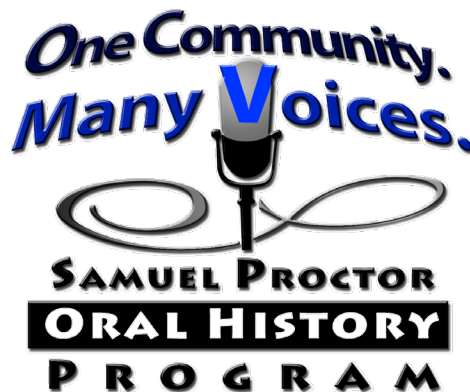


Hazel Faye George Griener

**Southeastern Indian Oral History Project (SIOHP)
CAT-204**

Interview by:

**Emma Reid Echols
May 22, 1993**



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21 minutes | 14 pages

Abstract: Faye George Greiner loves flowers. She describes her garden, and some of the medicinal uses for plants have been used in her family history. Her primary trades, however, are basket weaving and pottery, and she spends most of the interview describing the processes by which she produces her crafts. She also talks about members of her family who also participate in similar crafts, and she describes how more people are taking pride in the Catawba heritage.

Keywords: [Catawba Nation; Early Brown; Jeffrey Travis Blue; North Carolina--Charlotte; Pottery; Traditional medicine]

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

CAT 204

Interviewee: Hazel Faye George Greiner

Interviewer: Emma Reid Echols

Date of Interview: May 22, 1993

E: This is Emma Echols, 5150 Sharon Road, Charlotte, North Carolina. May 22.

[Break in recording]

E: Many years ago, I visited in the home of Edith Brown, a very lovely lady, living on top of the hill, with flowers all around her yard. Then, I saw the meats and vegetables she was drying on the wall on the side of the fireplace. Then, I made a tape of her daughter, Evelyn George, and some of the beautiful pottery she makes. She's making a little pottery now. Today, I am visiting in the home of the granddaughter of Edith Brown, the daughter of Evelyn George. I knew she made beautiful baskets, I came to see that, and I'm sitting on the couch here while she is making a beautiful pot, with an Indian head on the end. Now I am going to let her tell you her name. Tell us your name.

G: My name is Faye George Greiner.

E: You've recently moved into this small trailer here, haven't you?

G: Yes. Well, I'm not completely moved in yet, I'm just in the process. I'm going to have my electrical done this week, and hopefully by next week I'll be moved in.

E: And you'll be close to your brother and your sister and your mother here, won't you?

G: Right. My sister lives right next to me here on the other side, and my brother lives across the road from her, and my baby sister will be living just down the road from my other sister. So, we're all right—we're going to have to rename the road to George Road.

E: You know, I know something about you, that you love flowers, the same way that your grandmother did.

G: Yes, I do.

E: As I came up the trail, I saw the wildflowers you had collected from the woods.

G: Mmhm.

E: What wildflowers have you found?

G: Well, I've got some red honeysuckles blooming, and I've got some yellow honeysuckles, and I've got some wild snapdragons, and some black-eyed Susans, and some other yellow flowers—I don't even know the name of them, but if I looked in my herb book, I could probably identify 'em.

E: Do you know where some of the herbs that they used to get in the woods for medicines and so forth?

G: Do I know where they are?

E: Uh-huh.

G: Yeah, there's some down on the branch down where my brother lives. He lives below my mother. There's some over there. I remember when my grandma used to go and get holly and alder tag and catnip, and—they called it rabbit tobacco, and she'd put it in water and boil it and make a tea, and she'd give it to us for different kinds of things like stomachaches, and things like that. And it helped! You'd be surprised, because my daughter gave my son-in-law some catnip. [Laughter] Not too long ago, he was real sick, and he could not get nothing to stay on his stomach, and she said, "Well, Mom, I'll give him some catnip tea." So she went out in her backyard and got some catnip and made him some catnip tea. 'Cause she

remembers her great-grandma giving her catnip tea, and she made him some catnip tea and that stuff made him better. It would stay down, it didn't come back up.

E: Now, what other herbs did they get beside that?

G: Well, they got yellow root, and my mother got some of that yellow root last year, and I know that there's bloodroot all over the area here.

E: What do that for—bloodroot?

G: You can use it for different things, but what I was mainly interested in it for was for dyeing my baskets.

E: Yeah.

G: So, that's what I was going to collect bloodroot for. Along with, you know some other things, and dye my baskets.

E: Tell me, did you go to school here on the reservation?

G: I went to school here on the reservation, and then I went to school in Cherokee, North Carolina, at the boarding school for a year.

E: Now, who do you remember of your teachers down on the reservation?

G: Oh goodness, I can't even remember. There was Ms. Spencer, and I remember one of my teachers—now I am not sure whether she was on the reservation or not but—Faye Cornwall.

E: Oh yes, she taught on the reservation.

G: She was one of my favorite teachers.

E: She's a lovely person.

E: Mrs. Cornish, did you ever have her, and Mrs. Robinson?

G: I probably did, but I don't remember, it's been so long ago.

E: Then from there you went to high school?

G: I went to Rock Hill High School for one year, and then I went to Cherokee boarding school for a year, and that's as far in school as I got.

E: Then you married?

G: I married and moved to Michigan in 1953.

E: How many children do you have?

G: I have four. I have three boys, and one daughter. I have a daughter that lives in Michigan, and one son—my baby son—lives here and he works with the preservation of arts for the land, you know preservation of the land, for the Indians. And I have two boys that live in Alabama.

E: Are you pleased with the settlement that they are having with—

G: Well, there's some good things in it. You know you cannot always get everything that you want. I'd like to see it be a little better, but you know, like I said, you cannot always get what you want. I know, I was involved in business in Michigan, and I negotiated a lot of union contracts, because I was president of the union. So I know that you have to have give and take on everything. So, you do not always get what you want, and you can't please everybody.

E: But I'm pleased to see how well you all are working together. There are some differences, I'm sure.

G: Mmhm.

E: But you are doing a mighty fine job working together.

G: Well, Earl Robbins and I worked together a lot. A lot of people said, "Well, Earl

don't—"

E: Earl who?

G: Earl Robbins.

E: Oh, yes. Uh-huh.

G: Said, "Earl don't help people." But Earl and I go and dig clay together. Me and him and his brother. People think, "Well, she don't dig no clay," but I do! I get down there with the post hole diggers and I dig, you know. We strain clay and he shows me things that he knows about building pottery. Right now, I'm working on a big old pot that looks similar to some that he's made, with the big Indian heads on it. I never would have attempted to make this if it hadn't been for Earl. He kept telling me, "Well, you can do it, I know you can." I've made this big one, plus I got another great big one at my mother's that I made that's bigger than this one. I've made a big, tall wooden jug, and then I got another big one over at Earl's. But we've been finding some good clay and Earl and I have been working together, and I'm—

E: You go dig your own clay or don't you?

G: We go dig our own clay, and strain it out, and everything. Earl has been a big help to me. He's taught me a lot.

E: I wish somebody could be sitting beside you like I am and see the tools that you've done—

G: [Laughter]

E: You've got little round wheel that you just went—

G: You know what that is?

E: What is?

G: That's a pastry wheel.

E: A pastry wheel, and she's got a little piece of cardboard—

G: No, this is Tupperware.

E: Tupperware.

G: This is a Tupperware pot scraper. [Laughter]

E: She was putting the design on the Indian's headdress with that. She's got a little tiny —what do you call that one, Faye?

G: This is an awl, that I use in my basket weaving. If I can't get a piece of reed down in a tight spot, I take this awl and I open up that spot with the sharp point, and then I open it up and then I push it down in there.

E: And you have your mold over there that you made you Indian head with.

G: Yeah.

E: And that is the first time I have ever seen it.

G: We made our own mold. We made our little head, and—see that little head over there?

E: Yours would be a little different from some of them.

G: Yeah. See, we make our own and we burn 'em, we fire 'em and then we—gosh, here is one that I just did. See, I just did that one the other day.

E: Oh, yes.

G: We make our own little face, then we do this to it, and then we burn it, and then we can make a mold out of it.

E: This has not been burned yet?

G: Yeah, that's been burned. I just burnt that. That way we can make our heads faster,

you know, and put them on our pots.

E: And they are beautiful. Her pot is probably a foot high—at least a foot high—and probably a foot wide, with the two heads on it, and it is going to be a beautiful thing. She is not only making beautiful pottery, but she's an expert in making baskets. She goes out in the woods and gets things like bloodroot and things like that to dye her materials with, and she's teaching other people. Are you teaching in the school here?

G: I am teaching at the cultural center. We have classes. We haven't started our class this year yet. We have been waiting for them to put the air in over at the cultural center. So, they should have it in this coming Wednesday—which is the twenty-sixth, I believe it is, of May—I am going to Pickens, South Carolina, and interview and film a gentleman that splits his own reed. And he's going to teach me how to split reed and make my own basket handles.

E: You're buying your reed so far?

G: Right now I am, but I'm going to learn how to do my own split, and that way I can do my own split, and I can dye with black walnuts, and just about anything. You can dye reed with strawberries or grapes or, you know, anything like that that's got—people know that fresh fruits, if you drop fruit juice on it, it'll put a stain on your clothes. Well, you can use that stain to dye your—

E: Do you have a ready market for your pottery selling?

G: For my pottery?

E: Excuse me, for baskets.

G: For my baskets? Well, usually I just sell my baskets by word of mouth. I have a few

here that I haven't sold, but usually I take orders for 'em and sell 'em.

E: The price range runs from what to what?

G: Well, I can make them from eight dollars on up to a hundred dollars. I have some little doll cradles that I made, they're seventy-five dollars, and they're really nice for you to get for your little children for a doll.

E: You're not thinking about retiring? You are too young to think of retiring.

G: Well, I've retired from my job from Michigan, and I came here, and I was working in Charlotte in an office, and I hurt my leg—in [19]76, I broke it. So, in February, my leg started to give me a lot of trouble, so I had orthoscopic surgery done on it, and my doctor released me Tuesday and told me I could go back to work, but I told him I wasn't going back to work, because I had too much to do. I want to do my pottery. I can earn enough money on my pottery and my baskets staying at home. I can earn more by staying at home than I can up there in that little office. I don't really have the time to put into what I would like to do, which is basket weaving and pottery making and work up there.

E: It is so peaceful and quiet and beautiful down here. The trees and the flowers are all out. It is a beautiful spot in which to live.

G: Mmhm, it is. Once I get it the way I want it, it's really going to be nice. I got some landscaping to do out here, but that's not going to take me long to do it. As you say, it's quiet and peaceful here.

E: I am sitting here and looking at one of your beautiful baskets over there, and I see purple and black and brown and blue. Tell me how you got those beautiful colors.

G: And green and grey. Well, I dyed it with—you'll be surprised—I dyed it with Rit dye.

You can dye your reed with Rit dye, and that is how I use some of my colors like that when I make Easter baskets.

E: When you teach other people to make baskets, how many are you going to have in a class?

G: Well, last year I had nine. So, I do not know how many—I heard some other people, a lot of other people say they wanted—

E: How soon will the classes start?

G: They should start next month, probably in a couple of weeks. But I'm hoping it'll be starting in a couple of weeks anyway.

E: Do you feel that your pupils have the innate talent to make it, or is it just that they learn from you—what is it?

G: Well, they are learning from me, but they learn the basics from me, and some of 'em have gone on to make their own designs. You can take a basket, if you're talented enough, you know your basic design and how to lay it out and weave your bottom, then you can make any size or type of basket that you want. I learned this in Cherokee, North Carolina. I do grapevine reeds too.

E: Oh, that's good.

G: Mmhm, I gather vines out in the field or in the woods and I make grapevine reeds, and they're beautiful. But you can make grapevine baskets also. Like you said, you can—these students that I had last year, they were really great and I appreciated 'em. We went to the fair, and one of my students won first place for her basket that she entered in the fair.

E: Who was that?

G: That was Sarah Plowler.

E: Oh, yes.

G: Leonard Plowler's wife. I won second place with my basket, and I saw her basket, and I did not see a ribbon on it. I told my mother then, "That basket should have won something, it is really pretty. She did a good job on it." I didn't know she had won first place, and she didn't either until she went to pick it up. She was really surprised. She said she wasn't ever going to cash her little check that she got. It wasn't much, but it was—I think the ribbon meant more to her.

E: The ribbon was the most important.

G: Yeah. The ribbon meant more to her than, you know—

E: It used to be, years ago, that the Indians were not proud, or they didn't say they were proud, but now I hear everybody telling me that they're proud to be a Catawba Indian—

G: Well, years ago the Indians were looked down on so much, and discriminated against so bad, until the Indians weren't proud of their heritage. Because if you went somewheres and applied for job, and you told them that you were Indian, you didn't get that job. Well, it's still like that to a certain degree now, but it's not near as bad as it used to be. So, therefore, the Indians were just—they wouldn't tell nobody they were Indian. But now, the Indians are proud to claim their heritage and there's a lot of them that are going back and trying to learn their culture, like learn the pottery making. And there's a lot of people that are learning to make drums and to do all kinds of other things. My sister teaches bead work, and my mother teaches pottery, and I've been teaching pottery, too. This summer too—well, not this

summer, but since it started getting warmer—I've been teaching pottery making to my great-nephew, and he's doing good—

E: It's interesting to me that the boys and the men are interested in pottery making and basket weaving.

G: Mmhm, yeah. Well, he is one of my good basket weavers, too. He learned to do baskets with me, and he's such a joy to be around. I really—I love him dearly and he's here every Tuesday and Thursday. He is nineteen years old, and I was telling my son, "A lot of young boys that age would be out running around and trying to see what kind of meanness they could get into, but here's Travis. He's sitting over here and learning to make pottery." He made that little bowl right over there with heads on it.

E: Oh, it is lovely. Now, Travis—what's his last name?

G: Blue. Travis Blue.

E: Travis Blue.

G: He's Carson Blue's son.

E: Oh, yes. Travis is the one who finished high school not long ago.

G: Yes, he's already—

E: He also is a musician.

G: Yes, he is. He's a musician.

E: Well, I did a tape on him.

G: Did you?

E: Yeah.

G: He sang, it was really—

E: He sang at his mother's funeral.

G: His grandmother's funeral.

E: His grandmother's funeral.

G: He sure did, and it was just beautiful. I told him, "Your grandmother was so proud of you, Travis. You don't know how much your grandmother loved you, so you can carry that and think about it," whenever—you know, because when she passed away, I called him and he cried. I told him, "Well, don't cry, because your grandmother is in a better place. She's not suffering," because she did suffer a lot, and I told him, "She wouldn't want you to be sad, she would want you to be glad because she is not hurting anymore." So, you know, he's such a joy. I just love him dearly.

E: He is an attractive, lovely person. I know him. Now, anything else you want to say on the tape before we stop talking? It has been a joy for me to visit you today.

G: Well, this is funny. I met a lady. I went down to the Beauwater's office Monday to get a permit to dig clay up on Beauwater's land, and a lady was in there and she wanted some pottery. So I told her I had some in my car, and she told me, "When I was a little tiny girl, my mother—we lived in Van Wyck, and my mother used to go, and she'd blow the horn and somebody would come and get us and take us across on the ferry." She said there was this man that lived there, said he was an older man and she said, "He would get me and carry me onto the ferry because I would just cry, because I was scared. He would tell me, 'Now honey, there ain't nothing that's going to hurt you, the water is not going to get you wet, you're gonna be alright,'" and that was my grandfather. It was really strange meeting this lady.

E: John Brown was your grandfather.

G: Mmhm, yeah. Early Brown, Early Brown. My mother and I were in York last Friday and Saturday at a pottery show. My mother and Nola Campbell and I—and this man had been in Ohio, and he brought my mother a piece of pottery that had her name on it and the date of 1939. He bought it in Ohio, and my mother had made it up there. I can remember when we went to Ohio, because I was like, about four years old. And that's where he found her piece of pottery, and he brought it and gave it to her. It was a beautiful little vase. It is probably about—I would say eight or nine inches tall—and it's just gorgeous.

E: It was a long time ago.

G: But what is so important about that little piece of pottery is that I know, and my mother knows, that my grandfather scraped it. She said that she knows that my grandfather's hands had been on that piece of pottery, and that's what meant a lot to her. So, he gave it to my mother and she brought it home with her. So that was nice.

E: All of you have a rich heritage, and I'm glad to see you proud of it.

G: Well, I am. My sisters—both of 'em—and I make pottery, and my one brother makes pottery, and we're proud to be able to do this. I am glad that I was able to come back and get started doing my pottery again and my baskets.

E: And you have so many of your family and your friends around here on the reservation, and that makes you happy.

G: I sure do. So that's nice.

[End of Interview]

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