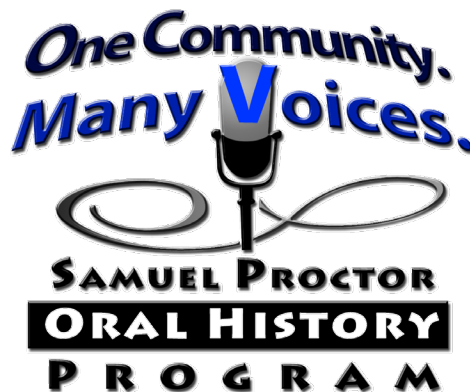


Gwynn McAuley Crawford

**Southeastern Indian Oral History Project (SIOHP)
CAT-029**

Interview by:

**Emma Reid Echols
January 12, 1972**



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 029 Gwynn McAuley Crawford
Southeastern Indian Oral History Project (SIOHP)
Interviewed by Emma Reid Echols on January 12, 1972
39 minutes | 20 pages

Abstract: Gwynn Crawford, a librarian and former teacher at the Lesslie School, discusses her relationships with the Catawba children she taught and her experience with integration at the school. She speaks about how it took some time for her and the Catawba students to become comfortable with each other. Crawford describes the attitudes of the school's White children and their parents to integration. She then shares some of the activities she did with the Catawba children and how many of them enjoyed art. She recalls folklore about the "wild Indians" that her students told her. Crawford describes her relationships with the Catawba parents and their attitudes about integration and the school. Crawford remembers some of her former students and speaks about what they have done since leaving her school.

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

ORAL HISTORY

P R O G R A M

University of Florida

CAT 029

Interviewee: Gwynn McAuley Crawford

Interviewer: Emma Reid Echols

Date of Interview: January 12, 1972

E: This is Emma Reid Echols, Route 6, Box 260, Rock Hill, South Carolina, January 12, 1972. I'm recording the oral history of the Catawba Indians, and I'm now visiting at the Lesslie School. My friend today is Mrs. Herbert Crawford, who was a teacher and is now the librarian here at the school. But I'll let her tell you her full name.

C: Gwynn McAuley Crawford. Mrs. Herbert Crawford.

E: And you've been teaching at Lesslie School for quite a number of years, haven't you?

C: That's right. Since World War II.

E: We are especially interested in your relationship to the Catawba Indians. The Catawba Indians, I believe, were integrated into this school in the fall of 1966. Was your husband principal at that time?

C: That's right.

E: Do you remember these children coming into the school?

C: Oh, yes. Miss Ethel Owen, who was assistant to Mr. Sullivan, came out and talked to us about the board deciding for the Indians to attend Lesslie. She asked me if I would be willing to have them in my room. At that time, I was teaching two classes: a third and a fourth grade. So, they took the fourth grade away from me and gave me this fifth-grade class of Indians. So, I had the third-grade regular children, and the fifth-grade Indian children.

E: You had them seated on different parts of the room, then, since you had two different classes, didn't you?

- C: Well, now, yes. One class on one side, and one on the other.
- E: You remember what time of the year this was?
- C: This was sometime in the late fall that they came in.
- E: That was quite an event for you and for your school. What was the attitude of these children when they began coming in?
- C: Well, you talking about the Whites or the Indians?
- E: No, the Indian children.
- C: The Indian children were—well, they acted almost like Indians. [Laughter] They looked impassive about it but after you got to know them, you realized that it was a big change for them to come here, and it took some time for them to feel easy with me. In fact, it was I guess about three weeks before I would say that I was their teacher.
- E: What about the attitude of the White children to the Indian children?
- C: Well, they were thrilled to death. I had a third-grade class made up mostly of little boys. You can imagine how excited little boys would be to have a chance to go to school with Indians. They were tickled to death, and they enjoyed it and it was all year long. The little ones did.
- E: Did you feel that after you broke the ice, so to speak, that you really became the friend of the Indians?
- C: I think that I did, because they've kept up with me since then and some of them are always stopping by to see me. But there was a real awkward feeling about that at first, and I can remember how baffled I was by the little Indian children just, you know, until we got comfortable with each other. The first thing that I

noticed about them that made me realize we had two different races in the room was, at times, when the Indians would just seem like they would close their minds to what you were teaching them. Just sit there. It seemed like their skin took on a kind of a greyish hue, and that was the first thing that I noticed. I noticed that the whole time when there was any kind of withdrawal on their part. Well, it seemed to me that their skin took on a new tone. [Laughter]

E: Was there ever evidence that they didn't want to learn what you were teaching at the time?

C: I don't know. I think they just weren't too interested. Their idea of what to do in school was a great deal different from ours. Would you like for me to tell you about it?

E: Oh, yes!

C: All right. When they first came in, to this school, their idea of being busy in school was to copy something. All of them had beautiful handwriting. What they loved to do, they'd like to get busy and copy something. And they wanted me to get them to copy something. And there was, you know, I don't teach like that unless there's something behind it. [Laughter] I think, though, that love of copying something had to do with their interest in art too. I think it was just doing something with their hands that they wanted. But now that's where we struck our first common ground in school. It was through art. To me, they were the most talented little bunch of children I had ever taught.

E: Mary Carolyn Sanders said that you helped her so much with her art. She was in that class that you're speaking of. Now, will you tell me some of the things you

gave them to do, or did you just give them materials and let them work on their own?

C: Well, usually we had a mural going in the room all the time, you know, a big old mural on the wall that the children worked on. I remember that Les Blue is the one that planned this one, and it was about Indians. But it's strange, too, their idea about Indians. They were thinking about other people as much as we were. I found lots of times that they didn't think about themselves as Indians and when you mention Indians to them, they think of something they had seen about the Plains Indians or some Tribe of Indians or Nation a way away.

E: Did they do anything with pottery or with clay while they were in your class?

C: I tried that and that didn't work too well. The best results I had from them was turning them loose with paints and letting them just paint what they wanted to. Mrs. Echols, you might be interested in this. I, of course, was watching them carefully, as you would a bunch of children you don't know too well, and from a different background. The little White children would always act their age. They would paint the sky up high, just a straight blue; you've seen hundreds of those. The Indians that I taught never did paint a blue sky. They painted it other colors, and to me that was what made some of their pictures so beautiful. Now, that Sanders girl you were talking about, her skies were always some shade of brown or buff and I don't know what it was about it, but it just made the pictures that she did, you know, beneath the sky, or with a sky background, it made them just stand out so beautifully.

E: Did they like the darker colors, or did they go for the bright colors?

C: They liked the bright colors and the dark too. They didn't care for pastels.

E: Well, imagine that. In your teaching of these children, did you find some areas of reading or math or any subjects that were more difficult than others?

C: Well, that's been a long time ago. It seems to me that they liked their math when they were fairly along. And I believe that they had more trouble with reading than they did with that. There's something orderly about an Indian that I think the math appealed to.

E: What about the discipline? You probably didn't have trouble with discipline if they were interested in what they were doing.

C: Well, I never did get complete control of them 'til punished a child one time. And that was just for, I think it was disobedience, you know. Just a little thing. It was an accumulation. I took that child to the office and when I came back, they were just settled back, just as satisfied as though, well, now, you've accepted us taking all that discipline now. [Laughter] They never did give me very much trouble. Now, there were several boys that I just lost my heart to, they were so attractive. But they didn't have any ambition and the others seemed to admire them for that. It was an attitude, I guess, that worried me more than anything else. One of those boys—who was the best artist in the room, by the way—he ended up in the state penitentiary. He got in trouble.

E: Yes, that's bad.

C: Now, as I said, he was very, very attractive, though. He was a good artist, and he was a very—that's another thing about the Indians, they were honest. I would say that their standard of honesty was greater than that of many White children.

Among the whole crowd I never did find but one Indian boy who did the slightest thing dishonest. Now, the boy that got in the penitentiary, he was not there for stealing. He was there for—I don't know. I think he killed somebody. And that's an awful thing to put killing below stealing. [Laughter] But I mean it was a matter of temper with him, the thing that got him in trouble.

E: Well, you spoke of their art and their math and their reading. What about music? You were such a good musician; did you have some of them in your Glee Club and did they like to sing?

C: Yes, they all sang. They liked it. I found that their voices were not as pure as the little White children's voices. There was a little tone to it that was a little bit scratchy. They didn't have quite the purity of tone that the Whites had.

E: Someone told me about the time you went out on the playground to help an Indian boy who was in trouble. Do you remember that occasion?

C: Oh, yeah. Now, I believe that was the time when they quit looking grey at me. They didn't like to be compared with Negroes at all and some child in the schoolground called one of these boys a nigger, and he was fighting for dear life over it. The little Indian girls came running in the school and got me, which I was flattered that they did that. [Laughter] We went out where the boys were, and I just made an issue right then of taking up for the Indian boy and sending the other boy to the office and telling him that he was to quit calling people niggers. And I don't know that that was too big a thing as that, but it kind of opened the door to them for me. I didn't have any trouble with Indians after that. [Laughter]

E: They came to you with their problems.

C: That's right.

E: Exactly. Do you remember them ever using any unusual expressions or words or stories from the past?

C: Now, I remember a good many things that they've told me. I don't remember any expressions. Right after I had taught these children, I wished, at the time, that I had kept some kind of diary about it because they did have expressions that we didn't use. One of them was, you know, you talk about "my comb." Like, "I had washed my comb." But the Indians that I taught always talked about "their comb." It gave you insight into home conditions because that was something that was passed around. Another thing that they did that was unusual was—you met my son, Nickie. Well, they were very interested in Nickie, and they always wanted to hear about him. One time he was sick, and he had some bronchitis or something like that. And the Indians told me all kinds of things that I could do to get him well. [Laughter] I don't remember any of them except one thing. I believe it was one of the Beck children who said, "You just get Mr. Crawford to get a mole," you know what I mean, "and kill it. And now, you don't have any **napkins**, so he'll get well." [Laughter]

E: Did you have this whole group of Indians for one year or longer than that?

C: I had them for one year.

E: Now, how many do you think were in that group? Of course, you don't remember exactly.

C: I guess there were about twelve or fifteen, something like that.

E: Do you think they showed signs of affection at the end of school because often children would come and tell you, "Goodbye. I love you?" Did the Indians show any signs of affection?

C: Yes! They did. They'd come up and hold on to you and hold your hand. Some of them would put their arm around you, you know, while they were talking to you. They were not like stoics or along that line. [Laughter] It was just when they first came here that they were just so reserved and withdrawn.

E: What about the needs of the home? Did these children need food or clothing when they came to the school?

C: That's another thing that impressed me about them. They came from real poor homes. In fact, property at the reservation was not, you know—that business wasn't straightened out until later. But I do not know of one Indian who got free lunches. They didn't want it. They wanted to pay for that, and I know it was a hardship for them, but it was a matter of pride. They weren't too poorly dressed. Sometimes you could tell that they needed some new socks or something that size. But they got along very well.

E: Now, at this time they rode the school buses to school?

C: That's right. The only the trouble we had with the Indians that first year was about the school buses. There was some fights and things that broke out between the Whites and the Indians. Now, that was older children. Some of the boys that were on there coming from high school. I don't know what went on, but the Indians asked for a special place on the bus for them to sit in so they could sit together. One of the older Indian men came and talked to Mr. Crawford about it.

Now, I don't remember all the ins and outs about this. Since they were the last ones to get off the bus, they put them on the back of the bus. Let the Indians all sit together if they wanted to. Well, they did that about a week, and then they decided they wanted the front of the bus. So, I think they just made everyone sit together.

E: Now, I'm sure your husband must have had a good many times when you had problems that would come to him?

C: More than likely.

E: Now, did these children ever come to you and asking for—did they expect you to encourage them? Did they expect you to advise them? Did they ask for that?

C: Well, they liked for you to commend them just like anyone else, but they had a very special love for whoever was teaching. I noticed it later, you know, with the other teachers too. I think today you'd say they identified with the teacher. [Laughter] You didn't find—in these little ones, anyway—you didn't find that hostility towards the person over them that you find in some places today.

E: Did they ever tell you any stories about the wild Indians?

C: The wild Indians. I heard about the wild Indians. And I think maybe that older people in the Tribe tried to keep the stories about the wild Indians to themselves. I think that subject was a little bit taboo. But one day—I don't know how it was—we got started talking about things of that sort and they told me about different things about the wild Indians. And I questioned them as much as I dared because I could see from the way they looked at each other and warned each other that it was a subject maybe that you shouldn't press them too

much about. Now, Mrs. Echols, when I told my husband about the stories about the wild Indians, he had me write to Dr. Francis Bradley. You know, he died just recently, and he was a **lecturer** on South Carolina folklore. That thing was fresh in my mind when I wrote to him about that. Would you like for me to tell you a few of the things that—

E: Oh, please do!

C: All right. Well, I think that the subject may have come up like this: some boy was maybe bragging about something, and the others said, "You better watch out. The wild Indians are going to get you." And I said, "Wild Indians?" They said, "Yeah, don't you know?" I said, "Well, where are they?" And they said, "They're under the ground. If you come home drunk at night, they'll come out and beat you up because they don't like us Indians to drink." One of the boys said he had seen them ride up out of the ground one time. His idea of these Indians was just like the pictures you see on the nickel or something like that. These Indians have feathers, and they ride on horses. Then he said that the wild Indians' meeting place was across the Catawba, and that you could hear them yelling and hollering. But the wild Indians, as I remember it, seemed to be just like an ancestor, you know, that was checking up on what you were doing and seeing if you were keeping the faith. [Laughter]

E: Did they ever tell you about leaving clothes on the line at night?

C: No, I never did hear that from them.

E: Oh, I've heard that story too. You remember any of the other stories that they told about the wild Indians?

C: I just can't think. Oh yes, I do remember one place that said when you got to the reservation there was this tall tree there, and a hole went down under this tree. That's where the wild Indians came out.

E: Now, since they loved the forest and the land so much, did they particularly like stories of animals, birds? Or did they tell you any?

C: No. Sometimes they would paint a picture and I would kind of get to something that they needed from that, but they never did tell me any of their folk tales. I did learn some of the superstitions. They seemed to me to be, when they were in my room, very interested in fairy tales. Not Indian folklore, but just our own fairy tales.

E: What superstitions did you find that some of them had?

C: Not any of the medicinal ones. [Laughter] I don't remember anything special. You know, Mrs. Echols, this has been so long ago.

E: I think you're doing fine remembering.

C: Well, would you like for me to tell you about the time they had the big Mormon meetings?

E: Yes, I would.

C: Well, you were talking about music. I had learned that Mormon hymn that I think they sing more than any other: "All is well, all is well." I learned that, and I let the other children sing it. They were just thrilled to death to hear one of their own hymns. There was the year that there had been— the next year, I forgot which. There was a big Mormon convocation for this part of the country, and so many real important people in the Mormon hierarchy came out here. They had an all-

day meeting and they had singing. The little Indians really did enjoy the importance that they felt at that time.

E: I believe they used the Lesslie School, isn't that right?

C: That's right. They met right here at the school.

E: I know that your husband would be interested in that too.

C: Yes, and then I was interested in—there were several out here who sang in the Tabernacle Choir, and one of them—is it called the president? The man called the president, you know, who's the head of it for seven years, or something like that. I think he is. His wife is one of the soloists with the choir and she was here. Great big woman, just as hardy and a wonderful musician. She played the piano, and she sang too.

E: Mrs. Crawford, since you had the first class of integrated children here, I wonder how the children felt, or how the parents felt concerning this integration. Were they glad to be at Lesslie School, or did they resent giving up their Catawba Indian school?

C: Well, I'd say that there was a little bit of both in it. They were excited, you know, over the new adventure and getting in with new people, but their hearts harkened back to the old school a lot. We at this school received a good many books from that school when they closed it out. I would see the little Indians when they would find those books, you know, with their school name in it. They would look at each other just like, "Oh, these were the good old days." [Laughter]

E: Did they need workbooks or were the books and workbooks provided for them if they needed it?

C: My experience with the Indians was that they bought what they were supposed to have, and they didn't want any help. Now, they may have been getting government money at home, I don't know. But here at school we didn't have any trouble with them.

E: Now, did the parents visit the school at this time?

C: Sometimes. I've never seen a difference in the attitudes to this change—the difference between the men and the women. The Indian women were much freer with us and felt more at home here than the men did. I know it used to amuse me, because for a long time I never did talk to an Indian man. There was a little reticence there. I don't know whether it was their etiquette or what, but sometimes I would have to go out to the car and talk to a family and **advise** with them. Go out to the car, but if there was a man there, he'd turn his back on me and I'd talk to the woman. I've had those Indian women actually wink at me and then toss their head and tell the men as if I'd been crazy. [Laughter] I think it must have been a custom of theirs or it may have been self-consciousness. I don't know. But one of my children was sick in the hospital and I went to see her several times. When we went in the hospital room, the whole family would be there. And by the way I bet she had six little brothers and sisters that were younger than she was. They were the cutest little, you know, black-eyed things and just the prettiest babies you've ever seen. And then the father, when I would come in the room, he'd hitch his chair around and turn his back. The only Indian man that I remember talking to was Mr. Ayers. They let women attend the meeting.

- E: Did they seem to appreciate what the teacher was doing for the children?
- C: Oh, yes! And they couldn't thank you enough. They were very generous about the things that they gave you. I don't remember who it was, but one of the mothers during the year made an apron for me. Made it by hand herself. And they were always giving you little pieces of pottery. Then at Christmastime, they would give you presents too.
- E: I don't suppose any of the pottery is preserved in this school? It would be nice if it were preserved, some of it.
- C: Well, now, no. Those pieces that they gave me, I wasn't thinking ahead like that. That would have been good to have left them here. I had those at home. But now Mrs. McFarland, that teaches the third grade here now, she's got a good collection of Indian pottery in her room. Her room is one right there that I turn pass as I go down to the office.
- E: I'd like to see that. Today, 1972, I'm sure that things have changed. The principal at this school will be giving me, a little bit later, a list of all the Indian children. But let's talk about you as the librarian today. Do you have any Indian children that are helping you in the library?
- C: Not this year. I don't have any Indian children helping me this year, but I have had Indian children helping me. You know, the older ones. Now, the little Indians that are in this school—see this just goes through the fourth grade—they are not too interested in helping. But I have had excellent help from Indians before the school divided. They were especially good at mending books. They could mend them lots better than I could ever think about mending them.

E: Now, you have worked with a lot of different Indian children. As a rule, do you find the Indian children enjoy reading? Like the books?

C: Yes, especially the ones that have lots of pictures. And they love to be read to.

E: Now, what do you think the Indians think of themselves? The self-image, are they proud of themselves and their history, or not?

C: I think that the women could get more pride along that line. But when they first came in, the girls, I think they looked on themselves as kind of second-class citizens. That was always something that Herbert insisted that the teachers do, was to try to give the Indians something to be proud of.

E: What did the Indians think about themselves?

C: When they came here or now?

E: Now.

C: Well, I would say now that there is not much—I know the White children don't know any difference between themselves and the Indians. And I don't believe the Indians are feeling any difference. In fact, to me that's disappointing. I would like for them to keep their identity more than they have, but they fade right in with all the school Whites. Especially athletics. You know, some of those Indian boys and grand athletes have gotten scholarships to Princeton and so on.

E: Now, when you provide source materials for your teachers, do you find that teachers are interested in projects on the Indians, and do they check out the books?

C: That's right. I guess in this school and in the other two, we have more books about animals, you know, for little children, than anything else. And the next

category is Indians. We have just hundreds of books about Indians. And now I know a lot of Indians used them, but the other children are too.

E: Although do you have many books about the Catawba Indians?

C: No.

E: Very few?

C: Very few about them. Now, sometimes when a child writes something about the Catawbias, we'll make a little booklet out of it and leave it out for the other children to read. Our main subject heading on the Catawba Indians today is from a book that came in. Anytime we find a book that has anything about them in it, you know, we always file about it in the card catalog so people can get to it. Have you seen that new book that the Rock Hill system wrote as a study in local government?

E: No, I haven't.

C: Well, I have that book; I'll show it to you. The first part of that book is about the Catawba Indians.

E: I'd be very happy to see that.

C: So, see, I was bringing out the different subjects and that one today.

E: Now, a number of your children remember you so well. They told me so. I wonder if you would know any of the youths who have gone on into business, or teaching, or nursing, or any of the ones that you happen to see today and know them?

C: I came across a **man** Indian. One of them has worked at Sherer's, a dry-cleaning place, and they're always sending me messages by the younger

children. See, some of those I taught, their families are large, and they have younger children here and I hear about them. They send me messages and I send them back. The boy that made the most impression on me as a failure on my part, was the boy who I told you ended up in the penitentiary. His name was Les Blue. He was the grandson of old Chief Blue. He was the one who just seemed to want to just throw his life away. He served his time in the penitentiary and I was always—when the family would go down to the penitentiary to see Les, Steve and I always sent him a message. I don't think I saw him but once or twice after he left school here. He was paroled from there then and came home and drowned in the Catawba River. And I knew at the time, you know, I heard all those—he was the one of the ones that talked so much about the "old Indians." He was drowned just about near where the "old Indians" had their meeting place and I thought about their meetings.

E: Now, Carolyn Sanders was one of yours who's become a beautician down here in Charlotte. Have you seen her recently?

C: No, I haven't. I remember her exactly, though, very well. She was just a fine girl. In fact, Mrs. Echols, these Indian children all had character. As I say, I just think I came across one rotten apple in the barrel and the rest of them had exceptional moral standards. Now, then, their morals were just good.

E: How do you account for that? Do you give the credit to the church, or the home, or their native abilities?

C: Well, I imagine that the pure Indians that were not mixed up with us were high-type people. You know, I've heard that the Indians in Mexico, living in the

mountains, are steadfast characters. I imagine it comes from several sources. It comes from their heritage and their homelife, and, of course, the church.

[Break in recording]

E: Did you really enjoy these Indians?

C: Well, as I look back over it, I enjoyed the Indians more than any one group that I have had. And it was strange that I should enjoy them, because it took me so long to get next to them so that I could teach them. We went through a hard time there at first and I just felt like I was not reaching them at all, and they were holding back from me. But when we finally got together it was just a big hug on both sides. [Laughter] They liked me, and I was crazy about them.

[End of interview]

Transcribed by: Anthony Delgado, September 10, 2021

Audit-edited by: Callum Karoleski, February 26, 2022

Final edited by: Evangeline Giaconia, July 11, 2022