill.

H: I think five. **Five kids.**

W: How many, Uncle 'Roni?

G: Five.

W: Five children died in one week.

G: Some of 'em died the same day.

W: Some died on the same day. Did people die in every family down on the reservation?

G: No, not every one. I had one I thought I was going to lose, but she pulled through.

W: Did you have doctors?

G: Oh, yeah.

W: Can you remember who the doctor was?

G: Dr. **Massie**, that was my doctor. I lived up in Rock Hill down back of the Highland Park.

W: Well, do you know how many Indians was on the roll at that time?

G: No, not exactly.

W: Somebody told me the other day that they thought about half the Indians died at that time and I just wondered how many was on the roll.

G: No, I don't think half of 'em died. Of course, there's a good many of them small kids died. John lost about four or five out of his family. His wife and sister.

W: Did neighbors and friends among the Indians help to take care of each other or were they able?

G: I don't know how they do it down there in the Nation because I wasn't down there. When I was in Rock Hill, they took well care of me out there. **Neil** would send people out there to get fixed [inaudible 2:36]

W: It was told to me too that the Indians ran out of caskets and they had to build their own caskets. Do you remember that?

G: No, not since I've been born. [Laughter]

W: You don't remember that?

G: Unh-uh.

W: Well, I believe it was Evelyn George told me last night that Rachael Brown told her that they fixed the linings on the inside of the caskets that they had made. I was just wondering if you had helped to, you know, make any of them?

G: No, that's something new on me. [Laughter] I never **heard tell of it**. Of course, now, I have had to make coffins. My uncle—**was** for the outsiders. We lived over in Lancaster County, on Red Green's place.

W: Well, Uncle 'Roni, can you remember when the reservation was bigger than that little spot we're on now?

G: Yeah. It **goes** out way up—who lives over down there [inaudible 3:54]—'round **Commanee** into the road up to what comes out of the Nation.

W: The **Fuell's** lived up there, didn't they?

G: No, I mean, the Fuell's lived on up the road further way up **there where** Nola lives now. I can't think of that boy's name lives **in there**. Those are two roads there. Ike Johnson lives right in front of their house, right above 'em on the other side of the road. I know him but I just can't think of his name.

W: **Emory** Thomas?

G: No, it wasn't Emory. He lives further down in the flat.

W: Alfred?

G: Yeah, I reckon that's what it is, Alfred.

W: Well, do you remember what year we started drawing money?

G: Well, now, I'll tell you—let's see, I just can't remember what year it was. But I know me and Richard went down there—to Columbia—to see the government.

W: Were you ever Chief?

G: I was secretary and treasurer, **whole of 'em**. Richard was Chief by committee. Sam Blue was Chief, but me and Richard were the [inaudible 5:33]

W: And how did the people down in Columbia treat you?

G: Treated us fine.

W: Do you remember the Indian agents in your time? Were there Indian agents in your time?

G: You mean Indian—

W: Well, I remember Tom Flowers. He was the Indian agent. Was he not the fire Chief in Rock Hill?

G: I don't remember **if** he was.

W: And I remember Greer Lesslie.

G: Yeah.

W: Now, do you remember any other men who was agents?

G: I know another one but I just can't think of his name. He was a young fella. He **dumped** more **for 'em** than anybody. He wasn't drawing much, but maybe eight dollars—

W: I believe you're gonna have to talk a bit louder so I can get you good on the tape.

G: There's another fella who was an agent. O.K. Williams, I believe his name was. We weren't getting more than about eight dollars when he went in. Then it got up to twenty and somewhere along there.

W: Did you have to live the whole year on that small amount of money?

G: Well, I didn't because I worked hauling wood. They had a boat fixed—well, they made away with the boat. After I got in as secretary and treasurer, I had another one fixed. Always write out orders. Then they'd trade 'em to the outsiders, you know, the **grocery men**.

W: Who made out the order, the Indian agent, or you did? You was the secretary.

G: I did, I'm secretary and treasurer.

W: And if anybody needed food or anything you would make out an order, and they could take it to the grocery store and redeem it.

G: Yeah.

W: Well, where did that money come from?

G: That was from the government, **draw** money.

W: It was set aside and you could use that during the year?

G: They set aside so much for the young folks, and so much for the old folks. Some of 'em decide to run over, **wanted to trade** these orders, that's why I happened to be in there one day and the bookkeeper, he was checking a truckload of stuff. [inaudible 8:24] **unloading** and he'd check. He kept on watching 'em and when he got through and got back to his office, he called me. So, I went on back there and I straightened him out. See, the old folks got so much and the young folks so much. Of course, the old folks got a little more than the young ones.

W: Well, did the time come when we were drawing money, did everybody get the same amount?

G: Same amount, young or old.

W: Young or old, you got the same amount of money?

G: Same amount.

W: Did you, like lots of other people, buy your supply of flour for the year? Did you take part of your drawing money and buy your supply of flour and things like that for the year?

G: No, I generally tried to make mine go **as running through**.

W: Well, I don't know how old I was, but I remember when we would draw money, Momma would go and buy, oh, several hundred pounds of flour and she could bring it home as she needed it.

G: Well, I bought by the hundred too. I had a brother-in-law; he was a preacher.

W: What was his name?

G: Ben Harris. He got up there on that pulpit preaching one Sunday, didn't know how brother Roni George make a living for his family, he drank so much.

[Laughter]

W: [Laughter] Well, you know, Jessie told me the other day that Uncle Sam really tried to keep the young men from drinking, and he said he was one of them. And so how did he get the stuff to drink? Was it plentiful? Or did you make your own?

G: Yeah. Well, I made some of it. I could get anything I wanted in Rock Hill. I never did bother Sam for a thing.

W: But you couldn't go into the liquor store and buy it could you?

G: Yeah.

W: You could?

G: Even when I was going to **Carlisle** School. I lived out in the country. A bunch of boys got together one day, and we went into the liquor store. I don't know what they sold there; I believe it was a liquor store. The police come in there and he stuck his belly out and pushed him out the door and left him standing. I don't know why.

W: But he didn't bother you?

G: Unh-uh.



W: Now, there is another thing that I want to ask you about. I realize that times have changed, and things have changed, but did the Indians help each other very much a long time ago? I mean if anybody was sick, or they needed wood.

G: Oh, yeah. They was good for that. They'd go around and watch for 'em, take 'em something to eat. Anything they could do for 'em they'd do it.

W: Well, can you remember anything about the big flood that was in 1916?

G: We was living over in Lancaster County that year, and we was down there on the railroad. My daddy would go out on the end of the **trestle**, you know, out there on the side of the river. And he just got off and he got back when the bridge went.

W: My goodness. He was very fortunate, wasn't he?

G: Yes, he was.

W: Now, I want to ask you about the missionaries. Do you remember anything about the missionaries being persecuted and driven down in Catawba? Could you tell me something that you remember about that?

G: Well, my daddy laid out with 'em in the woods many a night.

W: Your daddy did?

U: [inaudible 12:35]

W: And your daddy is Taylor George?

G: Yeah.

W: All right. Can you tell me anything else about what you remember about them?

G: A mob got a **hold** to the elders one time, and some of 'em got away. There's one left. There's a scripture in the Bible that says if they slap you on the one cheek,

turn the other to 'em. He said, "Yeah, I done all of that, but it didn't say what to do after that." [Laughter] **And** I guess he have to **say**.

W: [Laughter] When the first missionaries that you can remember come in among the Indians, were there very many Indians join the church at the beginning?

G: I don't remember just how many joined. I know my mother and them was the first ones to join the church.

W: They were the first ones to join the church—your mother and your father?

G: Mmhm.

W: Well, then this record that you've got would take care of the very first people that joined the church.

G: Yeah. It would [inaudible 14:05]

W: I would like to say that Uncle Roni has one of the best records and it's written so plainly. Who did this recordkeeping? Who wrote this in your book?

G: I wrote it myself.

W: In the little book too?

G: No, not there. I reckon she's got the family book there.

W: Well, she's got the family book there, but then there's that little book. That one there. Who wrote in that?

G: Some of the elders, the older elders. Elder Bingham. I think the name's in that book there.

W: Well, it might be. I know that it's real good writing, and you can read every word of it, and I did not know who had kept such a good record. I would like to say also that Uncle Roni has all kinds of books. I am sure that they would be collector's

items and I just wish that the Catawbas had a museum that maybe he would be willing sometimes to donate these prize books to a museum where they would always be on display for people to see.

[Break in recording]

W: Do you remember, Uncle Roni, any of the Indians getting rid of any of the land?

G: Well, not after I come along, they [inaudible 15:42] A lot of 'em back before I was born traded the lands for horses and blankets. You know, we used to own way back over to the other side of Fort Mill.

W: Yes, I saw a sign just night before last where it says, "Catawba Reservation," and that's right on the edge of Pineville. So, they traded away their lands for horses and mules and blankets?

G: Mhm. [inaudible 16:12]

W: Yes. I know that I have a belt that was Granny Sarah's and it was traded for something. I don't know what it was traded for—I don't know who they traded with, but several people that have seen thinks that it might have been gotten from the English. Now I don't know that it is. It would take somebody that knew history to—it has some sort of emblem on the buckle, and it would take somebody who knew about those things to tell us where it came from.

[Break in recording]

G: All the dances I went to, some of my friends on the outside would take me with them to the dances.

W: Well, Uncle Roni, you seem to have been more fortunate than most of 'em because you always had a job to provide for your family, and you always got to

mingle among other people rather than just the Indians. And so, you really wasn't in the position that some of those Indians were in—in fact, most of 'em. Were you ever one of the people who went in the middle of the night, or in rainy weather to administer to the sick?

G: No. Let's see what year was I [inaudible 17:45] I was living up here on the highway. I don't remember what year it was. **Haddie** might remember. **The old man** Truman Turner, he was sheriff. He got so he couldn't drive for himself and I used to drive him around. Everybody at the mill said I'd take his place when he died. I told 'em no. I didn't think I would. Be somebody else that take it.

W: Well, can you remember any Indians who would really go out anytime that people were sick and administer to 'em?

G: Well, the elders took traveling **out of the**—

W: All right, then beside—I mean Indians. What about Ben Harris, did he ever go and administer to the sick?

G: I don't remember him doing that. Sam—

W: That's Sam Blue?

G: Yeah. He **administered to some**. He did his part **in that**. Henry [inaudible 19:19] didn't have time. I mean he was in the church. He was a preacher too but—I know I worked in Rock Hill around the wood yard. I had had some kind of **spells**. I come downtown one evening after, you know, [inaudible 19:45] to get my supper I would go to the cafe down there, [inaudible 19:54] **Davis**. I'd go down at night, **get** to fix the horse and buggy for me, and I'd drive it down to the Nation.

W: And that was ten miles in a horse and buggy. And who would you get to administer to you?

G: Well, Sam Blue was one of 'em, but I don't remember know who was with him.

W: The Mormons really believe that when we're sick, we call on the elders to be administered to and it works, doesn't it?

G: [inaudible 20:36] Let's see, he built that house **and I** built the church. I was living there. I took down, and Sam and Elder Davis, he was in there then, he—

W: He was schoolteacher, wasn't he?

G: Yeah, they'd come around administer to me. I couldn't move hand or foot or turn over the bed 'til after they administered to me. Ms. **McKinley**, she was a—

W: A nurse, wasn't she? That came down among the Catawbas.

G: [inaudible 21:19] go around [inaudible 21:22] She took me to Columbia. When I got down there the orderly that come out there to get me, if he'd just had let me walk my way, I'd have been all right I reckon. He grabbed my arm and jerked me up straight and pulled it around his shoulder. Something tore loose. I stayed there, I believe just about eight days. They operated on me. The doctor told me that last day, said, "You're lucky to be here."

W: And what did they operate on you for?

G: I don't know what they called it, but I know it was a bad operation.

W: Did you go to a Veterans Hospital, or what kind of hospital did you go to down there?

G: Free Will Baptist Hospital.

W: Free Will Baptist, and Ms. **McKinley** took you down there?

G: **Yeah.**

W: I can remember Ms. McKinley and she was very interested in the Indians. I also know that she took care of other people beside Indians, but we in Catawba remember her because she was good to us.

G: Yeah, she took me down there and she brought me back. [inaudible 22:49] walking for I don't know how long **since** the operation. The doctor told me when I left there, says I was lucky to be here.

W: I've been talking with Moroni George. A few months ago, I had visited him before, and he was unable to walk. He used a walker and with the help of his wife he was able to get around. Today when I visited, he's walking all over his house without any help and he seems to be in just real good health now. Once again, I'll say that he's the oldest living Catawba Indian.

[End of interview]

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