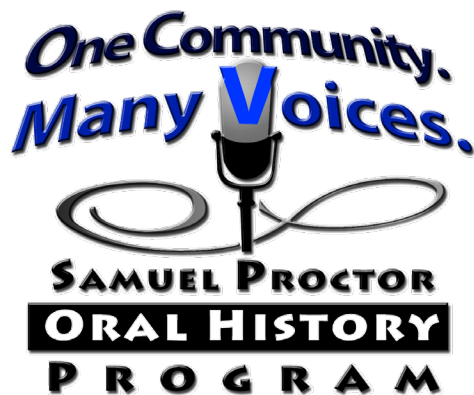


# Isabelle Harris George

**Southeastern Indian Oral History Project (SIOHP)  
CAT-023**

**Interview by:**

**Jerry Lee  
February 6, 1972**



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**CAT 023 Isabelle Harris George**  
**Southeastern Indian Oral History Project (SIOHP)**  
**Interviewed by Jerry Lee on February 6, 1972**  
**31 minutes | 20 pages**

**Abstract:** Isabelle George recalls her life from the time she was a little girl on the old reservation up to her life now as an adult on the new reservation. She describes her experiences in school and the types of lessons she was taught in her early childhood education. She then goes on to explain her family's work as farmers and mill workers on the reservation and then describes her decision to move to a different reservation in her twenties. George then goes on to describe the changes in land and governmental support she witnessed over time. After this, she briefly discusses her experiences with various doctors over her lifetime as well as her religious experiences in the Church of Jesus Christ of the Latter-day Saints. She then ends the interview by detailing the process of creating traditional pottery, including the type of clay she used, where she gathered this clay, and how she learned to create it.

**Keywords:** [Catawba Nation; South Carolina--Rock Hill; Pottery; Family histories]

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

CAT 023

Interviewee: Isabelle Harris George

Interviewer: Jerry Lee

Date of Interview: February 6, 1972

L: I'm Jerry Lee and I'm interviewing Mrs. Isabelle George. It's the sixth of February, 1972 and we're sitting in the living room of Mrs. George's home. Mrs. George, what is your full name?

G: Well, it's Isabelle George, 'cause my middle name's Harris. I was a Harris before I married George. I married a Harris and then when I married him— then I married George.

L: Who are your parents?

G: David Adam Harris and my mother's name is Margaret Delphina Harris—no, George. [Laughter] She was a George before she married.

L: Are you the kin to Chief Blue?

G: I guess **maybe** somewhere—now long years ago people told me that we were first cousins or second cousins. I don't know. But I know we're cousins anyway.

L: Were you kin to any other Chiefs?

G: Well now, Albert Sanders was Chief once, and he was a nice Chief while I was maybe his about second or third cousins. My brother Raymond Harris, he was a Chief once.

L: When was he a Chief?

G: Let's see, when was that? It must've been some time in...I think it was in the [19]40s anyway I don't really [inaudible 1:36]

L: How many children do you have?

G: Don't have any.

L: Don't have any children?

G: I raised a boy and a girl.

L: What part Indian are you?

G: Well, I couldn't be—I know I've got some White in me, but I just don't know how much because my daddy was an Indian, my momma was an Indian, but she had some White in her, but I just don't know how much.

L: Are there any full-blooded Indians left?

G: None as I know of. If there's any I don't know 'em.

L: Would—Tell us a little about your younger life. Where were you raised at?

G: Well, I was raised on the old reservation. I was raised on there until I was about in my twenties and then people started moving out. But I went to school on the old reservation when I was small. I went to school there cause you know they didn't want to go outside the reservation. We went there.

L: What kind of school did you have?

G: It was just a small frame school. Not no bricks. Well, it had about one room to it. It was one big room and the desks. It was big.

L: How was it heated?

G: With a big ol' belly heater. One of these big, old ones that you know you can put a lot of wood in. And they used wood. They didn't use coal then, they used wood.

L: How many classes did you have? Different ones—

G: Well then, they call them when you got to school then, you had to go to ABC class. That's what they called it. You learn your ABCs. After you learn your ABCs, then they'll start you with spelling. Spelling words to learn your words, you know, just like "an" and "in" and things like that. You had—they call them words

out and you get them off by heart and spell them and then maybe the next year, if you make that one, you go to the first grade where they taught you to read and write. But—what you call it—ABC class that was just ABCs and numbers and you just count as far as you could.

L: How high up did the classes go? Do you remember?

G: I think about to seventh or eighth. I believe that's about as high as it went when I was going to school.

L: Did you finish school?

G: No, I didn't finish. I just quit.

L: Did you ever go to school anywhere else?

G: No, I never did go to school outside. [Laughter]

L: You said you lived there as a little girl with your family—

G: Yeah, I lived there until my mama died and then when she died, I stayed around with my sisters and my uncle, but I stayed on the reservation. I was on the reservation.

L: What year were you born in?

G: 1904. Tomorrow's my birthday. [Laughter]

L: Tomorrow's your birthday? And you left when you were twenty years old?

G: No. I mean— I got married when I was twenty-one and see, then my husband, he moved out of town and then on his way out, I moved off with—You know, my sister and she moved out, her and her husband, on the farm or something. And I moved out with them. Kept 'em to work the farm.

L: What kind of work did your father and all do when you were a small girl at home?

G: My father-in-law or my father?

L: Your father.

G: Farmer.

L: That's how he raised y'all?

G: Yeah, he was a farmer on up 'til I guess I must've been about fifteen—no, sixteen—he went to work in the mill. Cotton mill. What they call Highland Park. He went to work there.

L: And that was a pretty good job there?

G: Yeah, he went to work there about three or four months and then he'd come back and started farming again. So that's how he lived as farmers.

L: Did he have a pretty hard time keeping y'all up?

G: Well, it didn't seem hard to me it seemed like more than that it was harder now than it was back then. It didn't seem like it was hard to me. You know what I'm saying, I really enjoyed—[Laughter]

L: Did most of the people farm on the reservation with you?

G: Well just about all of 'em. Just a few didn't and they worked outside, you know. But farmers you know they worked doing **anything**. [inaudible 06:21]

L: After you left the reservation, that's when you were married, did you have a job?

G: No, housewife.

L: Housewife? What type of work did your husband do?

G: He worked in the cotton mill.

L: What cotton mill did he work in?

- G: I think they called it Carhart Mill. It was up there with that, whatchu call it, **Astro** mill is now. He worked there and then he'd come back and did industrial work a long time. Well, that's what he was working at when he died.
- L: When you moved off the reservation, you were married, did y'all move to Rock Hill?
- G: Uh-huh. Yeah, we moved to Rock Hill.
- L: Lived inside the city limits there?
- G: Yeah, we moved on **Mill** Hill. You know, then they had what you called Mill House. And you could move in then you know, so we moved.
- L: Is your husband Indian?
- G: Uh-huh.
- L: What was his name?
- G: Robert William Harris.
- L: Did y'all ever have any trouble with the townspeople and y'all being Indian? Or they never did—
- G: They didn't bother me pretty much. We'd get along with 'em all right as far as I was concerned.
- L: Do you remember the Depression times?
- G: When Hoover was in there—was it Hoover? Yeah.
- L: Can you tell us something about that? That time I know it was pretty hard all over.
- G: Well, it was pretty hard because that was in—What year was it? [19]32? —That's when I got this little boy and I raised him. And it was pretty hard because we had

to, you know, buy milk for him at the time. Then you made about fifty cent an hour and it didn't make so much. And you had to keep meat from uh ... But we lived. It didn't bother us, it didn't worry us one bit.

L: When did you move back to here? I notice now you're living on what's called the new reservation.

G: When I moved here ... let's see ...

L: Just approximate it doesn't have to be—

G: Yeah, I know what year it was, but the date ... 1950 when I moved here.

L: Where you live right now is about, what, some three or four miles from town?

G: I think it's about that. Of course, it's not due for a long while. Well, I say that it might be a little bit further.

L: Northeast of Rock Hill. How far is it from here to the old reservation?

G: About seven miles, I think.

L: And one time all this was reservation? All this land, right?

G: All this land you see was reservation.

L: What happened to it?

G: Well, it divided up and gave each family so much that the family wanted the land, well, they took land and if they wanted money, then they took money. And a lot of 'em took land and a lot of 'em took money.

L: Who got this? Everyone that was Indian?

G: Yeah. All them that was Indians.

L: How much land did you get, you remember?



G: About two and half acres to a head. You know, just like me and—I'd get about two and half. Well, me and **Ethan**, we've got ten acres together, and then Dianne was in there, and so we got fifteen, but I meant—not fifteen because she got two new ones.

L: Where was this land at?

G: Right around here.

L: This is the land your house is on. This is yours?

G: Yeah, this is my—and that up there—and all of this is mine.

L: It's pretty. Is your house paid for?

G: Yeah.

L: Oh, well, that's real nice. Well, I noticed they're building a highway in up here on the other side of Herbert Blue's home.

G: Yeah.

L: Will that affect y'all any?

G: Well, if any of 'em had land, they're paying for it, the land that belonged to the Indians just like if Herbert—now Herbert wasn't I don't get **spurred enough then**—you know, he didn't have to sell any of, but back over there the Canty's, they had to sell some of theirs.

L: Do you find—when the government gave you this opportunity—did you find out that was a good thing?

G: Well, a lot of them thought it was and a lot of 'em didn't, but I know at the time of it I didn't think it was.

L: You would rather keep the reservation?

G: You know just like it was before you know, but it's happens so we just like, you know, White people. We all know, so if you want to buy a place and build a house, well, we'd have to buy it.

L: Did your family, when you were little, did your family get any help from the government?

G: They always got the help. I guess it's a government—what would you call it where we get so much a year?

L: They just gave you a yearly salary, so to speak?

G: I don't—each child got, I think it was thirty or thirty-five or whatever it was maybe fifty a head. I don't know. Each child got they share out of it. And that's for a year.

L: Was it enough to get by on?

G: And then our doctors was paid for. We didn't have to pay for our doctors like they do now.

L: Who was your doctors?

G: My doctor's old. [Laughter] Dr. Hill was our doctor 'til he died. He was an old man. He was out in the country because he stayed down at the Catawba Junction.

L: Where's Catawba Junction?

G: Down on next to Boar's.

L: This is five or six miles from the reservation?

G: Yeah, just about like that.

L: Do you remember the year this doctor died?

G: No, but it seemed like to me it was either twenty-six or twenty-seven years ago—  
No, it must've been about twenty-eight.

L: Do you know who replaced him?

G: Dr. Black.

L: Was he a good doctor?

G: Mmhm.

L: Did he have an office?

G: Yeah, up town.

L: Oh, y'all had to go all the way to town?

G: Yeah. You can find doctors on up too. It must've been 1950.

L: How did the Indians get from the reservation to the town?

G: Well, when I was small, we always had wagons and buggies and the series—you  
know what they call them series with them two seats— and then [inaudible 13:30]

L: And what happened to Dr. Black? Did he eventually—

G: He died. I think he's been dead about two years now.

L: Do you know who replaced him?

G: Dr. Patton

L: Dr. Patton? He was—

G: Yeah, he replaced him, and then all this got settled up and you see we didn't  
have to pay Dr. Patton till after and then after everything got settled up, you  
know, they settled up this land and then we started having to pay him then.  
Cause he's still my doctor. I still go to him, and I do have to pay him.

L: Is he a good doctor?

G: I like him.

L: Do you think most of the doctors treated the Indians just as well as they would a White person and anyone else?

G: Yeah, I think they would.

L: You mentioned earlier that your brother was a Chief and said about what year was that?

G: It must've been somewhere in the [19]40s, I guess. I don't know it might've been in the [19]50s it's been a long time. It's my youngest brother.

L: What was his name?

G: Raymond Floyd Harris that's— I don't know what you know or not but **Willia Canel's** his wife.

L: Was he a powerful Chief?

G: I guess he was. I don't know. He was a Chief a long time.

L: What did he do? What does a Chief do?

G: They looked at the reservation, you know, just like land. They didn't want you to cut certain wood, you know, in different places where they'd have to go to take them down and then you—tell them not to cut it. They'd look after 'em to see what they need.

L: Did they have any dealings with the people in town?

G: Who, the Chief? Well, I don't know anything about that.

L: Did the Chief have a council at that time?

G: A council—well, see, there was the Chief and then there was the committee and there was secretary and assistant Chief, but I don't know who is the assistant Chief that's for that.

L: I wasn't aware they had an assistant Chief. Well, how long was your brother a Chief?

G: I really don't know because he was Chief a long time, and I don't know if—I believe up until he died but I don't know how many years that was.

L: What year did he die? Approximately.

G: I just can't think now where he died. He was thirty-nine though when he died, but I forgot what year it was.

L: Well, you didn't have any hardships, any troubles with people in town as far as you being Indian?

G: I haven't.

L: Have you ever been ashamed of being an Indian?

G: Uh-huh.

L: You're proud?

G: Yeah, I'm proud. [Laughter] I like to be Indian. A lot of people would tell me they said you know these people like come they've never seen me before just like a ... you know, if you was American and you didn't never saw one before you would say I was a White woman. Well, I guess a lot of them say that and it makes me mad. [Laughter] I don't like for them to say I'm White, I want them to say I'm Indian.

L: What religion are you? What church?

G: Oh, Mormon.

L: Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints? Is your whole family in the church?

G: Yeah, we're Mormons.

L: Why did your family join this church?

G: Well, I don't know I guess when you first come in and there wasn't no priests in town and then when the elders come in— well they come in stationed and they join the church. I just joined, just to be baptized. [Laughter]

L: Just to be baptized? [Laughter]

G: Then I didn't know. But I know better now.

L: How do these elders and all treat the Indian people?

G: When they used to come on reservations? They were good to 'em and they'd stay on there and that's where they lived at, when they'd come onto the reservation. They'd live like one of the Indians.

L: Do they still come out now? The elders?

G: Yeah, they come out once in a while?

L: And they'd still live wherever they can?

G: No, they live in town now. See, I kept the elders here for about five or six years right here with me.

L: Are you registered to vote?

G: Uh-uh.

L: Have you ever registered to vote?

G: I didn't.

L: In your opinion, who was the greatest Indian that ever was?

G: My daddy. [Laughter]

L: Your father? What is his name?

G: David Adam Harris.

L: Why would you say he was the greatest?

G: Just because he was my father. [Laughter]

L: Oh ... prejudice. [Laughter]. Who do you think is the greatest person whether he's Indian or White man? Like a president or supreme court or governor? What's a—movie star ... who's an ideal person in your mind?

G: I don't guess any of 'em.

L: You don't have any favorites?

G: [Laughter] No, I don't have any favorites.

L: When you were younger, did your family, did they teach you about the old Indian ways?

G: No.

L: Never did? Tried to teach you a language or—

G: No, I guess my father knowed it. I don't know whether he did or not, but I know my grandmother did. And whenever she got sick, and she would talk, that's all she would talk. And we would try to understand what she was wanting and I learned a little bit, but I forgot it.

L: When she got sick, she—

G: Yeah, talked in Indian language. She didn't talk like we talking now. She talked our language.

L: Well, that's strange.

G: But that was way back I was about fourteen or so then.

L: Do you remember any of the words? Do you remember any of the old Indian folklore? Old stories or how the Indian people came about being?

G: No.

L: Never heard any of the stories?

G: I forgot all of my own stories. [Laughter]

L: Well, I know at one time you made a lot of pottery to sell. Do you still make pottery?

G: No, since I broke my hand, I can't make a pot.

L: You had to quit altogether?

G: Yeah, I've been making pots every year up till this year.

L: How many years have you been making pottery?

G: I guess about thirty years maybe. [Laughter]

L: Who taught you how to make pottery?

G: Well, I just watched the other people make 'em, but when my mother was living, when I was a little girl like she is, she always had a big board that she would beat the clay on, and I'd have to beat it for her, and I'd always get a little piece and make a pot. [Laughter] I'd watch her, but it wasn't as good as the pottery she made and then when I'd get out playing, I'd go and get this old red, stiff mud and I'd sit down and make pots. And just sit around on the road.

L: Did you sell a lot of pottery?

G: When I did make 'em I sold a lot of 'em.

L: Was it pretty expensive or—



G: Well, I tell you when I first started selling pots, they wasn't expensive. Then, you'd get about five cents, ten, a quarter, fifty cents at different sizes. But now, they can sell them over there and they can get just a little pot about that high would be about three or four dollars.

L: About a six- or eight-inch pot for three or four dollars?

G: Yeah, something like that. Now you can get about five dollars for that bookend there.

L: Did you make those bookends?

G: No Elder [inaudible 22:32] so he wasn't no Indian.

L: Who makes the pottery they sell down at the old reservation now?

G: Arzada Sanders.

L: Arzada? Is she the oldest one who makes it?

G: I don't know. There may be some other ones down there, but I don't know anybody else. Of course, there's a lot of them that could make it, but they just don't do it anymore like they used to. But I loved to fool with it. I always made it every year but now I can't fool with it.

L: Too bad. When did they used to make it the most? Was there ever a period of time when they—everyone really made it?

G: Well, I remember when I was little my grandmother would make them all during the winter.

L: How old were you then?

G: I must've been about eight or nine years old.

L: She'd make it all winter to sell? Did a lot of people—tourists and all— come through?

G: No, she would take them off. They always get them **burning**, then take 'em and sell 'em outside. Maybe they were going away and ... go around to people's houses and sell 'em. A lot of time they'd trade food, for clothes.

L: Who would they trade to?

G: White people.

L: Anybody that'd trade them?

G: Anybody who'd trade with them.

L: I'd like to ask you about making the pottery. Will you tell us how you went about actually making the pottery?

G: How? I make it with my hands.

L: Well—

G: [Laughter]

L: You know what I mean. How would you, if you were going to make pottery, what would you do? I mean every step you go through. Can you tell me good enough on tape so that if someone could listen to it, they would know how to make it?

G: No, I never could tell them that.

L: You wouldn't want 'em to know?

G: No, 'cause I never get around to it cause—now let's see—go bring that pot in there on that dresser. I think it's got piece knocked out. See I take one big ball of clay as big as I want it—

L: Where would you get the clay?

G: Over the river off over next to **bay white**.

L: Is that a special kind of clay?

G: Yeah, it's a pipe clay. It's a blue looking stiff pipe clay and then you have to get some fine clay and—uh-uh, it's a pot. With the legs on it—and then we go to this place—well it's across from **bow water** so on the side of the river—and we go back down in them woods. And get—it's a fine paper clay, you've got to mix it with your pipe clay to make it stand and it—when you burn it, then your colors will come out and whatever you want to burn with you know sometimes it'll come out spotted or whatever, sometimes red. I don't like mine right now. [Laughter]

L: You just have to go down and dig it out of the ground with the shovel?

G: Yeah, dig it out of the ground with a shovel, a spade or something. You know one of those short ones, a spade. You've got it then you had to carry it about half a mile uphill.

L: And then what do you do with it?

G: I wish you could ask the elders because they used to go with us and get it. [Laughter] Not these, though. [Laughter] They used to go with us often to get it, when they used to stay. I took a big piece of clay and then I left this here part dry. Not let it get hard, just dry enough for—I could put these little stems in there, you know, bore a little hole in there and then I shape my stems up. Put this on. Then when this get dry, I turn it over and then put my legs on it and let it sit there and dry.

L: How do you mix the clay up to make it?

- G: I got me a tub and I mix it all up. I put my pipe clay in, my plain clay and I get it really soggy, soft—
- L: Where do you get the plain clay?
- G: Down in the woods on the river.
- L: Is it a different color from—
- G: Yes, it's a blue. Fine, sifted color [inaudible 27:09]
- L: You mix it up?
- G: Yeah, I mix it up and then when it get dry, then I will take a knife and trim it off and shape it up like I want it. Then when it gets real dry, white-looking, then I take a mere rock and I rub it, shine it up the way like the way that one shined.
- L: With a rock? What kind of rock?
- G: It's a smooth rock. It's a smooth one.
- L: Sounds interesting. I'd like to see you make something. [Laughter]
- G: Well, I can't make 'em now. You'd have to go somewhere to get someone else to make 'em. Maybe Arzada can make 'em for you, 'cause I can't do it, since I hurt my hand. I just ruined all my pot making.
- L: Well listen, I heard you used to make a lot of 'em ... pretty pieces
- G: I did used to make a lot of 'em [inaudible 28:06] I make 'em every Sunday.
- L: Why did the Catawba people not do like the Cherokee? You know how they build some teepees out there, sell all kinds of articles and pottery, and clothing. You ever wondered why the Catawba didn't?
- G: I think the Catawbas was backward.
- L: Backwards?

G: Yeah, actually they was shy or something. They didn't want to be out doing anything. I guess maybe some of these younger generations would, I don't know.

L: Who are some of the most active younger generation now? Are any of 'em carrying on in the—someone told me that Gilbert Blue had an Indian outfit.

G: Oh yeah, I guess he's about the oldest one.

L: And said he'd go around the school and make—

G: Well, his grandpa used to—Sam Blue—so I guess he's doing it too now.

L: Why would Sam Blue do this?

G: I don't know but it's just what he done. He had an instinct he would go around to these schools and different places and put on, you know, a play or something.

He was Chief, so I guess he just had to do it. [Laughter]

L: Had to show off the Indian people to all the country?

G: Uh-huh.

L: Well, I guess that about wraps it up. I didn't want to keep you too long.

G: [Laughter] Well, I guess that's about all I can tell you.

[Break in recording]

G: Lula Beck.

L: Lula. Yes, ma'am.

G: You know, she stays on reservation.

L: She knows some of the songs?

G: I imagine she would.

[End of interview]

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