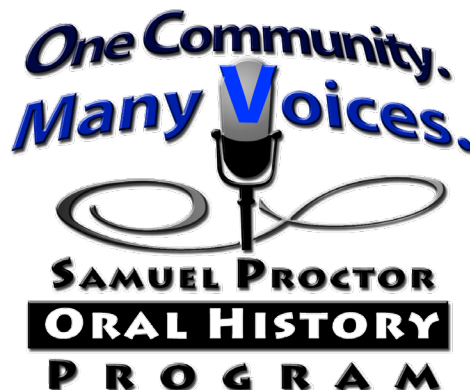


Edith Bertha Harris Brown

**Southeastern Indian Oral History Project (SIOHP)
CAT-086**

Interview by:

**Edith Frances Canty Wade
October 9, 1973**



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26 minutes | 13 pages

Abstract: Edith Brown begins by talking about her parents, grandparents, and siblings. Her father was a farmer and Brown recalls the time she and her siblings experienced a solar eclipse as young children. She then talks about her teachers at school when she was growing up, especially when she attended the Carlisle Indian Industrial School, the flagship Indian residential school of the United States, in Carlisle, Pennsylvania. She lived with a White family in Mason, New Jersey, until she grew sick and was sent to live with her sister in the mountains. Here, they did farm work and house chores. Brown then recalls school subjects and sports that she enjoyed. She talks about her adulthood and the ways her children have more school and work opportunities than she had growing up. Brown also discusses her work as a Sunday school teacher in her church's community and about her close relationship with her grandmother Sarah. She especially remembers the food, drinks, and medicines Sarah would make for her as well as her advanced pottery making.

Keywords: [Catawba Nation; South Carolina--Rock Hill; Residential schools; Family histories]

P R O G R A M
University of Florida

CAT 086

Interviewee: Edith Bertha Harris Brown

Interviewer: Edith Frances Canty Wade

Date of Interview: October 9, 1973

W: I live on Route 3, Box 304, Rock Hill, South Carolina, and today is October 9, 1973. I am talking to Mrs. Edith Brown. Aunt Edith, would you tell us your full name and give us your address?

B: Edith Bertha Harris Brown. Route 3, Box 306A, Rock Hill.

W: Who were your parents?

B: David Adam Harris and Lizzie Jane Harris.

W: Who were your grandparents?

B: Sarah Jane Harris and James Harris.

W: How many brothers did you have?

B: By my mother's side I had one brother and two sisters.

W: Well, you have other brothers and sisters who are half brothers and sisters, don't you?

B: Yeah.

W: What kind of work did your father do?

B: Farming.

W: What kind of work did your mother do?

B: Well, she kept house.

W: Can you remember any ol' stories that your mother might have told you when you were just a little child?

B: No, I don't remember any.

W: Well, when you were little, what kind of jobs did you have to do around the house?

B: Well, I carried in wood and helped to carry water.

W: Since your father farmed, did you have to do any work on the farm?

B: No, I was too little. My mother worked on the farm. And I can remember one time we had an eclipse of the sun. My mother was hoeing corn in the river bottoms. She had us all at the end of the field. When we heard the chickens crowing up here at our grandmother's house, because it was an eclipse, it was dark, and it scared us. Lavinia was a baby then, and we had an apple tree up at the end of the field. I said, "Put her in the apple tree."

W: Well, do you remember anything about church when you were little? Did you go to church when you were little, or was there a church here on the reservation?

B: There was a church here, but I don't remember. I think it was—when it first was over there at the old cemetery, you know, like a brush arbor.

W: Well, I know you've got something interesting to tell us about school. But let's start here in Catawba. Do you remember any of your teachers here in Catawba?

B: Mrs. Dunlap was our first teacher.

W: Do you remember how old you were when you first started to school?

B: I don't remember how old I first started, but there was a young girl come along, she was my cousin, and she carried me to school. Early in the mornings, we went.

W: Do you remember any of the subjects that you studied?

B: Not then. I must've learned my ABCs. [Laughter]

W: All right, you've got a most interesting story to tell about school. What happened after you finished school here in Catawba?

B: My mother died, and then my grandmother had to take care of us, four of us. There was an Indian woman had been off to school, and she graduated as a nurse from Carlisle, the Indian government school. She came home on a visit, and she told my father best place for us to be out there in school, and she would take us. So, she took us, there were four of us. She took me, my sister Lavinia, my sister Artemis, and my cousin Mary Ayers, all four of us to Carlisle school in 1905. And so we stayed out there five years at school.

W: All right, you said a young lady came from Carlisle and took you back. Was this woman a Catawba Indian?

B: Yes, she was. Her name was Lottie Harris.

W: Once you got to Carlisle, what was it like?

B: It was a big school all for girls and boys. Small boys and small girls and large girls and big boys. We stayed in a dormitory. Downstairs, down on the first floor, all the little girls stayed. We had a woman matron. There were three woman matrons over the girls and she had to see after the girls and we had to keep our rooms clean. We was learning to do these things by ourselves. There were three girls in one room and three beds in there. And we had to scrub our floors and had to make up our beds. One month, one girl had to keep up the room and see that it was in order. And if there's anything lying on the bed or on the floor, she would get a tardy mark for that, that girl would. Then the next month it changed to the other girl and it went around. This was to learn us how to keep house and to keep things clean. We did.

W: How old were you when you went to Carlisle?

B: I was eleven years old.

W: How did your life change immediately from the time you left Catawba and went to the school?

B: Well, I didn't know nobody there. And I was homesick for a while. But after I got over it, I liked it. I stayed there for about two years and then they sent you out in homes amongst the White families to learn you to do different kinds of housework there. And I went to Mason, New Jersey. It was a small town. I think there was one or two stores there, and a small school, and a church. So, I went to church every Sunday and I went to school there. They were a family of Quakers that I lived with, and they were good people. They lived on a farm too and they raised apples and sheep. They had horses and they had a man to do their work for 'em. And they had a three-story house, and my room was up on the third floor. And had two aunts, and one was across the hall from me and the other one was across at the other end. I took sick there one time and they sent for the field matron. They called her "field matron" because she took the girls out and got homes for them. And she come—I stayed there about a week, then she come and took me back to school. I stayed a week in the hospital and then they took me out to where my sister Artemis was, in the mountains. She was on a big farm, too. They had a lot of cows. They milked and sold milk. And we'd go out and pick huckleberries and blackberries. When the school time for us to go back, I went back and went to school.

W: Do you remember the name of the first family you lived with?

B: That was the first family, their name was Busbys. They'd pay you every month. You'd get paid, but they wouldn't give you the money. They'd send it into school, the money into school. When I went back to school, I had money there in the bank to spend when I wanted to go to town. They'd allow for three girls together to go downtown. You go to the office, and they'd take your name down and you report when you come back, so they know that you had come back.

W: Do you remember the name of the second family you lived with?

B: It was Lewtons, it was.

W: All the time you were in Carlisle, you attended church?

B: Yes.

W: Did you attend the same church every Sunday or did you go to different denominations?

B: I went to the same church when I was at—what we called it out in the country. I went to the same church out there. A Methodist church it was.

W: Do you remember any of your teachers in Carlisle?

B: I don't remember any of my teachers there, don't remember their names.

W: Do you remember any of the subjects that you took and particularly liked or disliked?

B: Oh, I liked geography and history. Had arithmetic and writing. I learned to write real good. We went to drawin'. We had a drawin' class. We went to music class every morning to learn us to sing. But I don't remember my teacher's names now.

W: Did you take part in sports?

B: No, only in the wintertime. They got us all sleighs and we would go out on the snow. We went to football games when they had them there.

W: This is what I was going to ask, did you ever attend any of the football games?

B: Yeah, we went. We had a grandstand for the school and that's where we went to watch 'em to play ball. We carried our blankets with us to wrap up in.

W: There was an Indian man who played ball there, and his name has gone down in history. Do you remember him?

B: James Thorpe.

W: Did you ever remember seeing him?

B: Yeah.

W: Could you describe him and tell us just a little bit about him? What you can remember of him?

B: Well, he was tall and built up heavy and stout-looking. He was a nice-looking man.

W: Who were you married to, Aunt Edith?

B: Early Morgan Brown.

W: In what year did you marry?

B: July 4, 1910.

W: Who married you? Do you remember?

B: John Sparks at Catawba Junction.

W: At Catawba Junction.

B: Mmhm.

W: How many children do you have?

B: Five.

W: They all live away from home now?

B: Yes.

W: You own your own home, don't you?

B: Yes.

W: Now, do you think that your children had more opportunities for advancement than you had?

B: Yeah, they do. They have more.

W: In what ways do you think that they got more opportunities than you?

B: Well, they can go to school now with the Whites. They can go out in public work and do work and learn different things in trade, make themselves better.

W: Well, I know that you're real active in our community and I know that you're eighty years old, but would tell us the positions you hold in church and what church you belong to?

B: [Laughter] I go to the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, and I'm a teacher in junior Sunday school. I've been teaching for years. I don't remember how long I've been teaching. I've been teaching ever since they had that small church built over here, before they built that other church. I've been teaching in Sunday school. But I worked and done assistant secretary and then they made me the secretary in Sunday school. I was branch clerk for thirteen years. I teached in the MIA, I teached the [inaudible 14:53] and I teached the Beehives. Now I'm only teachin' the junior Sunday school.

W: Aunt Edith, I know that you're interested in what goes on here in Catawba and in the surrounding community also, but have you ever voted?

B: No, I have never voted.

W: Have you ever registered to vote?

B: No, I never. [Laughter]

W: Have you ever thought that you would like to?

B: [Laughter] No.

W: Do you ever feel like, when somebody is elected that you don't particularly like, that it would've been different had you voted?

B: [Laughter] No, I do not think it would.

W: You don't think so?

B: [Laughter] No.

W: All right. I know that you have many friends, and you have friends among the Indians, your own people, friends among the Whites. What about friends among the Blacks?

B: Well, I have a few.

W: All right. What are your feelings toward being an Indian?

B: Well, I'm proud that I'm an Indian. [Laughter]

W: I know that you are. Would you tell us just some of the things that you've told concerning your grandmother Sarah? Some of the stories that she might have told you?

B: I don't remember none of the stories that she told me, but I stayed with her all the time. She didn't have nobody to stay with her. When I was real small, and all of

us—why, we all stayed with her. Then when I went off to school and come back, I stayed with her, when she made pottery. I helped her. And then, when I got married I stayed with her.

W: When you were small, do you remember any kind of goodies or sweets that she might fix for you grandchildren who were visiting or staying with her?

B: She made cakes and she called 'em sugar cakes. She made cakes. She'd have a big stack of 'em. She'd cook pies and she'd have a stack of 'em. And she said those were for her grandchildren. She had lots of grandchildren. Not only us but other ones, and when they come, she would give them some too.

W: You told me something very interesting about the way she cooked on that fireplace, would you tell us some of that?

B: She had a dinner pot and then she had a chain swung down in the chimney. She'd hang her pot up there and she'd boil stuff like rabbits and whatever she had to cook. She had a skillet with legs on it. Then she made a big fire in the fireplace. She'd rake out coals and set her skillet on there and she'd cook bread, cornbread and biscuit bread. She made pone bread. She'd set it and mix it up and let it rise. Then she'd push it back down and let it rise again, and then she'd cook it in the skillet. It would be a big thick cake of bread. She made locust beer out of persimmons and locusts. She took the locusts and trimmed the gritty part off and she put 'em in, then poured hot water over 'em and let 'em stand in an earthen churn until they get good. Then she would give that to us to drink.

W: Was that just for a beverage or was it for medicine or what?

B: No, it was just a beverage for us to drink. And when war was goin' on, she said they couldn't get no coffee. They took persimmon seeds and dried 'em and beat 'em up to make a drink out 'em for coffee. She made an ash cake out of corn meal. She'd rake ashes back with a shovel and she'd put her ash cake in there and pat it out just like you would a cake. Then she would cover it over with the coals and the ashes. Then when she'd take it out, she'd take it and wash the ashes off and give it to us to eat. And it was good. I guess the ashes that was left on it kept us from having a tummy ache. [Laughter] My grandmother would go to the spring, and I would go with her and she'd take these wooden buckets. She wore these split bonnets on her head. When she would get her water, she'd set it up on her head and carry it back to the house. And she's got a wash place she made down here on the branch where she would wash her clothes. She had a big ol' pot and she'd boil her clothes. And she had a stump there and she'd take her clothes out and beat 'em right good with a paddle. And put 'em right back in this pot and boil 'em and then she'd rinse 'em and hang 'em out down there on the bushes, on the branch. When she went to get clay, she'd just get enough that she could carry to make her pots out of. She'd carry that on her head just in a flour sack and set it up there. I would go along with her everywhere she went, to get clay at the Johnson and Patterson bottom. And the Collins clay and the Brady clay, different places where they get clay at 'round here on the reservation. She would go and get it and bring it home and make her pottery out of it. She made all big pots. She didn't make little ones. She made big ones. She would make pretty flower pots, vases, and gypsy pots. And make plain pipes. And the way

they made 'em black, they put 'em in a bucket and put chips and things on 'em and turn 'em down in a bed of coals and built a fire. When they come out, they would be shiny black.

W: Well, Aunt Edith, can you tell us some of the medicines that—you have used 'em on me—so can you tell us some of the medicines that Granny Sarah used on you all?

B: Granny Sarah would get catnip and make tea for us to drink when we had colds. And get mint, and mint is good for settling your stomach. I make cough syrup out of mint, and cherry bark, and catnip and rabbit tobacco. It's good, 'cause I've made it for different ones and they said it helped them. Granny Sarah would go fishin' down here right below her house on the river. She lived close to the river, and she would go fishing and she would set hooks. Early in the morning she would get a string and tie her dress up to her knees to wade through the grass and go and look her hooks. She'd catch the biggest catfish to bring home to eat. One time she caught a great big eel. I was sitting back and thought she had caught a snake and it scared me. She threw it up on the bank and it just wiggled and flapped its tail around. She took something and beat it 'til it settled down. And she took the eel and skinned it, and dried the hide and wore it for a stocking string. She told me that it was good for rheumatism in your leg. And wear a brass ring on your finger was good for rheumatism. Yeah. Granny Sarah farmed and she had two big mules and a big barn. Frank Collins worked her farm for her.

W: Aunt Edith, Before we go any farther, Frank Collins was not an Indian, was he?

B: No, he was not an Indian. He didn't live too far from the reservation. She went and seed about a farmer and she raised chickens and she worked hard. Her husband went to war, and he never returned home anymore. She was the onliest woman here that got a pension from the government.

W: There's just one thing that I'd like to ask you about Frank Collins. Can you remember whether Granny Sarah paid him wages or whether he got part of the crop that he raised for doing the work?

B: I think she paid him wages for working for her.

W: I have just been talking to Edith Brown. I would like to describe her here. She is a dainty lady. She has snow white hair. She's very spry. She raises beautiful flowers in her yard. She keeps her house spotless clean and she raises her own food to eat during the summer. She makes lovely pottery, big ones, mostly. She does lots of quilting. She walks to her neighbor's house every Sunday to go to church. She never misses church unless it's absolutely necessary. She has never been to the hospital in her life. And this lovely young woman taught me to make pottery. If all Indians had the dedication of Edith Brown and her drive, the Catawbias would never have need to be ashamed to be called Indian.

[End of interview]

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