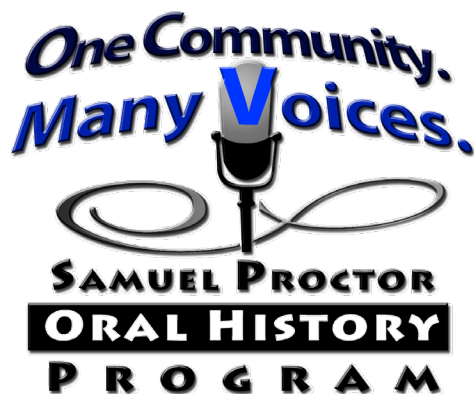


# **Sallie Hester Harris Wade**

**Southeastern Indian Oral History Project (SIOHP)  
CAT-015**

**Interview by:**

**Emma Reid Echols  
February 6, 1981**



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**CAT 015 Sallie Hester Harris Wade**  
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**31 minutes | 22 pages**

**Abstract:** Sallie Wade, one of the oldest living Catawba Indians at the time, shares some information about her family and the community, including classmates and teachers from her early years in school on the reservation. She then shares how she left for Atlanta as a little girl with a White couple named the Richardsons and received some of her education from Mrs. Richardson over the five years she stayed with them. Wade shares her memories of Chief Blue and Thomas Steven, a Catawba man who lived to the age of 110 and spoke the Catawba language; she recounts the events surrounding Steven's death and sings one of the hymns that she remembers singing with others as they went to recover his body. Wade describes the work her father did and the foods the Catawba ate while she was growing up. She closes the interview with a story about her aunt and uncle adopting a child from Gaffney, South Carolina.

**Keywords:** [Catawba Nation; Chief Samuel Taylor Blue; South Carolina--Rock Hill; History; Adoption]

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

CAT 015

Interviewee: Sallie Hester Harris Wade

Interviewer: Emma Reid Echols

Date of Interview: February 6, 1981

E: 260, Rock Hill, South Carolina. I'm recording the oral history of the Catawba Indians, February 6, 1981. I'm visiting the home of Mrs. Sallie Wade. Sallie, are you the oldest one of the Catawbas that are left now?

W: No.

E: Who's the oldest?

W: Edith Brown.

E: Edith. How old are you?

W: I'll be eighty-eight in April, the twenty-eighth.

E: April. So she must be about ninety, I guess?

W: No, I think she'd be eighty-nine.

E: You've got a good memory, you know that?

W: Everybody says I did. I had been in the hospital. I stayed there two weeks, and on Christmas Eve, they let me out. There was a lady in there, she died about a week after I come. There was a **car** between [inaudible 1:13]

E: Yeah.

W: All right, he come in there to see her. And I talked to him, and he come down here Sunday and got me to give him a story, but I didn't want to, you know, to put it in. He told me, he said at my age, I had a good memory. He said most people who get as old as I am, they're forgetful.

E: But you don't?

W: Seemed like to me, I do, but I reckon I don't. [Laughter]

E: Who was the man that got your story?

W: I done forgot his name.

E: Was he from Winthrop College?

W: No, he was—well, he traveled around, I know that.

E: Oh, is that right?

W: And takes a book, you know, and makes a book out of his stories.

E: Oh, yes?

W: And he sells these books, magazines and things.

E: What interesting things did you tell him?

W: Oh, I can't tell you 'cause I don't know now. [Laughter]

E: [Laughter] Now, your mother was Mary Harris.

W: Yes, ma'am.

E: And your father was—

W: Ben Harris—Benjamin Harris.

E: Benjamin Harris. And your father was the last full-blooded Indian. Is that right?

That's what I'm told.

W: Yes.

E: Ben Harris. Then, Ben had a brother. What was his—

W: Billy Harris.

E: Did he have another one or that was just—

W: Robert Harris. We all called him Bob all the time.

E: Well now, your father was Robert, was he not?

W: No, my father was Benjamin.

E: Oh, excuse me. That was my error. Benjamin and Robert Harris.

W: There was three of them. There was Billy, Benjamin, and Robert.

E: Your mother and father had how many children?

W: My father?

E: Yeah, your father had how many children?

W: Twelve.

E: Twelve children. And how many are living now?

W: Three of us.

E: You and who else?

W: I've got two sisters living, Ida and Martha. Ida Harris and Martha Johnson.

E: I know where Martha Johnson lives. Where does Ida live?

W: She lives way back out on the—next to Rock Hill. Do you know where that church is over there?

E: She lives where your mother lived when she died.

W: Yeah, that's right.

E: I know where she lives. Now, your mother told me—I had to tape on her one time—that as a little girl, she worked out in the corn field, and then at night she'd make pottery around the fireplace. And your mother told me she didn't have a chance to go to school.

W: She didn't. My daddy got his education, and he had a lot of people say my daddy accepted a lot of these people that went to college down in Wilmington. But see where he got his—well, he'd go out and work a plow and hoe in the fields for White people. Normally outside—you know, we weren't allowed to go to school on the outside for a long time. And so he got his education through, I believe,

three White ladies: Miss Culp and Miss Collins and Miss Dunlap. The people that he worked for when he was at dinnertime—see, they would give him the dinner. But they paid about fifty cents a day for the work he done, and I know he'd done more than that. He said when they stopped for dinner that's when they would learn him to read. And that's the way he got his education, through three White ladies.

E: And then he turned around and taught other boys?

W: Well, after that, when the government did send people in here to school, went to a school there and learned to write. And then a lot of the preachers that would let you go to church and they'd teach them a while. Then he taught school.

E: What was the first school you went to? Down on the reservation?

W: Yes. We weren't allowed to go outside.

E: That's right. And it was one teacher?

W: Yeah, just one teacher.

E: Who was your first teacher, do you remember?

W: Miss Dunlap.

E: Oh, yes. She and her husband?

W: Yes.

E: But there was a school down here before Miss Dunlap came—made of planks, they tell me, the first time the lumber planks. And I think Robert Harris must have done that school, probably.

W: Yes. Oh, that was just for grown people. It wasn't for children.

E: Oh, it was not. For grown people?

W: Yes.

E: Who were some of the ones you went to school with? Who were your classmates, schoolmates?

W: Sallie Beck and Arzada—well, they was Browns then. Sallie Brown, I would say. Arzada Brown, Edith Harris, Lavinia Harris, Livia and her brother Nelson, and the Sanders: Jim Sanders, Idle and everyone else [inaudible 6:33]

E: You've got a real memory.

W: But then, they let them go to an Indian school somewhere out—I believe it was in, uh—

E: Pennsylvania.

W: Yeah. There was a bunch of them went out there, but I didn't go.

E: You remember the girls that went there?

W: Yes, Artemis and Edith and Lavinia and Mary Fox. Well, I'm at school with all them, too, so. But they let them go out there, and my uncle, Moroni George, he went. And Jim Sanders went. I believe that's about all that I can remember.

E: Now, Edith Brown is the only one living that went off to school?

W: Off to school, yes. She'd be the only one left living.

E: Well, it's wonderful that they got the chance to go, and they've come back and share some of that learning with the rest of you, I hope.

W: Oh, I think they did, but I left. I went to Atlanta. There was this White lady from Atlanta that came up here one time, and they said they didn't know that there was a reservation up here at that time. Her husband run along the seaboard, you know, and it stopped at Catawba Junction, so he met some of the Indians. Now, I

believe it was Chief Blue he met down there, so he asked if he could come up here and drive to the reservation with him. Chief Blue told him yeah, he was welcome to come. Once he got his vacation, him and his wife come up here and spent, I believe about a couple days, and they wanted me to go back with them. They didn't have no children, so she wanted me to go back with them. And Coleman finally gave up, but he didn't give up right then. But they went back, and then they come back in about a week or two, I think, and they let me go with them. Well, that's where I got the most of my education, was from Miss Richardson.

E: Miss Richardson.

W: Yeah.

E: Now, you must have been a pretty little girl for them to fall in love with you.

W: They must have—I don't know. I guess so. [Laughter] Anyway, they had asked me to go back with 'em the first time and I didn't get to go. So, when they come back again, they checked along for me to go.

E: Whereabouts in Georgia did you live with them?

W: In Atlanta.

E: Atlanta. In the city of Atlanta?

W: Yes.

E: You learned to play the organ later on from—

W: She teach me music lessons.

E: Oh, she did!

W: Yeah. I stayed down there for five years.



E: No wonder you—

W: Backwards and forwards, see, from there back to the Nation. We come about every two weeks, you know, back to the Nation.

E: What business did Mr. Richardson do?

W: They runned a big store and all, but he worked on people's radios. That was his job.

E: You got to go to school down there, but you didn't have a chance to—

W: No, I didn't go to school. She teach me in the home, but she was a schoolteacher. She would teach me in the home and back then we [inaudible 9:41]

E: After you came back to the reservation to live, did you write to her and keep in touch with the Richardsons?

W: Oh, I kept in touch with 'em until they died.

E: Oh, that was good.

W: Yeah, I kept in touch with 'em until they both died. She died first, and then later about two years after that, **he died**.

E: I remember your mother quite well, and I knew your sister. A couple of your sisters I've known. You come from a very fine family. No wonder you've got this good memory.

W: Yeah. [Laughter] My momma had a good memory 'til she passed away.

E: She certainly did. She was, I believe, ninety-seven when she died. Moroni George was your uncle.

W: Yeah.

E: He was your mother's—

W: Baby brother.

E: Baby brother. He truly looked like an Indian. He told me that he remembered Thomas Steven.

W: Well, he should if I do.

E: Yeah, you do. Tell me what he looked like, Thomas Steven. The first time you saw him, what did you think of him?

W: Well, he was just an old man when I first remembered him. He lived to be a hundred and ten. He looked just like any other old Indian would look, but he had long hair; it would take us back. Foot long, just about like that, you know, thrown back.

E: Down on his shoulders.

W: Yeah, but he had a thick head of hair, and it was gray. It was like they do nowadays, but back then it didn't look funny, but now I think the young people looks funnier than the old people. [Laughter]

E: He went from home to home working, and staying two or three months at each place?

W: Yes, until he passed away.

E: Arzada Sanders said that sometimes he went out in the woods, and he'd get a log, and he'd beat the log like a little drum and sing.

W: Yes, he did.

E: Do you remember the songs he sang?

- W: No, I don't. He sung it in Indian, and I didn't know any, not **then**. When he'd go out and do that, he'd sing an Indian song.
- E: Would he ever go out in the woods and bring you back any nuts or berries?
- W: Oh, yeah. When he'd go out in the woods hunting walnuts and stuff like that, he'd bring us a little bag full or two or three pockets. Back then, they wore long coats with big ole pockets on 'em.
- E: You never found out what happened to his wife, whether she died of smallpox or what? She was buried across the river. He never said what happened to his wife, did he?
- W: No, I think that she did die with smallpox because at that time, a lot of them died out with it. But he would always go by to see her grave. That's where he was going every time.
- E: Every January.
- W: Yes.
- E: Now, at the time of his death, he was living with Sarah Ayres, you said.
- W: Yeah, and he went from her place down to Jim Harris's—that was Aunt Sarah's son. See, he was running a ferry, that log ferry way down there.
- E: That's Cureton's ferry.
- W: Yes. He went down there and stayed all night, see, and was going from there to the place the next day. They said it was kind of rainy that day, and they tried to get him not to go, but he told them he had to see her grave, so he went on.
- E: It was rainy and freezing, wasn't it?
- W: Yeah.

E: Very cold.

W: Raining and freezing.

E: You said that he often carried things to give you, that Sarah Ayres was a good cook and would make sausage biscuits and big fat biscuits. Did he ever bring you any of those things to eat?

W: Yeah. One time a little while ago, he'd wrap 'em up with paper or something. I can't remember what it was. But he always brought too many [inaudible 13:55] He was lean to go down to the fair. Well, he'd bring that for us, too.

E: A sweet potato and your sausage biscuits. Do you remember the day he left? You were a little girl then.

W: Yes, 'cause me and **Rock Bottoms** were top of the hill. My house, going up that hill, it went up a high hill. [inaudible 14:19] And so we followed him to the top of the hill, and he told us goodbye and told us when he came back, he was going to bring us some fruit and flowers from Lancaster.

E: How did he tell you goodbye? Did you Indians shake hands?

W: Oh, yeah. He always hugged us and kissed us when he left us and told us goodbye. It seemed like to me that morning he was crying when he told us goodbye. But he told us he'd be back because he was going to bring us flowers from Lancaster.

E: You loved flowers. He knew you loved flowers, didn't he?

W: I think all Indians love flowers, but I don't know. He did too, I reckon, 'cause in the summertime he would go through the woods before we'd get back, and he'd pick us wildflowers and bring 'em to us.

E: He must have been a remarkable person.

W: He was.

E: Now, from the top of the hill down to Cureton's ferry, it would be about four or five miles, is that right? It's a good long distance.

W: It's five miles.

E: Five miles. And with the cold and rain, I hope he had something in his pocket.

W: No, when he left and went down there, see, it wasn't. It might have been cloudy like today, but he went down to the ferry and stayed overnight. He left the next morning. The next morning was when it started to rain, and they tried to get him not to go, but he went on anyhow. He figured there'd just be a shower now and then, you know. But it didn't. It rained all day and all night. And I think it was about at night when he fell in that ditch and then couldn't get out. Well in fact, I know it was because they said he had went to some White person's house over there in **Grand Mark**, somewhere or another, and asked if he was able to stay all night and they wouldn't. So, he went on. I guess he thought he might get rest down somewhere, and it kept raining, so he didn't. The weather got so bad, you know, he just couldn't see.

E: Did you ever see him read a book? Could he read or write, do you know?

W: I don't think he could read or write.

E: But he spoke the Catawba language.

W: Yeah, he did that. Well, before my time—during my daddy's and my mom and them, way back then—children couldn't speak nothing else. They knew the language just like they do in Cherokee, from the time they were born. They

wouldn't talk nothing else to 'em. But they make the White people go into the Nation, I reckon, and then going to school, you know, where they learn it there.

E: Did you ever see Thomas Steven have any money in his hand?

W: No, I never did.

E: He just always got his pay in sausage biscuits or potatoes or?

W: I think when he would work wherever he worked at and got a little money for it—it probably wasn't over a quarter—he would take it back and give it to Aunt Sarah because that's where he stayed.

E: Who else lived with Aunt Sarah beside him? Any other person in the house?

W: With her?

E: Yeah, with her.

W: Yes, she had her sons and her grandsons.

E: Oh, a big family.

W: Mhm. That's why he stayed there, I think.

E: Probably there wouldn't be enough beds for all that crowd to sleep on. Did they sleep on pallets on the floor?

W: Yes, they used to.

E: You said she would have hogs, and she'd kill her own pigs and have sausage and stuff. Did they have cows, or did they have fruit trees or a garden?

W: Yes, they had cows and gardens, too.

E: He found a good place to stay, didn't he?

W: Well, he helped around there as one of the family. She must have been the only one, I guess, if he had any other kin besides. If she was kin, she must have been

kin to him to take him over and keep him with her because that's the only place I know he ever stayed. Only just visiting around people in the Nation.

E: That's right.

W: But I never knew him to stay at nobody's house overnight. I don't know if it ever happened. He'd go around in daylight to visit them all, but I don't think he ever stayed away at anybody else's house but mine. Because I remember I've got a cousin that she went to that school out there, and she graduated. She met a Indian. He was real nice, and then she come back home with him, this man come back with 'em there, and they got married. That was Doris's and Edna's mom and dad. I remember one night, I think in October, Mr. Wheelock bought a horse to get 'em. Anyhow the horse fell down sick. So Aunt Sarah told Uncle Tom, she said, "Go up there and tell that man—" she didn't know or couldn't say his name or something. Said, "Go back and tell that man that horse is down here sick, and we need him." [inaudible 19:45]

E: Tom.

W: Tom asked, "What man?" She said, "That new man." And Tom told her, said, "Damn the new man."

E: Oh. [Laughter]

W: Because she couldn't call his name!

E: That's right. [Laughter] Now, who was the new man?

W: Mr. Wheelock was the new man.

E: Oh, Mr. Wheelock, I gotcha. Mr. Wheelock was the new man! [Laughter] Doris's father.

W: [Laughter] Yes.

E: I hope he came and doctored the horse.

W: Yeah, they came back in no time to get the horse. But I don't forget, I was over there to stay all night with one of those girls. His wife [inaudible 20:25] She had them there with her, and I was over there to spend the night. We was daring some to laugh now, if something was funny, you know, in front of old people like that. We'd go behind the house, and we'd laugh about the new man. [Laughter] We used to tease each other about him.

E: He was different looking from the rest of you Indians, wasn't he?

W: Yes.

E: But he was a well-educated person. He and his wife both were.

W: Yes.

E: And of course, Doris and Edna both been to school.

W: They've been to school this year on the reservation.

E: That's right, on the reservation.

W: But they got a good education.

E: They had good a mind to begin with, too. When the message came back that Thomas Steven had died across the river, I believe it came back to Sam Blue, and Sam Blue got the wagon, and then you all got in the wagon to go get the body.

W: Well, the sheriff from Lancaster—I don't know why he was on a horse; maybe it was so bad he probably couldn't get in a buggy or something. But he was riding on a horse, and then he come by down there and saw Uncle Tom was standing



up like that, with his hands. Done froze to the mud. He couldn't pull loose. So, he told Uncle Sam he figured that's where it was because he rode over here on the horse and told Uncle Sam to fix his wagon with him.

E: And then you and Sallie—

W: Sallie and Lilly. Me and Sallie and Lilly.

E: You and Sallie Beck?

W: She's Beck now, but she was a Brown then. And Lilly was a Blue.

E: You, Sallie Brown, and Lilly Blue were the three that went, the three girls. And in the front seat up on the wagon would be Sam Blue and Toad?

W: And my daddy.

E: And your daddy was Harris.

W: Yeah, Benjamin Harris.

E: So that was six of you. And so you sang going down the way. You sang "Nearer My God to Thee," and then you sang the other one that I like so much.

W: "O, My Father."

E: Sing that one, I like that one.

W: I don't know if I can or not. You know, I've talked so long now, I can't talk much more. The doctor told me so I had bronchitis.

E: If you've gotta—

W: [Sings] "O, my Father [inaudible 23:10] and in the high and glorious place, when shall I regain thy presence, and in the high and glorious place."

E: That is beautiful. Thank you, ma'am. I'll bet it was cold for you. You probably covered up with little blankets in the back of that wagon.

W: Yes, we had blankets and quilts, too. They had an extra sack to lay him on.

E: Oh, yes. Then when you got down there and you found the body and they placed it in the wagon and covered it up, then you three girls got close up to the front seat near your grown-ups, didn't you? The men?

W: Yes.

E: And you came home. After they came home and they prepared the body for the funeral, did you go with them to the top of the hill when they buried him?

W: Well, safe from where they buried him—they carried him to Chief Blue's house, that's where they carried him 'cause we had no home with Aunt Sarah, and her place was so small they carried him to Chief Blue's. The graveyard was not very far from there. The whole reservation would gather there at the place and stay, too.

E: Chief Blue at that time lived down near where the well is in the center of the reservation? Was that his home?

W: No, not then. He lived way over above where Aunt Sarah Harris lived. That's back up on the road up where Gary lives.

E: Yes, I know where that is.

W: Where Gary lives now. All right. Just up there in that big oak road, that's where it was.

E: And so everybody on the reservation came?

W: Oh, yeah, just like they'd do now, if somebody of the family dies. If they died somewhere else, they bring the funeral. And they go every night 'til they're buried. They would let 'em stay up, you know, 'til nine.

E: A wake, they call it.

W: Yeah.

E: Chief Blue would have the funeral service at the grave?

W: Yeah.

E: He was an amazing man that he knew much of the bible, didn't he?

W: And didn't know "A" from bullshit.

E: He didn't know any of his alphabet.

W: No.

E: But he knew the bible.

W: But he knowed. I've heard since then—I didn't know then—that he would always get my daddy—well, I know my daddy would be gone every night—and he'd teach him the Bible lessons he was going to preach the next day.

E: Is that right?

W: See, out of his memory, that was the way he would preach. I've been told. I didn't know that then, but I do now.

E: Well, your father was the first one that got a good education, and we're just glad he did and passed it on to the others. I've seen the grave, and it's one of the very few over there that has a marker, a white marble marker. The history says that Thomas Stevenson was elected Chieftain one time in your Tribe.

W: Yes.

E: I don't know how long he was Chief.

W: I don't know either, but he had been. I guess that was long before I was born, maybe. It may have been while I was a kid coming up, I suppose, I don't know.

E: Well, Sarah Ayres was older than he, so if he died when he was 110, she was more than 110.

W: Yes, she was old. But she got where she couldn't get out and go around walking like he did.

E: That's right.

W: That was—actually, he'd been dead before she got like that, too.

E: Is she buried in the old cemetery?

W: Uh-huh. Well, I think all her family is in the old cemetery.

E: It's amazing that so many of the Indians do not know this history that you know. It's just wonderful that you do know. You were telling me about the kind of food that they ate, that he had those sausage biscuits, big fat sausage biscuits, and sweet potatoes roasted in the fireplace. What other good food do you remember you having?

W: Most of 'em had beans and peas, we had beans and peas, cabbage. Well, that's what my dad and them used to raise in the garden. Corn.

E: What would you use for money? Cut wood from the forest to sell for money?

W: Well, yeah. Back then I think they'd sell wood, but to tell me—I used to hear my dad and them say when they sold the wood, they didn't get but fifty cents a cord for it when they'd sell it to the White people. I don't think that was right either but—ah, they finally made a living anyhow. The lord brought 'em through. And I'm thankful for that because they didn't have no chance on the reservation making pots, you know. The lord brought 'em through.

E: You remember Nelson Blue, I'm sure. You went to school with him?

W: Yeah. Nelson was in the old folks' home. He died recently.

E: He died where?

W: It was in the summertime. He died in the old folks' home.

E: Yes, I knew he had died. His wife was a remarkable woman, and I believe was adopted into the Ayers family across the river.

W: No, she was adopted by the Wattses when she was a baby, but they weren't living around here. My Uncle Jim and Aunt Jane, they was Wattses, and they lived in Gaffney. And there was a White girl at that time that said—back then, I reckon, I didn't know anything about it, but when a child was born that didn't have a father, the parents would put them out. So that's how him and Aunt Jane got Lee. He said the woman was living with a Negro man, and he told her when Lee was born if she wasn't a colored baby when she was born, he would kill her. And so the woman went into the barn and had this baby—she knows it wasn't going to be no colored baby. And when the baby was born, she just came in through a window early one morning and told my Aunt Jane to not to let nobody know she knew that baby wasn't colored because if the nigger did find out, he would kill her. So that's how Aunt Jane had a connection.

E: So she brought the baby from Gaffney?

W: Yes, sir. When they moved back home, she brought it with her and raised it. That baby never did know who her momma was. I heard people say since then that lived around Gaffney said that she found her dad's preaching. But the nigger thought she was living with the milkman. And he thought that if it wasn't his, you

know, I reckon he'd make meals out of her. He would kill the baby, and so she give the baby to Uncle Jim and Aunt Jane.

E: Uncle Jim and Aunt Jane?

W: Watts.

E: They named her Leola?

W: Yeah, they named her Leola Watts, and she went by Watts. She never did know who she was no more than Uncle Jim and Aunt Jane taught her. See, her people and White people around Gaffney, they knew who she was. But she was not their own.

E: And they raised a fine family.

[End of interview]

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