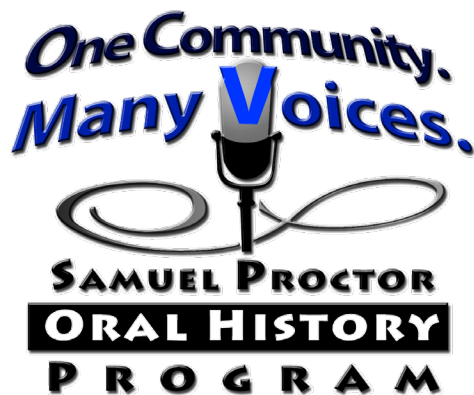


Phillip George

**Southeastern Indian Oral History Project (SIOHP)
CAT-099**

Interview by:

**Edith Frances Canty Wade
December 1, 1974**



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CAT 099 Phillip George
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29 minutes | 16 pages

Abstract: Phillip George, interviewed in Rock Hill, discusses his life, beginning with his current job in the Navy in Jacksonville, Florida, and describing his family tree. He talks about how holiday dinners such as for Thanksgiving and Christmas used to be celebrated jointly by hundreds of people on the reservation, and how he believes it signals a decline in the togetherness of the Tribe. He moves on to describe his time in school, and his training and time in Vietnam while in the military, which he joined after he quit school. Finally, he discusses his children, his voting record, and why he does not attend church.

Keywords: [Catawba Nation; John Early Brown; South Carolina--Rock Hill; Family histories; Military participation]

SAMUEL PROCTOR
ORAL HISTORY
P R O G R A M
University of Florida

CAT 099

Interviewee: Phillip George

Interviewer: Edith Frances Canty Wade

Date of Interview: December 1, 1974

W: This Frances Wade, I live on route 3 Box 304, Rock Hill, South Carolina. I'm gathering oral history of the Catawba Indians for the University of Florida. Today is December 1, 1974. Today, I'm talking with Phillip George. Phillip, what is your address?

G: [inaudible 00:32]

W: Where do you live now?

G: I live in Jacksonville, and I don't even know the address. What is the address, **Brenda?**

BW: 5404 Little Acres Lane.

W: Maybe you'd better say it louder Butch, so it will take on the tape.

G: 5404 Little Acres Lane, Jacksonville, Florida.

W: I know Phillip better as Butch, and so if I miss and say Butch, well I'm still talking to the same person. Phillip, how long have you lived in Florida?

G: **I've been here** four years.

W: And what are you doing down in Florida?

G: I'm in the navy.

W: You're in the navy. Well, you have a family down there too with you, don't you?

G: Yes. I have my son who is about eleven years old, Anthony and my wife, Brenda.

W: Who were your parents, Phillip?

G: John Marvin George and Evelyn George.

W: Who were your grandparents?

G: My grandfather on my mother's side is John Early Brown and my grandmother on my mother's side is Edith Brown. And my grandfather on my father's side is J. P. George and my grandmother on my father's side is Easter George.

W: I don't know if you remember J. P. George or not, but I remember him real well, and he used to tell me that he lived across the river with the Nesbits and he was sort of a housekeeper or something to them, and that they were real good to him. I would really have loved to tape an interview with him. What brother or sisters do you have, Butch?

G: Let me see. My oldest brother is Howard, and let me see, it's Lawrence, Howard and the next one is Charles Lewis and the next one is Faye and the next one is **JoAnne** and then there's myself and one sister that's dead Nancy and one brother that's dead is Kenneth, and then there's John Early, then Susan Marie and then Wayne George who is the baby.

W: You're sort of like me. You have a trouble keeping up with all of your brothers and sisters. What kind of work did your father do, Butch?

G: He was a carpenter, for as long as I can remember, but before that and looking into some of his past books that I went through last night, he was a textile worker at one of the mills and he used to be one of the representatives for the textile union there at the Goldtex I believe it is.

W: Yes, it was the Goldtex because he, uh, got my husband his first job.

G: [Laughter]

W: And he taught him how to work in the mills. What kind of work did your mother do?

G: I believe she worked in the cotton mill at one time, but, as far back as I can remember she has never really done any work with the exception of she used to make pottery and stuff like that and take it to the reservation of Cherokee and sell in the fall of the year.

W: I believe that at one time when your mother was much younger, she went to Ohio and stayed for a summer or two and made pottery there. You probably don't remember any of that, but your mother, she works now. What kind of work does she do?

G: She used to work in a hose factory, and I think now she works with a curtain company making draperies for homes.

W: And your father, does he still work or is he retired?

G: He's in semi-retirement.

W: Is he in good health, Butch?

G: He quit working, I think it was two years ago, and he really got down and got sick, and he said he thought he would feel better if he went back to work and I saw him about six months later, and he had went back to work and I think his health had improved, just about 100% over him quitting working.

W: Butch, do you remember any old stories, or anything that you might have heard your grandparents or your—I know you was around Uncle Early a lot, and he knew a lot and, do you remember anything that they might have told you about what it was like on the Catawba Reservation a long time ago?

G: They used to tell me about when they had the old ferry and when the soldiers were moving through here and I'm not sure what year it was. But he used to tell

me they'd come to their home and ask for part of their food, and they were all up and down the river and I don't know. I'd have to sit down and really think about the old stories he used to tell me.

W: I know he knew a lot of 'em and I know you really don't have time to sit here and talk a long time with me, but, what you remember about the holidays that you had just now. Just a few days ago you came home, and I think you all got together as a group and had a big Thanksgiving dinner. What was it like when you were growing up at Thanksgiving or Christmas or what can you remember about that?

G: Well, what it used to be like isn't like it is today. Today, when you have a Thanksgiving dinner you may have your brother or sister or your aunt and uncle over, or your mother. But that's about it, and I don't know, before I came in the service about five or six years, or so, before that in the early [19]50s, they used to have, say at a birthday party or Thanksgiving, or Christmas, on the reservation you'd get, everybody would get together and they'd have a big dinner and you'd have maybe hundred and fifty, two hundred or three hundred people there and used to be something to really look forward to in the summertime, at Thanksgiving or 4th of July.

W: Well, don't you think, Butch, that that tells that the Indians were closer together, or more united, maybe, in that time. Or do you think maybe it's because we have so many different jobs now, we just don't take time?

G: I think it's because the people were a lot closer together and more of them lived here on the reservation then, than they do now. A lot of them live in town and

they just don't care to take the time to come down and visit the people like they should, or like they would like to.

W: I can remember, when it was Thanksgiving, every Thanksgiving, I guess fifty or sixty Indians would have their dogs and their guns and go hunting here on the reservation. I also remember whether it was rain; or snow, or whether it was fair weather, that Gary and your daddy would go fishing and come back with tubs, absolutely big tubs, full of fish. And then they'd sit there and clean 'em and we would have big fish dinners. When you were growing up, Butch, I know that in your home, like all of our homes, we didn't have running water. We didn't have any bathroom facilities, and we didn't have the kind of heat we have now, but what were some of the things you had to do, some of your duties as a child?

G: I didn't have to do nothin'. I had all my bigger brothers to do it.

[Laughter]

W: Well, you're lucky.

G: No, I had to carry water. It was about maybe, two hundred yards from where we used to live, near Red River on the old Springsteen Farm. It was about two hundred yards I had to carry water. I had to cut wood in the wintertime. We had a horse, a couple of cows that we had to take care of year-round, and my father, even though he was working as a carpenter, he would plow the fields, and plant stuff in the early spring and we'd have to take care of that in the summer and spring of the year.

W: Now Butch, you're talking about living out near Red River. This is on the new part of the reservation that was bought.

G: Yeah, that's right.

W: Did you ever live on this part, the old reservation?

G: Yeah, I used to live right behind you over here. [Laughter]

W: Yes, you sure did. What do you remember about that? Can you remember anything about living over there?

G: Yeah, when we lived over there, I think Mary Anne and Little Richard used to live in the house where my grandmother is living now. And we used to fight and play with all the other kids around here and that's where my brother Kenneth died. It is too, because he got over there playing in a mud hole and he caught pneumonia.

BW: He died of [inaudible 10:16]

W: But he did take pneumonia, didn't he?

G: Yeah.

W: Now. What kind of a house did you live in, Phillip?

G: I don't remember much about the house.

W: You don't remember much about the house. Well, it was made of planks of lumber, wasn't it?

G: Yes, I remember right, it was just what the guys would take and gather from the lumber yards. Say where a guy cut a two by four, you have the old piece of board left off the edge, with the bark and stuff still on it. That's what most of the houses down here were made out of then.

W: We were all, we all lived in just about the same circumstances. What can you remember about church? Did you go to church? Were you taken to church when you were small?

G: Yes, and it was. I don't know, it was really an experience and I think that a lot of kids today should experience the same type of bringing up that we had back then, because, when I was baptized, I was baptized in the Catawba River down at the—down at the White Bottoms?

W: Uh-huh.

G: Down in the White Bottoms and, I think there was four or five others that got baptized the same day and must have been with all the people that belonged to church and the elders and the missionaries and stuff, there was maybe a hundred or so people there and today when one of the children are baptized or something like that, you may only have just the family there.

W: That's true. Now, can you remember the month you got baptized?

G: No, I can't. I was looking at daddy's papers last night.

W: I remember that I got baptized in February and you know that was a cold month and there was—

G: In the Catawba River?

W: In the Catawba River, and there was seven of us got baptized and we changed clothes in the corn field. So, you can see the difference from just those few years. What church did you go to Butch?

G: I went to the Mormon church here on the reservation.

W: Can you remember anything about that old church?

G: Yes, it's still standing.

W: Unh-uh.

G: It is too.

W: No, not the one right across there. The foundation of it is there and Louise Vick has her house built on the foundation.

G: Uh, yes. There was a large church. It used to have a bell in it too, didn't it?

W: It had a bell right at the top, yes.

G: And I used to go over with my mother and father, and after they built the new church, Samuel begged them to preserve the old church and keep it from being destroyed by the smaller kids here on the reservation, moved into it and used it for a home, until it burnt down with all of their clothes and possessions in it.

W: The old church also, that stood right across the hill from here. I can remember that every time there was a meeting maybe the road would be just full of parents and their children and most all parents had at least 8 or 10 children, and so that was a lot of people walking to church and it didn't matter whether it was raining or what the weather, they were always there. You went to church like you went to school. You only got to stay out if you were just deathly sick. Now we'll talk about you going to school. Did you ever go to school down here on the old reservation?

G: No, I don't think I had that privilege, when I started school, we were living out on the newer part of the reservation, out near Red River, and they had a grammar school there; in the little town of Red River, and that's where I went to school, I think, the first three years.

W: Did you finish high school?

G: No, I didn't. I finished school when I got in the service.

W: Do you remember any of your first teachers?

G: My first-grade teacher and my second-grade teacher and my third-grade teacher was Mrs. Boyd and I believe she came into a school that I was going to about six or seven years later as a substitute teacher.

W: Have you had any further training? I'm sure that you must have while you were in the service.

G: Yes, I've had a few training privileges there. I've learned to work on all the—any type gun that the military service had. That's from the smallest caliber pistol that the service has up to their biggest gun that fires just like a small pistol and also the newer-type, space-age rocket launchers.

W: Now, I know all of you George boys and I know some of the things that you really like to do. I know what you used to like to do. Do you like sports?

G: Yes, I do.

W: Do you have any particular sport that you like better than another?

G: Yes. I used to play football and I played that, I think, from the time I was in the fourth or fifth grade until I quit going to school and before I went in the service.

W: What about hunting?

G: Yes, I think I'd rather go hunting than I would eat.

W: Another brother of yours said those same words. What do you hunt for now?

G: Well, just the other day, here on the reservation, I came up here for a visit with my parents and to visit everybody on the reservation, my oldest brother and myself and my younger brother and my brother's son, Tommy, we all went hunting here on the reservation for squirrel and some dove and we didn't find anything. I think they'd all gone Christmas shopping.

W: [Laughter] Do you like to fish?

G: Yes, well I've been fishing ever since I was a little fellow living on the bank of the river with my grandfather, Early Brown, and we used to fish all the time, and I think that's where, back then, we got maybe 50% of our food that went on the table was hunting and fishing.

W: I can remember that also. Now, you talked about being in the service and the things that you had learned. Now, you've been in service for many years, Phillip? Do you know?

G: Fourteen and a half.

W: How old were you when you went in service?

G: Eighteen.

W: You quit school and went into service?

G: No, I'd already quit school.

W: Do you know why you quit school?

G: Yes, my greatest pleasure in going to school was not really studying even though I could get by with most anything that they had. I had a better, I think advantage and everything. I played football and I get along great with everybody, and the year before I quit school, I fractured two vertebrates in my neck, and I had to quit playing football and I lost interest in school. So, I quit.

W: Now, once again, let's get back to your service, and you might not remember all of the things because you've been in for quite a while now. Where did you go when you first joined, you were in the Navy?

G: Yes, I took my basic training in Great Lakes, Illinois in the February, March and April, and most things I remember about that is it snowed one night- it started one Friday night, and it was still snowing on Wednesday, and we had about forty-two inches of snow.

W: My goodness. Why have you stayed in service so long? You're making this your career, I'm sure, now, aren't you?

G: Well, I'm just trying it out for twenty years and if I like it, I'm gonna make a career out of it.

[Laughter]

W: Were you ever in any battle zones, Phillip?

G: Yes, I've got six campaign ribbons for Vietnam, and also the government Vietnam medal that was issued to the military service that served there from the Vietnamese nation.

W: What kind of ship were you on in Vietnam?

G: I was on one of the older type aircraft carriers, CBA-19, the USS Hancock.

W: You'll still be a young man when you get out of service. What kind of work do you want to do, or do you plan to do?

G: I'm going to try to get the military to pay for and send me to school before I get out to be a gunsmith, because in this area and around here, the people that do a lot of hunting, there is no one that is really qualified to work on the guns.

W: That sounds like a good vocation. Now we're gonna get the real important part of your life. Where were you married?

G: I was married, the first time, in my home on North Jones in Rock Hill.

W: To whom were you married?

G: Grace Elizabeth Taylor.

W: Do you have any children by that marriage?

G: Yes, I have one son, eleven, and his name is Phillip Anthony.

W: Now, we've talked about what it was like for you when you were growing up, do you—well, I'm getting ahead of myself. You have your bride sitting here with you and I'm about to forget her and I didn't intend to. Would you go ahead and talk about her for a few minutes?

G: Well, I met my present wife in Jacksonville, and we went together for a year or so and decided we'd go ahead and get married and we're expecting another little George to come along about in February.

W: And what is her name Phillip?

G: I didn't know she had one.

[Laughter]

G: Her name is Brenda Debra Waldrip.

W: And I know your wife is not an Indian.

G: No, she's White.

W: And your other wife was not an Indian either.

G: No, she was White also.

W: Well now, your wife works. I know that she does. What kind of work does she do?

G: What are you?

BW: Nurse.

G: She's a nurse.

W: What kind of opportunities do you see for your children? The one that you have and the one that is coming along, what kind of opportunities do you see for them that you didn't have when you were growing up?

G: I see better opportunities for education, and, uh, your equal opportunity to work where, I know when I was growing up it was a lot harder for a person to, if they didn't get their education here on the reservation and they went to the White schools, it was almost just like a Black guy trying to live in a community. He had to fight his way through school all the time.

W: And that hasn't been very long ago, has it? For some people, yes, I'm sure that it is. Phillip, do you go to church very often now?

G: No, I haven't been going to church for a few years now.

W: Do you have any reason for not going, or just got out of the habit?

G: Yeah, I just got out of the habit, and you can say I don't know a lot of the military guys that go there they form a military life, and it's lot different from what you do when you're in civilian life. A lot of the guys stay with the church, and you could call it weakness or not, but I just say that I'm not gonna be hypocrite and go out and cuss all week and go to church on Sunday and that is my main reason for not going to church.

W: Well, one day you'll change and take your children, I'm sure. I know that you have your son with you. Do you take part in any PTA that they have at school, or anything down there?

G: No. My hours are just a rotating basis, and I don't have—my hours of work would interfere with me trying to participate in any PTA or Boy Scouts, which I tried to get into when I first got down there.

W: Uh-huh. Are you registered to vote, Phillip?

G: Nope.

W: And so, you have never voted.

G: No.

W: Do you know why you have never voted?

G: Too lazy to go down and register.

W: Oh well, that's a reason too, if you want to call it a reason. Well, I think that so many Catawbas and most people that I've asked, have not voted or only voted once and I think it might be the fact that for many years we couldn't vote. We wanted to, and couldn't, and now we have that opportunity, and we just fail to take advantage of it, but you should get in the habit of voting because you might help to get somebody in there that you really want. Do you have friends among the Blacks and the Whites, Phillip?

G: Yes, I do, and I can say from my experience in the service that some of my better friends in the service have been Blacks.

W: I sit here and look at Phillip, and think about when he was growing up and how his mother and father used to bring all of the children over to my house and I have this close feeling to them like they're almost my brothers or my sisters or my children, and I tell you that Phillip is not—I want to kind of describe him just a little bit—he's not very tall. He's real husky and he's getting kind of bald in the top

and he's got just black hair and he's got this huge, what do you call thin thing around your chin, all the way around.

G: It's hair Francis. They call it a beard. [Laughter]

W: A beard, this was I'm trying to say. A beard that runs completely around his chin and Phillip, I don't believe I asked you what year you was born, did I? I don't believe I did. When were you born?

G: They're trying to make me twenty years older than I am! I was born February 16, 1941.

W: And so, that will make you how old now?

G: Thirty-three.

W: Well, you're still a young man. In the thirty-three years that you've been here, do you think that you have accomplished very much, or do you think that you've accomplished any of the things you wanted to accomplish?

G: I don't really know because I haven't, you know, really set my mind on anything say in the distant future that I've really wanted to accomplish.

W: Now, the last question that I'm going to ask you is: Are you proud to be an Indian, and do you think that the culture of the Indians—which is pottery making for us—should be preserved?

G: Well, I could sit here and talk all day about that. Yes, I've always been proud to be an Indian. I used to get in more trouble in school for fighting because someone would make fun of my being an Indian or my brother's being an Indian, and, on the culture of the Indians, yes, I've always **thought** that it should be preserved and from the meeting I attended last night, that the Tribe held, I think

they're trying to do this now. And I do believe that it should have been done maybe ten, twenty years ago.

W: I want to thank you, Butch, for taking time to come down here before you leave and go back to Florida, and I want to say just one other thing about Phillip. He has a huge boat, or he did have, and I would just love to go fishing with him one day and he also had a motorcycle that he just rode around here, and he rides real well and he also had a horse and he brought it down here and wanted me to ride it and it was such a huge thing and I never rode before. I got up on it and the saddle felt like it was about to fall off and, he's just an all-around good person and the kind person you would think that Indians would be.

[End of interview]

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