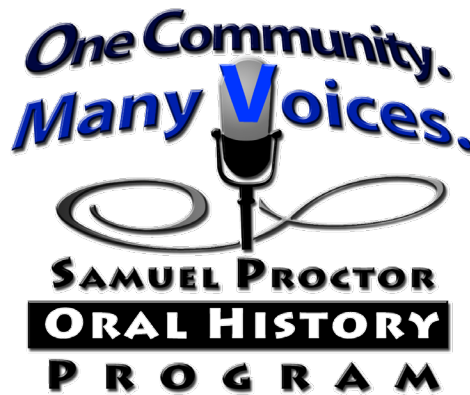


# John Thomas Boyd

**Southeastern Indian Oral History Project (SIOHP)  
CAT-152**

**Interview by:**

**Emma Reid Echols  
April 20, 1983**



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**CAT 152 John Thomas Boyd**  
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**Interviewed by Emma Reid Echols on April 20, 1983**  
**12 minutes | 7 pages**

**Abstract:** John Thomas Boyd is a retired captain of the York County Sheriff's Department who retired in 1982 after having been with the department for twenty-five years. In the interview he discusses his relationship with various Indians through the years. While on the force, he treated Indians on an equal basis with Whites and he feels Indians were law-abiding citizens just like their White counterparts. Boyd tells of a friendship he had with one Indian by the name of Kevin Farrell, a cook in prison, who was serving a life sentence for murder. Boyd feels Ferrell was a trustworthy person and he thought highly of him. Ferrell committed suicide while on an errand outside of the prison. Boyd was a pallbearer at his funeral along with several other officers.

**Keywords:** [Catawba Nation; Kevin Farrell; South Carolina--Rock Hill; Law; Politics and government]

**ORAL HISTORY**

**P R O G R A M**  
**University of Florida**

CAT 152

Interviewee: John Thomas Boyd

Interviewer: Emma Reid Echols

Date of Interview: April 20, 1983

E: This is Emma Reid Echols, Route 6, Box 260, Rock Hill, South Carolina. It's April 20, 1983. I'm recording the oral history of the Catawba Indians. I'm visiting in the home of Mr. John Thomas Boyd. And he took me to see the most interesting thing down in the pasture beyond his lake, way down among the trees. Years ago, the Indians camped at the top of this hill, and they would bring their corn to this big rock—it's called the Indian Rock—and there they would mash up their corn to make their meal. The big rock is still there. So, in the early spring, we were able to take a picture, which I will send along with this tape. Mr. Boyd, tell me your full name and address.

B: John T. Boyd, Route 6, Box 515, Rock Hill.

E: What was your official job here? You're retired now, but what was your official job?

B: I retired as the captain of the York County Sheriff's Department in July of last year, which would be 1982.

E: And how long were you with this department?

B: Twenty-five years.

E: Now, during those twenty-five years, you've come in contact with lots of Indians, and I remember that your grandfather was supervisor for York County and had a number of contacts with the Indians. He was particularly concerned that the Indians would have good roads down into their reservations. Now, I understand that you went to high school with some of the Indians. Do you remember going to high school with some of the Indians?

B: Yes ma'am, I went to high school in the late [19]40s with Buck George, I know personally, and he played football.

E: In the classes, did they—the children—how did they rate academically? Did they keep up with the other boys?

B: Yes, ma'am.

E: Now, were there any disciplinary problems? Did you have any trouble, fights on the ground, or anything of that kind?

B: No, ma'am.

E: Now Buck George later on went, I believe, to Clemson College as a famous football player, and is now living in Rock Hill. Do you know what he's doing now?

B: No, I do not.

E: I believe his wife went to college. He's respected among the Indians. Now, when you became associated with the York County Police Department you had contacts with lots of Indians. As a general rule, did the Indians give you any trouble with the law, or were they law-abiding?

B: Mostly they were law-abiding. They were no more trouble than anyone else, and I would say less trouble than anyone else.

E: Was the big problem drink with them?

B: No, ma'am.

E: The Mormons are very strict about not letting their people do that. On the prison—in the prison camps did you ever know any of the Indians who were there?

B: Yes, ma'am. I knew a Kevin Ferrell, who had been sentenced to life and was a trustee and a cook at the county jail. I was at the county jail helping the jailers for a period of three months, and became acquainted with Kevin very closely. He was very trustworthy. He was—you could safely send him out to do something away from the jail. He would say where he was going, what he would do and when he would return, and he would always be on time. And after we moved the county jail to Rock Hill, he had a room out back of the jail which was fixed up for him. One morning when I went in, the jailer told me that Kevin had not come back in the night before. That he had gone to York to feed the bloodhounds, which were still being kept at the old jail in York. At that time, I felt like something had happened, because he was always trustworthy and was always back when he said he would. We started looking for him and we couldn't locate him anywhere. We went back down in the old Nation looking for him. I think it was a period of about three or four days, someone opened the old garage at the old county jail in York and found the station wagon which he drove. It had been running and had run out of gas. It had a hose, water hose, taped to the exhaust and run into the back of the station wagon. He had all the windows up. Papers were stuffed all around the doors, and Kevin was laying on the front seat dead.

E: Now this was very unusual for an Indian to commit suicide?

B: Yes, ma'am, very unusual. I don't remember another Indian committing suicide.

E: And he was really in despair because he lost his wife to another man and committed murder for that reason. Is that right?

B: That's correct. I talked to him several different times about it and he said he just got mad, and just a matter of a few minutes what can happen to a person then. He could have gotten out after a twenty-year period on probation. I feel sure that he would have made the twenty years if he hadn't committed suicide with no trouble at all. He would have gotten out on parole.

E: His mother is a famous pottery maker and highly respected in the community. One thing that I noticed in the newspaper was a number of police officers went to the home and also attended his funeral. Is that correct?

B: That is correct. I was one of the pallbearers at the funeral, and so were the sheriff and some of the other men. I don't recall how many. But he was the same as one of us officers at the time.

E: That's a wonderful tribute if you say he was absolutely trustworthy. Did he look like an Indian?

B: Yes, he was dark-skinned, had black hair, and a black mustache.

E: His mother is a very fine pottery maker, his father is a White man, and both Alberta and Jack make pottery. It's real interesting though that a White man would learn to make Indian pottery but Jack Kimbrough, his father, learned to make pottery. Did you ever see any of the Ferrell's pottery?

B: No, I have not. I did get to meet his daddy, and I did meet his mother. But I never did see any of their pottery.

E: You had mentioned Buck George. Tell me some of the other Indians that you know by name. A number of them have made their way in the world as electricians or mechanics. What ones do you know?

B: The Harrises, the Blues—

E: The Cantys?

B: The Cantys, and several more I can't think of them right now.

E: Well, there are quite a number. Did you know Edward Canty who lives not far from us here?

B: I knew the Cantys, but I'm not sure whether it's Edward or not.

E: Edward lives on the Fire Tower Road at the foot of the fire tower on Fire Tower Road near Lesslie.

B: No, I don't know him. Now I did know some Cantys who lived on Springsteen Road.

E: Are there a number of them that live now in the Springsteen development? That land was given to the Indians, I believe. Leroy Blue lives there and Carson Blue lives there.

B: And the Cantys did live there as far as I know. They were up the road.

E: Did you know Carson Blue?

B: Yes.

E: I believe he is the new bishop of the Catawba Nation.

B: Yes, ma'am.

E: So as a group, they have really been law-abiding. You have very few arrests and very few problems with the Indians.

B: That's correct.

E: Have you ever visited the Indian school or the Indian church?

B: No, ma'am.

E: Well, they made a great many improvements there. Of course, the reservation has a great many campers and a great many trailers all over it cause there— some of them can't get the land. Do you remember the old church on the reservation in the very center? It was made of cement blocks.

B: Yes.

E: That is gone now. It was a landmark, I believe. We'd like to have preserved it. But they have a new church on the reservation, and also a new one on Saluda Road on the Chester highway. **So it's very different.** Sometime down on the reservation I'm sure you at the Lesslie fire department, you go to help out. Not long ago, I believe you had a fire of an old Indian woman down there. Can you tell me about that?

B: We had a call that a house was on fire at the old Nation down to the left of the Mormon church. These people on the road showing us which driveway it was. We went to the fire, and they were on the road, as they said they would be. We went into a road down through the woods. There was a one-room house, I would say it was no bigger than twelve by twenty, that was on fire. It had started burning in the ceiling. It had caught from a stove with a pipe going out the side. It did not have a chimney at all. This lady, which was around eighty-three years old I think, had walked as it caught on fire, she said she had tried to put it out. Said that she couldn't, walked to another house to call the fire department. We did put the fire out, but it was a lot of damage, you could see all the ceiling in the house had fell in and was just more or less a shell.

E: Did you see the old lady at this time?



B: Yes, ma'am, I did go back in the house. She was wanting her medicine, and I went back in the house and got her pocketbook and took the medicine out to the car where she was standing.

E: I know she appreciated that. That was Mrs. Wade, and she is the nearest, I suppose, to full-blooded Indian that is on the reservation today. She is eighty-three years old, and her father was Ben Harris, and Ben Harris was a full-blooded Indian. She lives alone in that little house, and I think she has moved back into that house since you all helped her after the fire. Well, this is just another illustration of a good contact that the White people have had with the Indians in our community. Thank you, Mr. Boyd.

[End of interview]

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