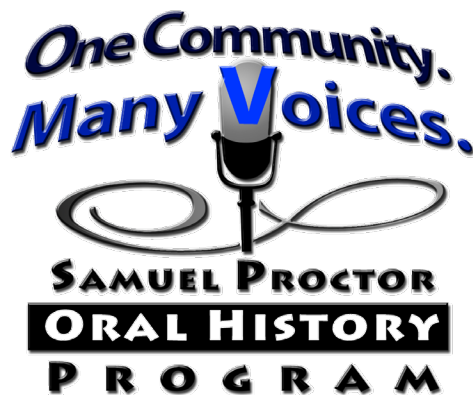


# Walter Caswell Sullivan

**Southeastern Indian Oral History Project (SIOHP)  
CAT-019**

**Interview by:**

**Emma Reid Echols  
January 4, 1972**



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**34 minutes | 13 pages**

**Abstract:** Walter Caswell Sullivan was a teacher, principal, and superintendent on the old reservation's school from 1938 to 1965. He oversaw many changes to the school from a new building to the merging into the Rock Hill school district which gained more resources for school children. He described the struggles of the Catawba children and what he did to help them in education, employment, and transportation. Sullivan also described the behaviors of Catawba high schoolers and their feelings of mistreatment by the White majority in school. Sullivan details the new school and then talks briefly about his wife, another teacher who formed strong bonds with her student Doris Blue.

**Keywords:** [Catawba Nation; South Carolina--Rock Hill; Education; Discrimination]

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

CAT 019

Interviewee: Walter Caswell Sullivan

Interviewer: Emma Reid Echols

Date of Interview: January 4, 1971

E: Emma Reid Echols, Route 6, Box 260, Rock Hill, South Carolina. January 4, 1971. I'm working on the oral history of the Catawba Indians, and I'm visiting in the home of W. C. Sullivan. Now, let him tell you about himself. Mr. Sullivan, will you give me your full name and your address?

S: My full name is Walter Caswell Sullivan. My postal address is P.O. Box 9093, Post Office Box, uh, 9093, Post Office, that's the number of the—uh, Willow, Cherry—

E: Cherry Road.

S: Cherry Road Station, let's see, abbreviated CRS, don't you see, and Rock Hill, South Carolina and my address where I live is—gosh, I—

E: It doesn't matter what the routes are.

S: **I like the street.** Cobble roads and narrow street and they—Hutchinson Estates. Isn't that what they call it?

E: I believe that's right. Mr. Sullivan, you came here first as a teacher, isn't that right?

S: That's right, as a teacher.

E: And what—did you teach in the high school?

S: Yes, ma'am. I came here as a teacher in the high school in September 1920. And I taught—I don't know exactly how many years—but I taught as a teacher for about, I'd guess it's around four or five years. And after that, I became a principal and taught a good many years there. I don't recall how many, but after that and finally Mr. Burkes died. It was 1938, wasn't it?

E: I believe so.

S: Anyway, after becoming principal I taught—I mean superintendent—I taught for twenty-six years. And I—the Indians—I believe if I look on through one of these pictures down here, I could tell the children [Break in recording]

E: Now let's get those dates down. You came in 1938 to 1965—

S: I was superintendent at the time.

E: You were superintendent. Now, during those years, you saw many changes. And I'm particularly interested in what you remember about the Indians. As I visit among the Indians, several of them told me that when you were principal that you tried to help them and encourage them to go on to school. Can you tell me what you remember about your contacts with these Indians?

S: Well, I, of course, knew what the trouble they had run into trying to get an education and I tried to do everything that I could to help them get it through the public schools. And whenever that the public schools permitted them to attend, why, I tried to encourage them, and also tried to help them and give them information that I thought would be of interest to them that they could get from other people. For example, they had trouble with getting transportation, for one thing. That was one of the earlier troubles, was transportation. And but they finally somehow got the use of an automobile for the group that I'm thinking of right now. And they also, at that same time, why, there was a government of—see that was somewhere along about right 1930, [19]32, or [19]33 along in there, but I noticed that the government was making certain things available to people who needed help. But the Indians, there was nobody that seemed interested in

telling me about those things. But I don't **say** nobody except me, because that isn't true. But there were very few or, in other words, there were not many told. Like, for instance, in our school I knew that there were mainly and most students around us, for example, that there were White people that were getting work, just, I'm tellin' you, in such jobs as maybe working in the library, doing such things as almost anything that should be done even some things, and I hate to say it, well you see it was [inaudible 07:34] physical work. That the school didn't have anybody that had more to be done that could be done and some of 'em were used for that. I know two, but some of 'em worked in my office to carry messages. You see, we had no thing to carry messages from my office to the teachers, anything like that, unless there's a note sent to them. There was no phone systems and things like that. But they were used for that purpose. To do things at that time. And I wish I could tell you the names of these these people but I have know how **that looks** and that kind of thing. And I will say to you that me—they never gave me any trouble, nor were they ever sarcastic in any way to me or any other. They were courteous and, uh, kind as far as I was concerned. Now I don't know whether that was true throughout, but I do not recall anybody, any of 'em ever been reported to me for discipline any way. So that's the kind of thing that I did. I did also try to give them some advice on how they could possibly get—go about trying to get some transportation. Also, I tried to get around getting them to, uh, try some kind of things that they had a better chance to win in to start with. Because you can't take a child, like those children, with no more teaching than they had, and put them in there and expect them to do what

other children of the same age can do. They just can't do it. They have to start a little bit lower and take classes that are just not quite as heavy as the starting thing. And so, I didn't try to get them to take French, because, of course, I'm not God. [Laughter] I tried to get them to get the kind of things that were more foundation, things that would help them with other things. And as a matter of fact, I think that perhaps my greatest help to those Indians were that I was humane to them and treated them like I would have treated my own children. That's the **actual** truth, because I did a great amount of things for them. I did what little things came along that I could. But I think that—and you take right now, [inaudible 11:48] and Lewis down at the, just across from the—not far, **you know whole right there, the place, well, the bar that I'm talking about that school there** lived kinda across from the school and the church, kinda at an angle.

E: Is that Sanders? Albert?

S: No, it wasn't Albert Sanders. The Sanders was a little—he didn't cooperate. That's another thing about this because many of these people—well, I can't say much for anybody else—but they **did** have very strong feelings for and against. [Laughter] And so that's a—

E: You mentioned the transportation being such a problem. The roads down at the reservation are so bad that really, the buses couldn't go down there very well, could they?

S: Well, they certainly weren't good. That was before the days of this building roads, you know, like they did. They had a whole **piece there for building country town roads and that** kinda started the—

E: Now, what about at the elementary school down on the reservation? All those high school students had to come into your high school. And they tell me that they came in, a number of them, with their fathers when they went to work at the bleachery early in the morning and sit in their cars until time for the high school to open, walk down to the high school, go to school, and then walk back to their car and stay in the car until their fathers went home. I'm sure you understood that real problem, didn't you?

S: Yes, ma'am. I know that a good deal of that was a thing that they wanted to do because they didn't want to mix with a group of people, in which they were a minority. And they, like there was a same kind of feeling they have and still have, a very intense feeling about the fact that they aren't treated like White people are treated. And they don't say that they're treated as badly as Negroes were treated, but they feel that they are treated along that line and that's the thing that has kept them out. Because, you see, they were particularly down in that territory where they lived. In other words, the people that knew them best gave them the most trouble. And you know what that would do to you or me or anybody else. And that, as a result, why things were hard for them.

E: What about their food and their clothing when they came to your school?

S: We did some things for that. And we, for instance, as fast as we could, why, we got things for them, like, you take for instance, **Bob** Bryant would give them shows at picture shows for us. [inaudible 15:57] and we saw that they got a lot of playthings then. As a matter of fact, they had more things—we could get more things for them from some kinds of people than we got from anybody else. And

we had, I don't know, **we was working** [inaudible 16:20] **Not that you would know but** we had a tremendous, old box there that we kept bats and balls and things, footballs, and things like that. And whenever the time came, they could handle it. And we got one of the Sanders women to come and cook for 'em, you know. And we also got some good material. As a matter of fact, we got a refrigerator some time before other schools did. And they were not forgotten when they got in that school, and I'll tell you. Because I'll tell you that Robinson girl—

E: Sarah?

S: Yes, Sarah. She, she was one fine person in helping those children out.

E: Mrs. Cornish was also working with her, I believe.

S: Yeah, she was. She was good, too. But she didn't have the ability and the connections that Sarah did. I don't mean now; I sound like I'm trying to say everything's all right. It wasn't. Everything wasn't all right, but everything was better than it had been—no question in the world about that.

E: Do you remember any certain Indians that impressed you that got ahead? Do you know of any that have made a name for themselves in business or sports or anything like that?

S: Well, I've know some people. Peters is one of them. And I know—you take this football boy that went to college and got on the football team. He didn't go through college, I don't believe. But he did go for a while. I don't know why he didn't, you know, he had such a reputation at that school that they gave him a **pool** to give to him. **And then when that happen he couldn't—realized that**



**had he stayed if he could and gotten a degree and found that philosophy.** I

see him once in a while now, not too often.

E: I believe that was Buck George, is that right?

S: Yes.

E: Now when you were superintendent, a number of the Indian families moved into Rock Hill. Particularly in the North Side school. **And farmers and Chiefs in the Northside area**, they began working in the cotton mills and began sending their children to Northside School. Do you remember any difficulties the principal would have with the Indian children, or did they fit in?

S: No. If they had any difficulties of any degree, why, it didn't come to me. I don't say that they did. They may have some that they brought to my attention may have been Indians. But I don't recall Indians as a bad thing, on the whole, don't you see like that. I just don't know. I do recall that we did have some not so well. Not so well as other children and you know there is quite a difference between the high and low in the Indian Nation. I guess you know that better than I do probably, but they had some situations like that, and I know that you said if I had any and yes, we had some. I can recall a case now where there's some notes written that didn't have very beautiful language for school children. And I remember—that's one case I remember. But, on the other hand, why, seen some White notes that weren't so good, too. I remember one White girl we had there one time that came here from Baltimore is where I believe her home was. She came here and she was about as bad as I ever could hear of. At recess, why, she would tease all the boys and say that she was going to tell people that she

was gonna have a child by them and that kind of stuff, and saying she'd go down in the woods and give a striptease and that kind of stuff. And soon Ms. what's her name, that used to be out there then, got onto it and told her mother. I told 'em to throw her out, and they did. And, as I understand it, before she left here, why, she had to go to the hospital for venereal disease. But anyway, I know one thing, the old man was bad as she was. He was a crippled up ex-soldier, and he was tough. He wrote me a letter once in which he said that he'd killed better men than I was.

E: This was a White family?

S: Yes.

E: So there was bad in both White and the—

S: That's what I'm saying. You can just count on it. Now I'm not a Negro-lover, but I'm not a hater either, and the same way with Indians or anybody else, any race. It's practically what most of us are, is what we have been through at any point in our life. It's what we have encountered and have taken in that's made us what we are. And you take most people, I don't say everyone, because they're the ones that haven't got enough brains to do right. But many, many things, it's a matter of not being brought up correctly. And it isn't always the parents' fault of it, because they—it is their fault that they don't know what's going on, and they don't like following up and checking. By the way, this fella that I was tellin' you about, that old man, the soldier, the cops [inaudible 24:21] wanted to have him put under arrest **in the statement forward**. I told 'em no. They did try to put him under a program which would say that he could not travel to certain places or do

anything. I said, "I can't see the time when I'm worry too much about a one-legged, crippled-arm man." And I said that Mrs.—what her name, **Silvers**

[Inaudible 25:05] [Laughter]

E: Mr. Sullivan, the last of the schools, **I believe**, after the reservation school, the new school was built up on the top of the hill near the church, did the school board build that school? Or do you remember?

S: I don't know whether they built it or not. I rather think so, because we kept it up and painted it and kept it under construction all the time anything was wrong with it.

E: That was a big improvement over the other school. It had a lunchroom, two classrooms, an auditorium, isn't that right?

S: Yes. That's right.

E: And it was a much nicer building. Then, at the end of the school year 1966, the school, all these school children moved into the Lesslie School. What did you think about the move and doing away with the Catawba school entirely?

S: I didn't think much of it. But it was the Indians, I'm told, that wanted it themselves and not the people that they wanted to do that, **that** they wanted to, on the basis somewhat, on perhaps that they were still being separate from other people and isolated.

E: That's right. Now, I think that there might be an Indian that I found out that someone remembered that your wife taught, coached, some of the little Indian girls. Did she ever tell you anything of her experiences in coaching those children?

S: I don't remember so much about her terribly except that she liked the little girl that she taught. And she was one of the little girls that married one of these Blues.

E: That's right. She was Doris, and she married Chief Blue's son. He's dead now, but she's now Mrs. Doris Blue.

S: Yes.

E: And her sister was Edna. I don't know whether your wife taught both of them, or just one.

S: I don't know either. Well, she mentioned to me that she was just—what a fine person she was and what a shame it was that her folks were **after**— well, I that kind of talk I don't know that exactly, **but she was sad that she said. But she said that she** liked the job.

E: Now this little girl your wife taught later on, went on to the school and then studied under her own mother, so I'm glad that she did turn out so well. In your experiences with these Indians, did you find them very, very good in sports?

S: Well, the **thing**—I don't know very much about 'em recently, in recent years. When I got to know much about them was when I came in contact with 'em. **When I was the high school principal really started to come in contact with them.** You take, for example, when the school started getting big, I never did get in contact with many pupils at all. But I remember that Buck Jones was a mighty good man, and we've had some others that were mighty good out on the field. But I don't know of anyone that ever did much about going on to school, college, and making it pay off, so to speak.

- E: You've seen so many changes in your years here. What changes have you seen for the good and the betterment of the Indians?
- S: Well, the fact that they are permitted to the use of everything that everybody else has is the greatest thing, I think. For instance, they can take anything anybody else can take. And they can move the same here and there and transport it in trucks and things in that time and I think that they probably get protection that maybe at one time they didn't get.
- E: Did you ever see any of the Indian women making their pottery? I know they did demonstrations in the school sometimes.
- S: Yes, I've seen 'em make it. I've seen them make it up here at this plant up here, too, at the museum, too. There's several of 'em that works up there, and make it every once in a while. I don't know who she was that was makin' 'em.
- E: Well, the transportation helped out a great deal, I'm sure, in getting the Indians to leave their homes. And during the Depression and during the hard years, it was hard on the white people. It was equally hard on the Indians if I remember, even harder on the Indians, I'm sure. What do you remember about Chief Blue? I think you knew him, didn't you?
- S: Yeah, I knew him, but all I remember about him was that he borrowed western Indian's clothes. I don't think a Catawba never wore any of these kinds of things that went over like this, but he wore the things on the head. I don't think they ever wore those kinds of things. He had some good points. He was smarter than the people thought, and he thought that he was equally giving back. Why, that was the easiest thing to do well he'd get across what he wanted across, I think.

E: He was considered a leader among his people, wasn't he?

S: Yes, he was.

E: He seemed to be respected wherever he went.

[Break in recording]

S: I think that people that have wanted things for a long time and couldn't get 'em because they weren't available will do mighty much better if it ever does come to be available than they would ordinarily, and that's what I believe. Because if they've seen people that they knew basically had many more burdens than they are, about things that they have an opportunity to learn, and see those persons going ahead, why, when they get the chance to prepare for that sort of thing, why, they—a good many of them will prepare.

E: Determination to get an education?

S: That's right.

E: And you mentioned their modesty and their good manners as far as you ever saw and overcoming their difficulties?

S: And then they'll draw a courteous response to decent care. And I tried my hardest to be better than that, but what I mean is that the fact that the ones—I tried my best to be, to make up for a lot that they lost, and I think that they showed that in their manner towards me and I appreciate it.

E: I'm sure you had a lot of friends among those Indians.

S: I certainly hope so.

[End of interview]

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