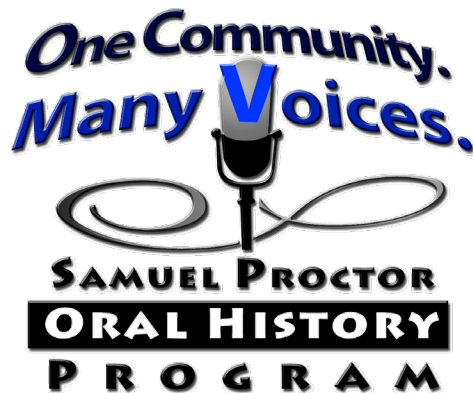


# Richard Jackson Harris

**Southeastern Indian Oral History Project (SIOHP)  
CAT-020**

**Interview by:**

**Emma Reid Echols  
January 6, 1972**



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**CAT 020 Richard Jackson Harris**  
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**31 minutes | 20 pages**

**Abstract:** Richard Jackson Harris recalls his life living on the old reservation. Harris starts by detailing his experiences in the first World War. He talks about his parents and grandparents as well as his only currently living sibling, his sister. In recalling his childhood, Harris details his time in school, talks about his father's farm that he helped tend to, and explains the medicinal benefits of yellow root and where it is grown. Harris discusses his own work history, especially about his work in soil conservation. He ends by talking about the presence of alcohol on the old reservation.

**Keywords:** [Catawba Nation; South Carolina--Rock Hill; Agriculture; History]

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

CAT 020

Interviewee: Richard Jackson Harris

Interviewer: Emma Reid Echols

Date of Interview: January 6, 1972

E: —in the home of a Catawba Indian. I'm working on the oral history of the Catawba Indians. Will you tell me your full name and your address?

H: Richard Jackson Harris. Route 6, Rock Hill, South Carolina, 397 Box.

E: Mr. Harris, have you always lived here?

H: First time I left here was when I's in service. Been here all my life.

E: Now, where were you in service?

H: I served in France.

E: In the First World War?

H: First World War.

E: How long were you in France?

H: About eleven months and a few days.

E: Eleven months and a few days. Were you wounded while you were there?

H: Never got in a battle. See, they signed on the eleventh **the armistice**. Never did get up to the front.

E: Tell me about your early days. You were born here on the reservation? Who were your father and your mother?

H: David Harris. They used to call him D. A. Harris. My mother was Mrs. Harris. She died when I was small. I don't remember too much about her personally.

However, I just remember when she died, that's all. I remember going to her funeral.

E: Then, after her death, you lived with your grandmother?

H: Stayed with my grandmother.

E: Now, who was your grandmother?

H: Sherry Harris.

E: And her husband, your grandfather was—

H: The name of my grandfather was James Harris. **He passed on now.**

Somewhere way back then and I think, I don't really remember, he was **in the military or something.**

E: He was in the Civil War, Confederate War, wasn't he?

H: I reckon musta been, way back yonder. I don't know.

E: Now is he buried here?

H: Yeah, he's buried over there at the old graveyard.

E: The old, old graveyard?

H: Yeah.

E: Is there a marker on his grave over there, give the dates?

H: I don't know whether there is or not. If there was over there [inaudible 2:12] **know his birthday** because it's covered then. I don't know who covered it at that time.

E: Now, do you have any brothers and sisters?

H: I had no full brothers, didn't have but three full sisters. They're all dead now but one, that's Edith Brown.

E: Edith Brown?

H: Yeah.

E: Now, where does she live?

- H: You see, go up there second house from here and turn back to your right. She stays back over there most time, but sometimes she don't be there. She's don't hardly ever stay there.
- E: Now, how old is your sister?
- H: She must be about eighty-seven years old.
- E: And how old are you?
- H: I'll be seventy-four next month.
- E: Seventy-four. Well, I bet you remember some interesting days years ago. What do you remember about your first school?
- H: Well, the first school I remember going to was Mrs. Dunlap.
- E: Mrs. who?
- H: Dunlap.
- E: Dunlap. Yes.
- H: That's the first one I remember going to.
- E: Now, how big was the school? Was this one room or two rooms?
- H: It wasn't but one room.
- E: Was she a good teacher?
- H: Well, I don't know right away, it's been so long. It seems like she was all right far as I know about her.
- E: Did you boys help to make the fires in the morning and keep the building clean?
- H: We had to get up, carry the wood in, you know. All the old people just wanted, you know, cut wood right close there. All you'd have to do, carry it in, and go get water.

E: Now where did you get your water?

H: We'd go to a spring to get water. Different ones, you know, each day'd go to the spring and we'd lose **fingernails** every day.

E: And you'd have that bucket of water on that porch?

H: Take it inside.

E: Take it inside?

H: Yes.

E: Did you go to school even in the cold winter when there was snow and ice on the ground?

H: Well, if it got too bad, we didn't go.

E: Now, Mrs. Dunlap lived close to the school. Whereabouts was her home, in regards to the school building?

H: Well, **right up there**. Right up the road here, 'bout one, two, three, the fourth house from here on the right going up the road. It's up on the high bank now, used to be kinda level. 'Til they cut that new dry road there, see, cut it down low, you know, and it's setting up on the bank. But, it's an ol' house. Government tore it down now, but that was where it used to be.

E: Now Mr. Dunlap was a farmer, I believe, did he taught the Indians how to farm, their methods?

H: I don't know whether he teached them to farm or not. I don't know, 'cause I's too small to remember what he done. With the way he farmed a little bit hisself, I think. Had somebody do the work, you know. I think that's about all.

E: You boys would play ball and things like that at recess time or at lunch time, did you not? During that time?

H: Well, if they'd play ball back at that time, it'd be a little yarn ball, you know, what they'd make up and they'd play with it.

E: And did you have any swings or did you use tree branches—

H: No, we didn't have no swings.

E: Do you remember helping to ring the bell that was up in the steeple at the school?

H: Yes, **the bell, we** had to ring it. You had to take up and everything like that.

E: And you could hear that bell for a long ways over the reservation?

H: Yeah, you could hear it all over the reservation.

E: Whatever happened to that old bell? Do you have any idea?

H: I don't know whatever happened to it. **Back in the old days we used to give it to it.** And then lightning hit that school. Lightning hit it and burned it down.

E: Now, how long did you go to Mrs. Dunlap's school? You remember how many years you went to school at?

H: I don't remember exactly how long I went to her, maybe two, three years, something like that.

E: So then after that, do you remember Mr. Lesslie? Did he teach you, too?

H: Let's see. I don't know. Could be but then Mrs. Sparks come in from Catawba Junction.

E: Yes.

H: She teached there for a year.

E: And Mr. Sparks also taught, didn't he?

H: Yeah, he teached there, too.

E: Did you remember Miss Macie Stevenson taught, I believe, one year there, or maybe two years?

H: Who that?

E: Miss Macie Stevenson, a lady, drove out from Lesslie on a horse and buggy and taught?

H: What year that was?

E: I think it was about 1912. I'm not quite sure. I'll have to look that up.

H: There was a pretty mean fella teach here. He come from down in the country somewhere. **I don't know where.** He teached there a while. **But he would teach in these here woods, you know, but he teached here.** Lesslie did teach at one of 'em.

E: There were two of 'em, Mr. Sep Lesslie and Mr. Than Lesslie. Both, I believe, taught for a short time. I don't know how long they taught.

H: I don't know how long, either.

E: And when you finished school, you thought of getting a job. Where did you get a job, and what did you do then?

H: I don't know when I did do that. I helped my daddy on the farm. Plowed, **moved** the dirt.

E: Did you work some of this river bottom that I see outside your window here?

H: Yeah. We worked that little part on back that way.

E: What were some of the crops you and your father raised?



H: Cotton and corn. Peas and stuff like that.

E: Then you went into—

H: Potatoes.

E: —Rock Hill to sell those products?

H: We didn't sell **but** a bunch of cotton.

E: What about fruit trees? Did you have any fruit trees around here?

H: We had a few, not too many.

E: Now how close was your home to the Catawba River. Your father's home?

H: Well, it used to be back over there. Something like, well, about a quarter of a mile from the river.

E: Now, when you went to school, some of the children came across the river to go to school. Do you remember any of those boys and girls that crossed the river in a canoe, or in a flat?

H: Well, if you cross the river, you'd have to cross down there. There used to be a flat down there, and someone sitting down on the other side of the river. If you go through there—I don't remember about them things but I guess they did.

E: They would have to come across the river there. There was no bridge, I'm sure.

H: Wasn't no bridge.

E: When were you married?

H: I was first married in 1916.

E: And then when did you go to the war?

H: 1918.

E: 1918?

H: Went up there in August 1918. Went to camp here west of Spartanburg. Stayed there little over a month and we were—on September 14 we was going across.

Stayed in camp little over a month on this side.

E: Were there any other Indian boys with you on the boat?

H: There wasn't nobody that lived around here. Wasn't but four of us went. That's brother-in-law and two first cousins.

E: Now what were their names?

H: Well, Early Brown, Ernie Sanders, and Joe Sanders. They's only three 'sides myself, and they went 'fore I did to the camp, but they never did go across.

E: So, you were the only one that went across?

H: I's the only one from here.

E: Well, I know you were glad to get back home. Did they have a celebration for you when you came home?

H: They didn't know when I's gone come so I didn't notify 'em.

E: Your father was still living at that time?

H: Yes, he was still living at that time. He's working up at the Highland Park, the mill.

E: When you came home, what did you do then? Did you farm or did you get a job?

H: No, I volunteered back up. Went back in the service. Stayed in one more year.

E: One more year in the service. Now where were you stationed then?

H: Camp Jackson, to Camp Jackson at that time.

E: Yes. Now, do you have any children?

H: No.

E: You been married twice?

H: Yes.

E: Who was your first wife?

H: Maggie Brown.

E: Maggie Brown. And did she have any brothers and sisters?

H: Yes. Most of 'em died in 1918 when that flu come on.

E: That was a bad time, wasn't it?

H: I reckon. I wasn't there.

E: You were in the service, of course.

H: I was in the service at that time.

E: Now what do you do for a living now?

H: I draw from Social Security, I draw from the army, too.

E: And your wife has been ill, so you need all the money you can get, I'm sure.

H: Yeah. I think it would be hard how high stuff is now. The stuff is high.

E: You've seen a lot of changes from the old days 'til now, haven't you?

H: Yes, lotta changes from the past. You take way back yonder when I's coming up, we used to work all this land all day. But now it's all growed up into pines and stuff.

E: Was this land ever very good for farming, or was it too rocky?

H: It's all good land, but some of it's rocky. But really that doesn't make too much difference about the rock, 'cause it still make good stuff. Now, you take, well, I farmed in the **pit**. I farmed in the sandy region up the river a ways here, about a mile up the river. And it's mostly all different sand, you know. What little rocks there was in it, the one little old place had little round rocks and they wasn't bad. I

mean, the other land there, that old land up there, it's rocky but it's good land. It'll make the stuff if you can work it. All of it'll make if you can work it. It's like them bottom down there, it'll make good stuff when you work it.

E: There's very little farming done down here now?

H: Ain't none.

E: Just a little bit of gardening or that sort of thing?

H: Just a little bit of gardening. That's about all.

E: Do you have your own garden now?

H: Well, I try to put out a little bit. I don't put out too much now.

E: And do you have your hogs or cows in there or any—

H: There's no hogs and no cows. I ain't supposed to eat too much, 'cause I got high blood.

E: Now how do you get into Rock Hill when you go in?

H: I get somebody to take me. I ain't got no way to go. I don't need no car now, I got too old. When life is full of **things you don't need a car so that way, I won't have a wreck. See, so now** I don't drive.

E: Your wife was telling me about the old man Thomas Stevens, the old, old Indian.

H: Yeah.

E: Let's see what you remember 'bout him. You remember seeing him, I'm sure?

H: I've just seen him, that's all. I don't know too much about him. He stayed all around here. He stayed up there with my grandmother sometimes. Leave sometimes and he just stayed 'round with other people all 'round here.

- E: Do you remember any of the—He used to tell stories to the children. Did you ever hear any of the stories he told?
- H: I don't remember him telling no stories. He coulda told 'em, but I don't remember that he told any stories.
- E: Do you remember any of the old superstitions or ideas that the Indians used to have? Now, for instance, we white people won't wanna open an umbrella in the house, it brings bad luck. You remember any of the old sayings like that among the Indians?
- H: I've heard that, but I don't know whether he told it or someone else told it. They claim it's bad luck. I don't know.
- E: What about the medicines you used to use? You remember the kind of medicine you used to use?
- H: We used to use different kinds of medicines for different things, but I don't know some of them may still use if you know find, for instance, yellow root, I used to use it, but I haven't used none in a long time. It's good for **fever**, givin' you appetite. It'll make you eat, too.
- E: What do you do, boil it to make a tea?
- H: No, you can just put it, take the roots and wash 'em, put it in the bowl or somethin', let it set there. It'll get strong. You ever take "Three Sisters"?
- E: No. I know what you're talking about.
- H: Well, I believe this is stronger than "Three Sisters" if you let it stand long enough. Yes, it is better when you drink it. **If you get the offer, do.**
- E: Did any of that yellow root live, growing around here now?

H: Yeah, there's some about three-quarter of a mile from here.

E: Did you ever try any of Chief Blue's medicines? He used to make a good deal of medicines.

H: I never tried none of his.

E: You plowed your fields. Did you ever find any of the Indian relics? Did you ever find any arrowheads or—

H: I find a few once in a while, you won't find 'em now because they were farming now over the cliffs now graves up on over where there was an ol' showdown, layin' around anymore sometime you'd find them and they're just layed out with broken plates, you know, put in the grave. Like I said, back at the house there [inaudible 17:06] find out down there.

E: Indians used those to mostly shoot birds with, didn't they?

H: Yes.

E: Mr. Harris, I believe you had one son. What's his name?

H: Alfred Harris.

E: Alfred?

H: Yes.

E: Now he's married and has children, is that right?

H: Yes.

E: How many grandchildren do you have then? Is it six?

H: I done got three boys—

E: And three girls?

H: —and three girls.

E: Why, you're lucky! Six children.

H: Yes.

E: Where does your son work?

H: Working in the **industry**.

E: He's been there for a long time, hasn't he?

H: Been there about twenty-five years, I think.

E: Now, does he own his own home?

H: Yes. Well, he had to build it. He had to borrow money from his company through the bank exchange. He's still paying on that.

E: Well, he must be doing real well. Now, does he have children in school? In Lesslie School?

H: He's got some going, two going to school here, but I don't know where they go right now. Now he's got one, one daughter married, and he got one who work up there at the [inaudible 18:25] Hospital, and she work at York County Hospital.

E: Now what's her name?

H: Vicky.

E: Vicky?

H: She works York County Hospital.

E: They seem to be doing well. And then there's some children at home, I believe?

H: Yes. Vicky has one, and Kenneth. Kenneth, he works out **industry**, too. That's the older boy. But I think he works in shipping department. I think that's what he's working at, seems like that's what he's working at it. But he already finished college before he started that **at the shipping department**. He's still working.

Well, he worked at the industrial plant and he come out and he's saving money to go back and finish college.

E: Where did he go to college? To Clemson?

H: Salt Lake City.

E: Oh, Salt Lake City. Well, you've got lots of friends out there, I'm sure.

H: I guess he has. Well, he's got another boy, done the same thing but he didn't finish college. He was going to finish, but they done sent him out on a mission. I reckon he'd have to finish the mission 'fore finish college. Both of 'em working in the mill up there and pay their own way through college, you know.

E: Well, that's wonderful. They had ambition to go get an education, didn't they?

H: Yes.

E: Now about your son, did he finish high school or where did he go?

H: I don't know whether he ever finished high school or not.

E: And did he marry an Indian?

H: She's about quarter or half or something like that.

E: You said you were three-quarters Indian?

H: Yes.

E: And now let's see. Your mother was a full-blooded Indian, you think?

H: She must not've been. I don't know if she was. She wasn't.

E: But your father was a full-blooded Indian?

H: Yes.

E: Now tell me about your home here. Do you own your home and your land here?

H: Well, the state owns the land. We ain't got no deed for this land.



E: But this is on the old reservation.

H: Yes, ma'am.

E: How many acres do you have here that you can work and plant?

H: They can't buy it or sell. That's one thing, they can't ever buy it or sell it.

E: But the building, the house itself, belongs to you, doesn't it?

H: Yes.

E: Now, can you cut as much wood as you need?

H: Yes, you can cut all you want, need.

E: Were you glad when the state divided up the land and did away with the school and you all became citizens?

H: No. I didn't vote for it, way they divided it up. I wasn't for it. I know majority rule, you know, but I wasn't for it. See, I worked for the federal, **see**. I worked soil conservation work.

E: What kind of work did you do in the soil conservation work?

H: Build pastures, sow grain on soil conservation, like that and fixed the land up.

E: How long did you work for the government like that?

H: Worked for 'em about fourteen years, I reckon.

E: Well, you have an interesting life now.

H: **I've got family life now. But I've been around. Back in my day I had another one, but I had to have that reminder you know. See I don't know where it happened, I don't know.**

E: You've been a farmer, you've been a soldier, you've come home and worked on the soil conservation. You never did work at the mill, though, did you?

H: Yes, I used to work the mill.

E: Industrial mill?

H: I worked there just a little bit. Most time I ever worked at a mill was at Eddie. With Eddie in town. It used to be Car Har Mill and **it changed to Cutter, and I worked at Cutter and I worked down there.**

E: Of all the things you've done now, what do you like to do best?

H: Well, the best thing I was on the soil conservation, 'cause that's outside work.

E: You had to work in all kinds of weather though in that.

H: No, I didn't. When it'd get too bad I just didn't work. If there's snow and things like that, I didn't work.

E: Well, that job made you eligible for social security, didn't it?

H: Yes. It was a pretty good job because it wasn't no rushing job. They told me when I went on that wasn't no rushing job. And I had to pull one of those things from the Cherokee open up. Well, they had an **air** museum. **Well, he looked at them and he left for a minute.** Well, he went back in the service. That's what he done. He was an instructor in the air **raids**, and he went back. Make good money. And we found another employee and he did fifteen year, awhile, and they took him away and no one put it in but me. He was sick when he come here. I don't know where he done but he would've had been in the service too if he retired, but he dead now. **Different people** took it.

E: Have you always gone to the Mormon church here?

H: Yeah.

E: Are you still going to the Mormon church now?

H: When I go to church, I do.

E: Now who's your elder or your preacher there now?

H: I don't rightly know who it be. There've been several of 'em in the past.

E: In your younger days, what did you do for fun? Did you have dances, square dances?

H: Well, they did at night. Way back, they'd play ball and stuff like that, baseball.

E: You and your wife have a civil marriage?

H: Yes.

E: Where were you married?

H: We married. We married at York. Yorkshire County.

E: What did you use to do when you were a little boy for Christmas?

H: Well, way back yonder, if you got anything much, it's lil' old candy stuff, and yours proud to get it then. Ain't like it is now.

E: You have a great big many more comforts now than you did then, I'm sure.

H: Yes. 'Course all them young'uns coming up, they don't know when Christmas comes now. They get so much stuff and all 'fore Christmas. I used to be a counselor here on the reservation. And we'd go on Christmas Eve and buy fruits and candy and stuff and bring 'em back and pack it up and distribute it out to 'em.

E: You were a counselor?

H: I used to be.

E: Now who helped you to do that work?

H: Idle Sanders and Sam Blue. There were three of us. I stayed on and I got tired of it and I quit.

E: That was a very fine thing to do. Are you kin to Idle Sanders?

H: Me and him's first cousins.

E: First cousins?

H: Yes.

E: You have to walk a good long distance to go to see him, don't you?

H: I went up there and I haven't been up there in a long time. I don't never walk up there, you see.

E: Years ago, you used to walk up to Neely's Store to buy your provisions, didn't you?

H: Well, I could walk up there, ride a mule or something, go in a wagon if I had one. I used to trade with Bigley and them a lot, you know. That old man, **a whole lot of I'd go up there and take**. He wouldn't even say a word. He'd give whatever I wanted. 'Course, I'd pay him back, you know. Real good to me, I remember.

E: That's a good trait to have, that honesty. Do you feel that most of the Indians are honest and will pay their debts?

H: Well, I tell you, you gotta know who you're dealing with. There're mighty few of 'em who'd pay me back. I bet a few would pay me, a mighty few of 'em. I got a first cousin stayed a long time when I's working industry. And I loaned him some money one time and he got in trouble. And we was always talkin' 'bout it and I told him, I said, "Now that **figure there** now **please** come back." And sure enough, he did come back and he paid me.

E: Well, that's wonderful.

H: Yeah, he paid.

E: Your younger days, there was not much drinking on the reservation. Is there, do you think there's much drinking now on the reservation?

H: There 'bout as much as there always was there. 'Cause we always did drink there, way back yonder. Course there wasn't no beer and stuff I remember back in that time like they is now. Most times, it'd be whiskey. Nobody drink beer. You could all drink whiskey back in those times.

E: And did they make their own homemade wines?

H: I don't know whether they did or not. If they did, I didn't see it.

E: That's been one of the bad things about, isn't it?

H: Yes.

E: The beer, the whiskey and the drink?

H: Whiskey's mostly what they drank back at that time. For the beer part, I don't what they had any beer back then or not. If they did, I didn't know about the beer. I know they had mixed whiskey, you know. With water or something like that. Water, or bottle of grenadine.

E: Well, you've had an interesting life.

H: **'Cause I want, I had a first cousin, he come over there and he left. And he thought he bought whiskey, never beer. Blue range whiskey.** But I didn't drink none. But I always communicated that I didn't. [Laughter]

E: What about the weather down here in the reservation? Do you remember times when it was very, very cold and covered with snow and there was a great deal of suffering among your people? You remember any of those times?

H: Well, they didn't ever since I got big enough to remember those things. It didn't snow like it used to snow here. I remember when I's small, it snowed pretty good here and I couldn't get out, you know. The roof down **here and the way we couldn't step over here and it was everywhere, and we couldn't. And my aunt with me.** Well, she had cows. One or two cows. **He couldn't take them. He was so wide** [inaudible 30:49] **Put him out sometimes. We had chickens.**

E: Were you here during the year 1916, when there was a big flood on this Catawba River?

H: Yes.

E: Do you remember that flood?

H: Yes.

E: What was it like, tell me.

H: Well, it was nothing but water, that's all. It crossed over by the gate.

E: Crossed all the way up this hill and down that road over there?

H: Yes, crossed the hollow. It didn't kill the people, you see. Right 'ere was corn, right 'ere where that barn is now. I had some corn down there and it got all my cotton.

[End of interview]

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