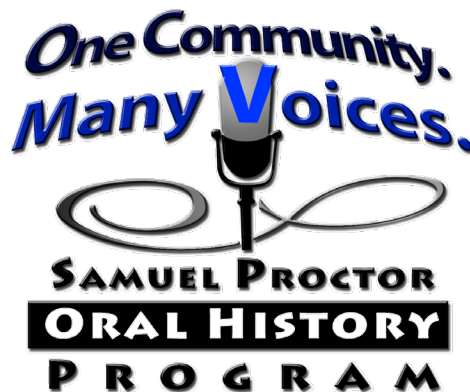


# **Jessie Allen Harris and Nola Louella Harris Campbell**

**Southeastern Indian Oral History Project (SIOHP)  
CAT-098**

**Interview by:**

**Edith Frances Canty Wade  
November 4, 1974**



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**32 minutes | 19 pages**

**Abstract:** Jessie Harris and Nola Campbell speak about their early and adult lives on the Catawba reservation. They discuss the Flood of 1916 and the Influenza Epidemic of 1918. Jessie Harris explains how the Catawba used drawing money to purchase coffins and fund burials. They discuss square dancing and some of the musical performers. They speak about land leases and the state's monetary appropriations. They remember the different doctors on the reservation as they were growing up. They reflect on the influence of Chief Samuel Blue over the nation. Nola Campbell recalls some of the things she did on the reservation as a child.

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

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

CAT 098

Interviewee: Jessie Allen Harris and Nola Harris Campbell

Interviewer: Edith Frances Canty Wade

Date of Interview: November 4, 1974

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

Today is November 4, 1974. I'm gathering oral history of the Catawba Indians for the University of Florida. I'm talking with Jessie Harris and Nola Campbell and myself, and we're going to start talking about the flood in 1916 as it affected the Catawbas. Jessie, what can you tell us about the flood of 1916?

H: I was working for the Catawba Lumber Company here in Rock Hill. They made boats and put them down on **the** River and met the train. The trains come from Charlotte and from **Columbia**, South Carolina. We transferred 'em back and forth across the river. I happened to be sitting on the boat, on the head of the boat; the water was high. A lot of the ladies come down. I didn't know 'em at the time, **I'd been here many years**. They said, "Well, here's **our help**. Here's one of our Catawba Indians. We'll ride with him." So, I transferred 'em back and forth, back and forth every time—that was the same way in Columbia. They're riding with the Catawbas. And we used those boats to transfer the passengers back and forth 'til the water got down, some—I don't know how many months. Every time we'd get out there and take 'em safe across the river, they'd give me a tip. Well, I divided it up with my **passengers** on the boat.

W: When the water got real high, did you help—what was it like for the Catawbas? Did any of them drown?

H: No.

W: None of the Catawbas didn't drown? Did it wash away any of their houses or anything?

H: I don't know if it washed one, but at the time, on the reservation up the river head, there was one that I think it had turned it around a little bit.

W: Well, did the Catawbas lose any cattle, or were there any Catawbas who had any animals at that time?

H: Yeah, they had cows.

W: Did they—?

H: Mules.

W: Did they lose any of them?

H: I don't remember. I don't know of any.

W: Do you remember animals in houses and cotton going down the river that belonged to White people?

H: I saw that. I saw that. I saw that, yes.

W: And did the Indians help to get any of those things out?

H: Yes.

W: How did they go about getting it?

H: They would go out there in a boat. That was on the reservation. I remember Nelson Blue. Nelson Blue went out there [inaudible 3:56] and I don't know, several more. [inaudible 4:02] went out there—Early Brown, somebody else. They went out there and pulled them cotton to the bank.

W: Well, Nola, do you remember hearing your parents talk about the flood and some of the things that went on?

C: That was before my time, but I've heard my father say that they were out looking, and they could see a house going down the river, and they could see mules and cotton and all kinds of **cloths** and things going down the river.

W: Well, I'd like to ask you this, Jessie. Was it right after that that so many of the Catawbas died with the flu? Do you remember what year that was when so many Indians were dying with the flu, or—?

H: That was in 1918.

W: And they were dying with the flu?

H: I was living in Rock Hill, and I was the third case in Rock Hill.

W: You were the third case in Rock Hill?

H: Rock Hill, yes, Rock Hill.

W: Do you know about how many Indians died?

H: No, I don't know exactly how many died, but there was a lot of 'em dying.

W: Do you remember if there was doctors to take care of them, or did they take care of themselves, or how did—what did they do?

H: They had doctors. But back in them days, the doctors didn't understand. And then they sent—later on, they sent the Red Cross in. There was too many in one house, and all there with the flu. **They'd** give it to the other ones.

W: In some cases, there were several members of one family dying in one week?

H: Oh, yeah, yeah. Well, I remember having to help to lay out a lady.

W: Do you remember who she was?

H: Was the wife of Richard Harris.

W: And her name was Lavinia?

H: Maggie.

W: Maggie. She was Maggie Brown before she married?

H: Yes.

W: And did she have a little child that died at the same time?

H: No.

W: But she did have a little child that didn't live, didn't she?

H: If she did, I can't remember.

W: Nola, do you remember hearing anything about the people of the Catawbas at that time?

C: Well, my daddy—I've always heard him and my mother sit back and talk that Uncle John Brown had two—well, he had several sick in bed, but he had two deaths in his family right at one time. He turned from one bed, where one had died, and went to the bed to the other one, and she died immediately after he switched from one bed to the other. And that was the year that my brother, Louie, died. I was born—.

W: Did he have the flu, too?

C: Yes. I was born May 2, 1918, and that was in the fall of the year. And my mother said my brother got over the flu and went to the field where my daddy was picking cotton early in the morning, and they called it a **backstep then**; they said he had took a **backstep** and took pneumonia, and that's what killed him.

W: And how old was he?

C: I don't know.

W: Do you remember the two people that died in John Brown's family within minutes of each other?

C: No, I don't remember the two girls, but they were girls. I've heard my daddy and them talk about it.

H: It was Maggie and Cora. And then I **believe that** there was a younger one **in there** [inaudible 8:28]

W: Did Jack die during that time?

H: Jack Brown? I believe he did.

W: Well, it seemed to me that I had heard somebody say something about Jack dying at that same time.

H: [inaudible 8:51]

W: Well, there is another thing that I would like to ask, and that is: Did they get coffins to bury them in, or did they make their coffins, or how did they do it?

H: They bought coffins. They'd run out of coffins in town **here**, so they just had to make them down there.

W: You mean the Catawbas made the coffins? What did they do, cut down trees, or how did they make them?

H: Buy the lumber.

W: Oh, they bought lumber?

H: Rock Hill [inaudible 9:40] When I got up, they had run out of 'em here in the city of Rock Hill. They had to go to Charlotte to get **any**. They were dying so bad here in town, they had to go to Charlotte and get 'em, but it got so they couldn't get them in Charlotte. They had to make 'em, too.

W: Well, did the Catawbas have money to pay for their caskets, or did the state pay for 'em, or how did they get them?

H: They had a fund. I believe they had a fund of about five hundred dollars a year.

W: Was that supplied by the state?

H: It come out of their drawing money—the money what they drew from the state, and that—to set that aside themselves.

W: Let me try to get this straight. This came out of the drawing money that we got once a year, and five hundred dollars was set aside to take care of burials.

H: That's right.

W: Was there a certain amount of money set aside also to pay the schoolteacher to teach the children down in Catawba, or did the state pay them? Or do you know?

H: I don't know.

W: Do you know, Nola?

C: I imagine the state paid. I don't know, but I imagine it was that way. I really don't—

W: I will try to pursue that father and find out definitely how the teachers were paid. It seemed like a sad time in Catawba during that time, and it wiped out, I know, a lot of Indians, didn't it? Did it wipe out about half of them?

C: [inaudible 11:36] Well, I would say about half of them, I don't know.

W: Nola, I think you gonna have to talk a bit louder so that you get taken on the tape here.

C: Well, I don't know. It's like I said, that was the year that I were born, but the way they talked, it sounded like it took out about half of them.



W: Do you know about how many people were on the roll at that time?

C: No, I don't.

W: Do you, Jessie?

H: I don't.

W: Well, maybe we can find out more about that later, too. It would be interesting to know; if we lost about half of the Tribe, it would be interesting to know how many was here in the beginning. Now, I want to talk to you, Nola and Jessie, about square dancing again, because that seemed to be the big thing with the Catawbas. I know that my mama was always—she was more reserved, but sometimes when good music was playing on the—well, they called 'em Graphophones, didn't they?

C: Yes, uh-huh.

W: Well, I could see her twitching her shoulders going through the house, looked like she was just really enjoying it; and I never saw her dance, but I'm assuming that she could. Nola, can you remember anything about the square dancing?

C: Yes, I was a little girl at that time, and we lived on the place they called the **Kelly** place, and every Saturday night—

W: Wait a minute. Before you go any farther, where was the Kelly place located?

C: It joined the Catawba Indian reservation, right kind of south of where we lived. I think you would say south because it joined the Indian reservation on the lower end. Every Saturday night, they'd—before Saturday night come though, they'd give out a place—Uncle John Brown's house or Theodore Harris's house would be one Saturday night, and the next Saturday night, some other place. Uncle Ben

Harris has had square dances at his house, and I had to follow Verdie—that's my sister. She was older, and she liked to dance, and we had to follow around after her, and that's how come we had to go to the dances; my daddy would make us go. They did have a colored man by the name of Charlie Crawford to pick a guitar, and he'd sit in the corner and pick the guitar until twelve or one o'clock at night for 'em to dance by. But they'd tear the beds down and throw 'em in the back room and just dance up a breeze in that there living room.

W: And the rooms were not really big, were they?

C: Well, some of 'em was.

W: They were?

C: Yeah. Uncle Ben Harris had a real big living room. I mean where they slept at, too, it was a living room and sleeping quarters, too; but it was a big place.

W: Jessie, do you want to say something about that?

H: Do you remember the Wilkersons? They had [inaudible 14:40]

W: No, I don't. I don't remember.

H: Had a couple girls and a boy, and they played the music for us a whole lot.

W: They came down to the reservation and played music?

H: [inaudible 14:59]

W: Did they ever take part in the dancing?

H: Oh, yeah, yeah.

W: Nola, do you remember some other people beside Charlie Crawford who played music?

C: Well, Major Beck played a fiddle, and several of the men could play harmonicas.

W: All right now, Major is not a Catawba?

C: No.

W: But he has another kind of Indian in him. What kind does he have?

C: Cherokee.

W: And, uh, he played the fiddle.

C: He used to play good music on the fiddle.

W: All right. And what other kind of music do you remember?

C: I remember a lot of the young men playing Jew's harps, as they called it, and harmonicas at that time.

W: Can you remember any of the men's names that played?

C: Willie Sanders, Douglas Harris.

W: Now, Douglas Harris is your brother?

C: Yes. And Chief Blue and ... he's a Blue, too, but I can't think of his name. You had his picture up at the schoolhouse. Andrew.

W: Andrew.

C: Yeah, and there was a lot of the men that just picked it up and could play.

W: I remember Chief Blue could play the harmonica real good. In fact, he played the harmonica at meetings for us, just right on up until the time he got beyond going. Jessie, you had something else you was going to say?

H: Chief Blue was the one training 'em how to play guitars.

W: Oh, he was? And do you know who taught Chief Blue? Or did he teach himself?

H: No, I don't know who teach him, but he taught the **others**.

W: Who was that, Nola?

C: Theodore Harris could play a harmonica, too, and a Jew's harp, too.

W: Well, it seemed like square dancing was a real good thing with the Catawbas. Now, speaking for myself, I know that all of the young people in Catawba now, they like to do all the modern dances, and they can do 'em just as well as any people anywhere else. But the older people, their thing is still square dancing, and they love to do it, and—

C: That's the biggest dance that they ever cared anything about was square dancing.

W: And if you were to come to Catawba today, and a square dance would be held in what's now known as the old schoolhouse—it's the church annex now—you would find the room full of the older Indian people just enjoying themselves square dancing. Now, I want to talk to both of y'all just a little bit about, um—Nola, you mentioned the fact that the young men were kind of hired out as slaves. Would you tell us about that?

C: Well, I've heard my daddy talk about they hired him out like a slave, and he worked for somebody by the name of Camps, and they always called my daddy "Baby Camps," and he talked about working on the farm for them. I think he went and stayed with 'em for years—I don't know how long.

W: And now, this Camp, he was a White man?

C: Yes, he was.

W: And they paid him wages, and their parents hired him out to work?

C: Well, that was my opinion about the thing, that my grandparents went and sold him out like a slave.

W: Do you remember anything about that, Jessie?

H: No, I don't.

W: Well, um, maybe we had better talk about—I don't know anything about that either, but I'm going to try to find out more about it, Nola, and I'm glad you mentioned it. But now, let's talk about drawing money just a little bit and see what we can remember about it. I don't know when it started. Do either one of you know when it started?

C: No, they were drawing money when I was a little girl.

W: Well, they was drawing money when I was a little girl.

C: When I can first remember, we were getting drawing money.

W: What about you, Jessie? Were they drawing money when you were little?

H: Well, I'm sure they was, but I—

W: But you just can't remember?

H: I can't remember.

W: Well, when we're talking about drawing money, maybe I'd better kind of explain it, and I don't know how to explain it as well as I should myself, but I know that once a year, every member of the Tribe would receive a certain amount of money from the state of South Carolina, and we always called it drawing money. This was all the money that some people got all year long. I remember when I got old enough to really know anything about it, well, my parents would take a portion of the money that they received for all of us—and there was nine of us all in the family—and I really don't know how much we got a year. Do you know how much we got a year?

C: Well, it was according to how many was in the family. Each child and the parents—the mother and father if they were Indians—drawed so much a head. Sometimes they would draw around twenty-eight dollars a head.

W: That seems like a lot in those days.

C: Well, it was a lot in those days.

W: Well, anyway, I remember when we drew money that my parents would immediately go to the store, and they would buy, oh, several hundred pounds of flour, and enough to last one whole year. Jessie, do you want to say something about that?

H: As well as I can remember, the state of South Carolina—some Chief was in there at the time of it. He was a Chief, and he rented this land from this Chief, so he paid him a small salary of money, which didn't amount to very much; I don't think it was any more than about two or three dollars at one time for the whole family. This land was leased to anyone taking out [inaudible 21:59] a few years ago, you know. It was leased to the state. We didn't pay no tax.

W: And we still don't pay any tax on that property down there, that one square acre.

H: No.

W: Now, you go ahead and—

C: Frances, was that when they leased this 164,000 acres out to the White man, and the Indians never did get it back?

W: That must be what Jessie is talking about. And I assumed that's why they started paying us this small amount of money, because they had taken all this land, which was—which is—very valuable.

C: 164,000 acres.

H: [inaudible 22:47] That was in Lancaster County. That's where the graveyard was, and when they leased the land, and when it come down, it come on this side.

C: Well, whenever this land was leased out, it never was turned back to the Catawba Indians whenever the lease was up. That's why they appropriated this money and give to the Indians.

W: Well, they actually wasn't giving us anything then, were they?

C: No.

W: They were just paying not even a rent.

C: No, they took the land.

W: All right. This is the type of thing that I really want to know. We're talking about drawing money, also. I remember that mama always bought enough clothes for us—it had to do us all year—when we got the money.

H: When you get up there in that higher bracket—

W: As we got older.

H: My daddy and his brother went to Columbia, and took the old doctor down here, Dr. Hill—they would take him with 'em—and they'd go down there to the state legislature and get a raise.

W: And that's how they appropriated a little bit more.

H: That's right.

W: When you're talking about your daddy, that's Jim Harris and his brother. Who was his brother? Which one of his brothers?

H: David Harris. **In our world**, he was known as Toad Harris, and he was a big—

W: That's my grandfather.

H: He was a big fat fellow **ever since he was** a kid.

W: Yes, I remember how chubby and fat he was.

H: He called everybody "Hot Toes," and they called him Toad.

W: Well, I'm glad you told us why they called him that. I always had heard people call him by that name, and I can remember well enough to know that he was short, he was just so fat, and I guess that's why they called him this. Nola, can you remember anything else about drawing money?

C: Well, I can remember when Tom Flowers was the agent over it, and he was the one that would sit up there and write the checks out.

W: Now, Tom Flowers, he was the fire Chief in Rock Hill, wasn't he?

C: I don't know.

W: Was he not, Jessie? Was Tom Flowers not the fire Chief in Rock Hill?

H: Yeah.

W: I thought that he was.

C: And in talking about the doctors, when I was young and just a little kid on up, I know the doctor as Dr. Hills. And then after Dr. Hills died, I remember this old doc—there was another doctor come in there. He didn't stay long with the Indians, but his name was Dr. Owens.

W: Dr. Owens.

C: Owens. And then after that, then we got Dr. Blackman, and he stayed with the Indians until he got disabled there near the **dock**. Then it was turned over to Dr. Patton.



H: I know who you're talking about now. Dr. Owens was a fellow who lived out here at Hominy.

W: Well, you know, this is a good part about being together and talking one with each other. It brings back to memory some of the things that we might have forgotten in just as talking with one individual. Another person can help us to remember some of those things, and I'm glad you mentioned that, Nola. Now, let's talk just a little bit about the things you did for fun when you were growing up. Some of the things that you—.

H: Well, one thing that I want to say.

W: All right.

H: If it had not been for Chief Samuel Blue, I don't think we'd have a reservation today. He is a great man.

W: A lot of people thought—well, I guess it's like that in every case; some people don't think very much of it, but we realize that he played a great and important part as far as being the Chief of the Catawbas. We all know that.

H: He built that Nation.

W: Well, I'm glad to hear you say that, Jessie, because I always thought well of him.

C: He was like just a daddy to everybody down there.

W: Yes, I remember he told me once that he was going to teach me the Catawba language because he knew that I was interested enough to learn. But at the time that he told me that, he had—they didn't know that he had cancer at that time. It was just before he got bed-ridden, and that ended all of that because from then on, he was just disabled to really take part. Of course, I know that once, when my

daughter was terribly sick, and we had had her to three different doctors, and we took her to Uncle Sam, and he was down in bed sick, and he couldn't even get up. And he administered to Sherry and, do you know, she got completely well. What three doctors wasn't able to do, by him administering to her, he did it, and he was not able to even get out of bed. I had to take Sherry and set her on the edge of the bed and let him administer to her. Jessie, did you have something else you was going to say?

H: Chief Blue was a man. He done for his people. If a man was sick, and there was nobody to cut wood, he went to his barn, got his wagon, got his mule, and went to the home of that person and cut the wood and hauled it and put it in the yard.

C: Well, I can verify that because when my dad was down sick, there was numbers of men come down there and cut and carried wood to our house on their shoulders and put it up in the yard for us.

W: Wouldn't it be nice if our people were so united today? I think that some of 'em would still do that if it were necessary. I believe that they would, but we have grown so 'til we think that other things are more important, and we just neglect, I think. It's not because we won't. We just have a tendency to think that other things just takes up our time. Now, let's talk about the fun that we had when we were growing up. Now, it wasn't too much different. I realize when I was growing up—I'm not too much younger than you, Nola, and Jessie, you're not old either, but I'm much younger than you. But things were not real good on the Catawba reservation when I was growing up. What was it like for you, Nola?

C: Well, when I was a kid, I liked to get out and build a playhouse—what we called little houses—where we lived at and made out like we cooked and ate. We'd make up mud pies and make out like that was our bread, and we'd build little houses. We went on the branch and catch crawfish, and we'd fry those and eat 'em. And we'd climb trees and bend 'em over and fall out of 'em.

W: We did the same thing and enjoyed it, too.

C: Yeah, 'cause that was all the recreation that the childrens had back in those days. They could get on a long, high hill and put their arms just as close to the sides as they could get, and they would roll down that hill, and when they'd get to the bottom of the hill, they couldn't hardly stand up, they'd be so—

[Break in recording]

C: And I remember, too, back in March weather, we had real high wind, and they wouldn't build a fire in the fireplace; they were scared the house would catch on fire. And they'd take us to the gullies, a big gully down near the river. That was up on Sutton's place now, where we stayed at during that time. Built a fire up down there, and we'd cook and eat down there in the gully and be down there all day long.

W: Did you have a fireplace, or did you have a—?

C: They had fireplaces, that's where they built their fire at; but they was afraid that those fireplaces was so rotten that it might catch—the house might catch on fire from these sparks and things that would fly.

W: What did they make the fireplaces out of then?

C: Rock.

W: Rock. And mud?

C: Yeah, mud.

W: They used mud rather than cement, didn't they?

C: Yeah.

W: I can remember Edith Brown's house having that kind of big fireplace with mud. I can remember her house also being a log house and having mud stuck between the logs to keep the cold out, rather than cement.

C: Well, that was the way our first house that Raymond built after we were married. He built a log house, and he put cement in between the logs, though. And we lived in it for years before we built a two-room frame house.

[End of interview]

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