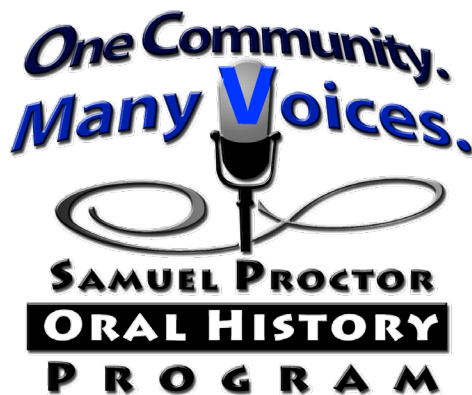


Chief Albert Sanders Sr.

Southeastern Indian Oral History Project (SIOHP)
CAT-180

Interview by:

Emma Reid Echols
November 30, 1992



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 180 Chief Albert Sanders, Sr.
Southeastern Indian Oral History Project (SIOHP)
Interviewed by Emma Reid Echols on November 30, 1992
15 minutes | 15 pages

Abstract: Albert Sanders, age eighty-seven at the time of the interview, was a former Chief of the Catawba Nation. He married Doris Blue and together they had eleven children. He worked at Rock Hill Printing and Finishing for fourteen years. He was elected to serve as Chieftain for the Catawba Nation and was involved with maintaining the old reservation and the distribution of acreage among the families that had been living on it at the time. He talks about some of the herbs that used to be used on the reservation and notes that it's hard to find them today. He also talks about his children and other people he knew throughout his life.

Keywords: [Catawba Nation; North Carolina--Charlotte; Land tenure; Family histories]

SAMUEL PROCTOR
ORAL HISTORY
PROGRAM
University of Florida

CAT 180

Interviewee: Albert Sanders, Sr.

Interviewer: Emma Reid Echols

Date of Interview: November 30, 1992

E: This is Emma Echols, I'm from Charlotte, North Carolina, 5150 Sharon Road. I'm down among the Catawba Indians, recording their oral history for the University of Florida, Dr. Sam Proctor. I'm visiting in the home of one of the Chieftains, Albert Sanders. I have his picture in my files, and I'm so glad to have a chance to visit with him today. Mr. Sanders, how old are you?

S: I was born October 10, 1904. So, I'll be eighty-eight years old October 10 coming.

E: Well, you've lived a long and a very useful life.

S: Yeah.

E: Tell me, who did you marry?

S: I married Doris Blue, married Albert.

E: How long has she been dead?

S: One year ago, March 16.

E: And together you had how many children?

S: Eleven.

E: Eleven children. How many of those are living?

S: Ten.

E: Ten of them are living. They're living all around Rock Hill?

S: Yeah.

E: Now they have all gone to school?

S: The one in Greenville was the oldest.

E: Yeah. I saw his picture, a fine-looking boy over there. What business is he in?

S: Welding.

E: Well, you've got a fine family, and they're all close by you, aren't they?

S: Yeah.

E: Did your wife make pottery? I see a little—

S: Never.

E: Some of them made them, and some of them didn't.

S: That's right.

E: Now where did you get your education?

S: On the reservation. What little of it I did get, I got right there. That's where I went but—I don't know why I **went miles** going outside the reservation and other places with that. And I worked at the bleachery, Rock Hill Printing and Finishing, with fourteen years and—

E: Fourteen years at the bleachery?

S: Yeah. And the [inaudible 2:07]. When I first went there, I used to call them the head boys when they first started that.

E: That's right.

S: And they'd come after me, at—I mean, I worked at Manchester Cotton Mill, Rock Hill and also the **cart** and the old mill standing there now, textiles and the bleachery—well, they all wanted me. They found out who I was and sees what I could do and know what I knowed. Everybody was after me. So, I just pick a job when I wanted it, and get it. I've been—I have, not bragging, but I have been well known ever since I was a young fella, and there's many, many people who know

me today. And I have got a good name. Never have been in the jail house or locked up in my life.

E: Of course, you wouldn't.

S: [Laughter]

E: You had a background here. Now who was your father and who was your mother?

S: Well, my mother was Nora Elvina Sanders. She was a Gordon, but **born she wasn't a Gordon**. Sally Gordon was her mother. And my daddy—

E: Sally Gordon was her mother?

E: Yeah. Bill Sanders, they called him—William Sanders was my daddy. And John Sanders was his daddy.

E: How many years were you at the bleachery?

S: Fourteen.

E: Fourteen years. Then you were one of the Chieftains elected by the Tribe for how many years?

S: That's right. Well, I was elected in there when I was up there at that time. I was the one that got the place that—I own part of it, some of it now and some of it got there and they sold it. And I left the old reservation 630 acres as it is, divided among the people who got it, money, their share in money, stayed there on the old reservation now and run it. They think they run that, but I left that for the Catawba Indians on roll. And so, it's still there and if I hadn't done that [inaudible 4:15]

E: Now you have your own three acres and your own home here?

S: Yeah. That's right, that's mine.

E: And you have a daughter and a son living with you now here?

S: That's right.

E: Now tell me about—you were a wise person to take the land instead of the money, weren't you?

S: Well, I think so at that time, because it was cheaper at that—a whole lot cheaper at that time. And now they sold what they did get, and I sold some of mine at that time at hard times.

E: Then you get a retirement pension from your job on the—

S: Yeah. I draw now a little. It ain't much, but I quit drawing—I quit work at that time, and took my retirement in [19]62, you see.

E: Yeah.

S: Okay. Well, I draw 490 dollars a month now from that. That's all I ever did draw. I raised my family on it and worked outside what I could do get and kept them going and still got—I'm still not hungry. I'm not what you'd call a man with plenty of money and plenty of this and that, but I did have sense enough to know you'd have to live according to what you made. I had—I could make some money with the crowd I had and draw that too.

E: That's good. And you had a small garden, I suppose, with your own vegetables?

S: Well, I never was a man that worked a garden. I worked outside. I was gone on different jobs, myself. My kids raising some stuff, now they do, but back in them times I never did farm but one time in my life. I helped a farmer. That was with Nelson Blue. Either way that was back 'fore I married. So, if you want me to tell

you that I can tell you living with him and then when me and my wife married. We were married December 14, 1925. December the [19]25, let's see, have to look back in there. And then Albert Jr., first kid—boy—was born October 28, 1926, about eleven months after our marriage he was born. Somewhere in that close few days maybe. He's still living in Greenville now, and he was born in [19]26. And the youngest is still here. And the other one now, dead and gone. She would have been living too, today, I guess if it wasn't for that bit.

E: You have so many beautiful pictures around here, all around, and some of these pictures I have too. What do you remember about the old church down on the reservation? Now you've got a brand-new church. What do you remember about the old Mormon church?

S: Well, all I ever knew was that I was born down there on the old reservation, and the old church was torn down on the 630 acres now. And this other's on the new land that I come in and divided up among the Tribe at that time and they got it. Well, I've been a fellow—most of 'em Mormons, born in my family were Mormons, but I'm one that never was what you'd call a pretend to be what I'm not. Actually, if you see me, everybody in [inaudible 08:04] knows me. That's Sheryl Gordon, Jimmy Gordon—**that ain't him**. Let me show you who—by myself [inaudible 08:20] Oh yeah, here he is. His family's here, and his two daughters in Greenville. And here he is.

E: Now this is your son, in Greenville?

S: The oldest one.

E: The oldest one. He's a fine-looking boy. Now what's his work? What job does he do?

S: Welding.

E: He's a welder.

S: Yeah.

E: That's a very fine one. What do you think is going to be the future of the Catawbas now that they're getting the settlement? Will it affect you or will it just be for the young ones?

S: No. According to the young ones, I wouldn't tell you why, they ain't even on the roll. I got a roll up until a certain time, but it wasn't on those 144 thousand acres of land. Actually, it was 144 thousand acres of land that the Indians owned when I wasn't here. Okay. But when I worked around and got what I got for 'em and put them where they are today, that's one of the reasons they're standing there and that's the reason I'm standing here. I've got the same rights you've got, do what you can do, if I had the money. I know I don't. But I don't have any cap keeping me from doing anything I want to do if I'm able to do it.

E: That's right.

S: I feed myself and fed my family and raised them where they is today. From what I worked.

E: You not only had friends among the Catawbas, but you had a lot of friends among the White people.

S: That's right.

E: Tell me some of the white people that you remember were your friends.

S: My friends?

E: Yeah.

S: Lots of them.

E: The Lesslies were good friends of yours I think. William Lesslie and Johnson Lesslie, and Mr. Greer Lesslie who managed the affairs for a while. You remember those?

S: Who?

E: Greer Leslie?

S: Yes. I remember him well. I used to work for him sometimes. He stayed over on number five.

E: That's right.

S: And that old barn out there, I helped—me and him—I helped another man over here and me and him built that barn out there when I was a little fellow.

E: You helped to build that barn?

S: Yeah. [Laughter]

E: Well, that is something. Somebody helped to build Neely's Creek Church, too. A few of you did.

S: Well, I didn't work on that. I know what you're talking about, but I didn't. And Greer Leslie you talking about, I know him and I know Sprat and Hayes and all of them fellows. Actually, they know me today, the ones in Columbia. All the big shots that got them big jobs, you know. They know Albert Sanders. If they told his name, they know about him. That's right.

- E: You're proud to be a Catawba Indian, aren't you? You've got a rich heritage. You're proud of it.
- S: That's right. Born one. And my mother was Nora Sanders. She married Bill Sanders. Okay. But now you see me standing in that picture there? That's the way I was raised. Hard. Sometimes I had something to eat, sometimes I didn't. My daddy worked, and she died young. I come up in what you would say the hard way until I got old enough to get out and work. I worked public work my own self on and on and on and that's why I made it today, and I'm the one that made the Indians—the Catawbans the way they are today, or they wouldn't have been here today. I put 'em there and get no credit for it.
- E: Well, lots of people remember you and give you credit for lots of things you've done. In Mrs. Brown's book, she gives you credit as being one of the Chieftains. That was a good thing. If you had one word of advice to give to the young Catawba Indians coming now, what would you tell them?
- S: Well, I've told them all, and tell them today—that's the reason some of them don't agree with what I would say, even living on the old reservation that I left for them to live on at that time. I do say, if the settlement comes up, I've got the papers in my locker that says who was born at that time on that roll that I was on, and who I was at that time. I got that. But like this other land was divided up among the ones at that time, they can do what they wanted with it. They own that. They have to pay taxes on it. I don't. As far as the old reservation, I left it as it was, when I was **born in** the State of South Carolina, not to be done away with. That's

the reason it's still down there. And I let those younger ones, who've been born now since that time stay there on that place, and says nothing about it, see me.

E: Do you speak any words of the Catawba language?

S: No. I wasn't born with the language and so I don't know any of it.

E: Well, you have a wonderful spirit, and I hope that God will bless you in the future.

[Break in recording]

S: You can ask anybody, any lawman, from anywhere else, and see if they don't know me here up. I don't know what. I even went to Atlanta when that was done Had that in the [inaudible 14:17] That's right. Peachtree Street.

E: Well, it's been a joy to be with you in your home and to see the pictures of all your family, you and your wife and your children. I like the picture of your mother. Are you with your mother in that second picture on the mantle? Sitting on her lap?

S: Oh, no, that's my daddy and his mother.

E: That's your grandmother, then?

S: Yeah.

E: And your father.

S: Yeah. That's way back, see.

E: Now who would your grandmother be?

S: I used to have some of that and so—that was in the Harris side. So, Lucinda Harris.

E: Now the woman would be?

S: Lucinda Harris.

E: Lucinda Harris. Then your grandfather would be?

S: John Sanders is the grandfather, and that's my daddy, that's his son.

E: Your daddy is sitting on her lap.

S: Yes.

E: Well, it has been a joy to talk with you. Let me see what—

[Break in recording]

E: I put my name on it, and I put your name on it. I'm Emma Echols, 5150 Sharon Road, Charlotte, North Carolina. I'm working on the oral history of the Catawba Indians, and I'm visiting in the home of Mr. Albert Sanders. He was a former Chieftain, and a very famous one. Someone told me—Gilbert Blue told me and others—that he probably knew more about their medicines that they used to use and where they are today. So, Mr. Sanders, can you tell me, what ones did you used to use?

S: Well, I used to—we used—you know where you can get up this stuff—you call it bear root. I've took it and made it and drunk it, you know, just boil it up and make a medicine out of it to drink like that. But I hadn't made none lately because I've done got up in age myself, and I hadn't been able to roam around and dig it up in the woods and hunt it and can't find it where it used to. Everything's done cleared out on the reservation we used to get it on.

E: Tell me the kind of roots you used to find.

S: You use fireweed, you can use **that kind of medicine**, heart leaves and stuff like that. They used to use that and make it up and use it for different things. You know, maybe something of the important part and breakout and stuff like that. I

know when they used to take that and make it up. I've made it a lot of times. I've used the bear root, they call it. In other words, it's good for people who get cold, got a—like I am today, walking around. It would hit me, and I would take it today, but I'm not able to get it.

E: Like for arthritis and rheumatism?

S: Yeah, like arthritis and rheumatism. Use it for that. In them times, well, I've made it for myself. But now, see, I was born myself, and I'm the man who was the Chief—Albert Sanders was the Chief. Where I'm at today on this place, well, I got that—they're always speaking about the 144 thousand acres of land. I don't know anything about the 144 thousand acres of land, I'm a lot older now. I've heard it. Fellas know and I don't. See, I was born October 10, 1904, myself. That's eighty-eight years ago, tenth of this month. That's when my birthday was. I was a Chief when we come up from the 638-acre reservation, on the old reservation, and I left. They wanted to do away the way with it as then the way Gilbert is now. Well I don't never butt in. They do what they want to do. When I got this, I got 3,388 five-tenths acres of land off the 144 thousand in 1959. That's when I was Chief at the time. **Both** had been the last Chief. But I never mentioned it to them. They wouldn't believe it no way. In other words, I'm the man in there. Got a lot of history on the ol' Catawba Indians. When they were born, who they was, and what. But I've got that, they don't have that.

E: The reservation has changed. It used to have lots of these herbs and things on the reservation. You don't know where they are much now, do you?

S: No. I don't even get out and roam around through the woods. And things have cleared up where they used to be and different people roaming for it—

E: Did Leroy Blue—did he know where some of it is, you suppose?

S: No.

E: The messages have disappeared. You depend on the doctors and the direct source, now, do you?

S: Yeah.

E: What doctors do you remember who used to come on the reservation?

S: Dr. Hill, they called him. He was at the Catawba Junction down here. He was the Catawba Indian doctor for way back when I was on the old reservation, but I've been up here on this place here since 1943 myself.

E: What do you remember about Dr. Hill?

S: Yeah.

E: He was quite a character, wasn't he?

S: Yeah.

E: He carried his little bag—

S: That's right.

E: —of medicines and knives and surgical things with him.

S: And back at that time, when he was doctor, doctors would be waiting on Catawba Indians at the old reservation. Well, it didn't cost like it is today, you see. Well, it's a little different from the old thing, but you pay the doctor a lot worse. Pay him three hundred and some dollars a year for him. What do you pay that for one big amount, for them to just walk in and out.

E: That's true. And Dr. Blackburn sometimes came down here?

S: He waited on us for years, yeah.

E: Well, you have two good doctors.

S: I knew Dr. Blackburn well, Dr. Straight. All of them doctors way long back. You take me, I'm lucky to be here. I was the Chief of the Catawba Indians when we was **born** by the state of South Carolina. We only had 630 acres of land. Well, when I was in there and we come up with this other, out of the 144 you hear about now, I set it up in 1959. Back in that time and I've got 3,350—88 and five-tenths acres of land. They be divided among the Catawba Indians, the land and money. Some took land and some took money. So much is for the **books** of the Catawba Indians, and I'm still honest. I'm the man that had that done. But 140 thousand out of that, I know nothing about.

E: Well, you've got some good memories, and the people here have good memories of you as their leader. You know that. I hear a great deal about that.

S: Yeah. Me and my wife used to talking about, we married December 14, 1925. My oldest son, Albert Sanders Jr., in Greenville, South Carolina today. He was born October 28, 1926. You see how old he is, he's sixty-five years old. This month, this is October the—

E: Twenty-first.

S: Well, he'll be sixty five. Twenty six, when 'til he was born.

E: What does your son, Albert Sanders Jr., do?

S: He's a welder now in Greenville, South Carolina. Randall, the next boy—two boys and nine girls. And twenty years apart, they two boys. Same birthday. He's

in the kitchen now, Randall. He was born October 28. One born in [19]26. Twenty years after, that one was born. Same birthday. October 28.

E: Well, you're proud of your family and you're proud of your heritage, aren't you?

S: Yeah. I kept them up all my life. If today I don't get no help, I don't beg nobody for nothing. I never have. I've always worked for what I've got. And I'm well known in the way you see me. Rock Hill, anybody anywhere else, within hundreds and thousands of miles knows Albert Sanders. That's the way it goes. I've got a good name, and I appreciate it and I'm glad of it.

E: Of all the people you've known, who has influenced you the most?

S: Today?

E: No. Who in the past—your family or your teachers—who had the biggest influence of your life?

S: Well, I was born and raised on the reservation, 630 acres of land. I've worked all my life. I've lived out—worked in Rock Hill, South Carolina. I've worked there way back when was [inaudible 8:52] booming in there and I went to work as a young fella in there. I've worked in the card room in there, in the room, cards drawing. And worked in the mill—cotton mill—'til I got married. I was foreman at the bleachery at the **Stanford Rise Apartments**. I worked there fourteen years, and, in two years' time, I was a foreman at the **Stanford Rise Apartments** on the third shift working twelve hours a night. A man I know well, out of the fourteen years I was there, I lose one hour out of the time I was supposed to be working for a funeral in seven years. [Laughter]

E: Who did you know that was your friend during those years? Your special friend—
a White friend?

S: Yeah.

E: Who was your very special one?

S: Well, there ain't no special. Anybody in Rock Hill, anywhere around miles away
from here knows. They know me today when they see me. I can work in a store
today that I've even forgotten some of by names, by looks when I was a young
man and way back, and still knows me today when I don't recognize the name of
them.

E: Well, it's hard to remember all those names. Well, you've had a good life and I've
had you've had the experiences here. You're proud to be a Catwaba Indian.

S: Yeah.

[End of interview]

Transcribed by: Callum Karoleski, December 22, 2021

Audit-edited by: Sabina Boddupalli, April 12, 2022

Final edited by: Indica Mattson, July 28, 2022