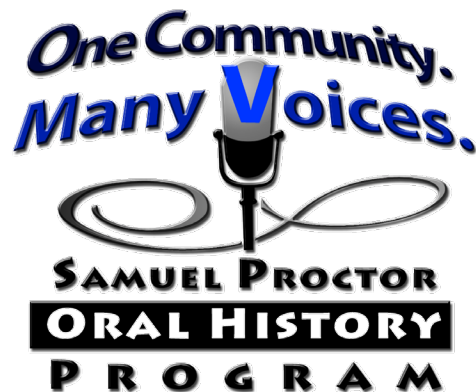


Georgia Henrietta Harris

**Southeastern Indian Oral History Project (SIOHP)
CAT-065**

Interview by:

**Emma Reid Echols
April 5, 1972**



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27 minutes | 19 pages

Abstract: Georgia Harris talks about living on the new reservation and growing up on the old reservation, including her earliest memories of school and her father's work as a farmer and a ferry operator. She then talks about her career as a licensed practical nurse and her career, as well as her marriage and two sons. She describes the division of land on the old reservation, her church and its leaders, and the seminary course available for young people on the reservation. She then provides information about carpentry and pottery before talking about different doctors and Catawba medicines she heard about growing up. Harris ends by talking about how she wished she knew more about her family's past and how she hopes her future descendants know where they come from and are proud of it.

Keywords: [Catawba Nation; Ben Harris; Thomas Stevens; South Carolina--Rock Hill; Indian reservations; Family histories]

ORAL HISTORY

P R O G R A M
University of Florida

CAT 065

Interviewee: Georgia Henrietta Harris

Interviewer: Emma Reid Echols

Date of Interview: April 5, 1972

E: This is Emma Reid Echols, Route 6, Box 260, Rock Hill, South Carolina. This is April 5, 1972. I'm visiting in the home of Mrs. Georgia Harris. And I'm working on the oral history of the Catawba Indians. Mrs. Harris, will you tell me your full name?

H: My full name is Georgia Henrietta Harris.

E: And what is your address?

H: Route 3, Box 1, Rock Hill, South Carolina.

E: Mrs. Harris, you are living on part of what is now the new reservation. Tell me where you were born.

H: I was born in Lancaster County, 1905, July 29.

E: Where did you go to school? Where was your home at?

H: We moved back to the reservation December of 1905, when I was four months old, and I went to school there. Well, I didn't go to school 'til I was about eight years old, 'cause my daddy thought I was too little.

E: Who was your first schoolteacher? Was Mrs. Dunlap your teacher?

H: It was a professor.

E: Professor Davis?

H: I don't know his name.

E: We'll come back to that. You don't have to know that. Tell me about those first days of school that you remember.

H: Well, I didn't go a full year. I just went after Christmas, after the weather cleared, and I went for about four months out of the year. But I made my grade. And I lost my father, I think, after the first year I went to school, in 1912.

E: Tell me about your father. What work did he do?

H: He was a farmer. Mostly he did truck farming, and everybody said he raised the largest rutabagas they've ever seen. I remember one of the neighbors said they went over and bought some from him, and they were large as a half-a-gallon lard can. They were just huge.

E: He lived close to the river when he operated his ferry, didn't he?

H: Yeah, we lived right on the river.

E: So, was his farmlands along the river?

H: Well, he didn't farm too much then. He just did gardening then, mostly. But after we moved back on the reservation, he didn't do anything but truck farming.

E: You went to school in the spring then, from Christmas on. Do you remember Miss Macie Stevenson? Was she ever one of your teachers?

H: No, I didn't get to go to school with her, but I remember her.

E: What do you remember about Miss Macie?

H: I just remember she was a tall woman.

E: She loved music, and she used to teach the children a lot of music. And some of the other ones taught music. Did you ever take music lessons when you were going to school down there?

H: Not there. I took music lessons later, but not from her.

E: Then after your school days on the reservation, what did you do then for your education?

H: Just packed up and left one day. We all went up there and, of course, they put us in school.

E: That was free schools provided at that time—

H: For the Indians living there, and we went one year there. And then after he stayed there a year, he was ready to come back home.

E: Which grandfather was this?

H: Ep Harris.

E: Ep Harris. Your grandfather was Ep Harris, and who was your grandmother?

H: Martha Jane.

E: Martha Jane White, wasn't it?

H: Yeah, she was a White.

E: Then you came back here, then what'd you do next?

H: We came back in the summer, on the Fourth of July, I remember distinctly. We rode one of these big ol' long surreys. You remember the surreys? That's what brought us home. I never will forget that. I enjoyed every bit of it. And we stayed there, and then we went back to school at the reservation. So, I made a grade there again.

E: Now, who was your teacher this time? Do you remember?

H: Let's see, I didn't go to **Miss Dupose**; I didn't go to her, or Miss Stevens.

E: You didn't go to Miss Hope?

H: No, I did go to her.

E: There were quite a number in there. When you were going to school, what did you do about your lunches? Was that provided at school?

H: No, we walked home and back for our lunch every day, which was just about almost a mile.

E: Then, would there be a bell to ring to remind you to come back to school?

H: No, I don't think they rang one at dinner time. They rang 'em in the morning. But we always hurried home and hurried back. Be there in time for school.

E: Were there a good road to go to school or was it just a red clay—

H: Just a red clay road. That's all we had. Nobody fixed the roads up then.

E: What about high school? Did you ever have a chance to go to high school?

H: Well, I went a little bit, I guess. I stayed down there, and I went to school 'til I was in the sixth or seventh grade. When I went back to North Carolina, then I went to school there up until the eighth grade. I finished the eighth grade there.

E: Then you took nurses' training somewhere. Where'd you do that?

H: I took that in Lancaster down here in South Carolina.

E: Now are you a registered nurse?

H: No, an LPN.

E: That means what?

H: A licensed practical nurse.

E: That's a very fine service that you render. Are you the only nurse that you know of among the Indians, or are there other ones who've also taken training working in the hospitals?

H: I'm the only one far as I know right now. But it's something I always wanted to do.

E: And so, you find many opportunities for service, don't you?

H: I've never been without it since I've been in it. It's something I've enjoyed better than I've done anything in my life except being a mother.

E: Do the Indians also come to you for help sometimes when they're sick?

H: Occasionally I have to give a shot sometimes for diabetes or things like that.

E: After you took your nurses' training, you were married. Tell me about the man you married.

H: I married Douglas Harris. I had knew him all my life. And we married and raised two sons.

E: Was he a full-blooded Indian?

H: No, his mother was White.

E: You're not a full-blooded Indian?

H: No, ma'am, I'm not quite full.

E: Where did you live? Where did you have a home and raise your two boys?

H: I partly raised 'em on the old reservation. I stayed down there 'til my oldest boy was in service when he was seventeen. And then I moved up on the new land, and I've been here ever since.

E: You have a lovely home here. And you have a beautiful view from your front window. You can see way across there.

H: Yeah, I enjoy it very much. It's just close enough to town to enjoy it.

E: Now, I'm interested in what happened when the reservation lands were divided up, and I believe you had a granddaughter that had an unusual story concerning that. Tell me about the division of lands and what you all got.

H: Well, I think they did that according to the families. If you had a good many in your family, you got more land or more money, whichever you took. We all took land. Of course, me and my husband didn't get too much. I think we ended up with about ten acres.

E: This land is part of the new reservation?

H: Mmhm.

E: What about your son? He was married at that time?

H: Yeah, my son was married. I think he got about thirteen or fourteen acres. My son with the little girl, that was the last one that was born on the list to receive any of the aid from the government. He had seven.

E: And this was Cheryl, the little girl?

H: That's Cheryl.

E: The lands were divided on July 4, is that correct? The little baby was born—what was the date?

H: June 27.

E: She got here just in time.

H: Time to get her name on the list.

E: To have a share of that reservation. I believe there was a newspaper article written about her at that time, is that true?

H: There was a newspaper article and a picture of her and her daddy and momma both. And of course, they still have that clipping, I think, that was in the paper.

E: Where are your two sons living now?

H: Well, Cheryl Ann and her daddy, they lived in Ashland, Ohio. And Floyd, my oldest boy, lives in Atlanta.

E: Both of your boys, what do they do for a living? What occupation?

H: My oldest boy, he works in Lockheed Aircraft, and that's pretty well been his life. He's worked there practically ever since he's been—before he got married. He's worked aircraft all the time.

E: And your other son?

H: My other son is working in a rubber company in Ashland.

E: Where did your sons go to school and take their training for their occupations?

H: They went to school mostly here in Rock Hill High School.

E: Do you feel like the Indians are having a new day for them, a new chance now that the school's opened to them and occupations, jobs are open to them without any discrimination? Do you feel like it's a new day for 'em?

H: I think it is. I think it's been real good.

E: One thing that I have heard is very few of you Catawba Indians are ever on relief or on the welfare. Now, I know you as a nurse would know about that. What about that?

H: Well, I think it's pretty well true. There's not many on relief.

E: You really look after your own people?

H: We always look after everything, especially our church, also. We have a church that really takes care of the old, the aged, and anybody that gets sick and unable to work. They always come in and help.

E: Do you have a registered nurse there or elder in your church?

H: Yes, ma'am.

E: Who is it? The church's elder?

H: Milton Osborn.

E: Does he live on the reservation?

H: He lives down there right in front of the church.

E: That's good.

H: He's my bishop.

E: I didn't know the title you called him. He's a bishop?

H: He's a bishop.

E: Then what helpers does he have?

H: He has two other counselors that will help him.

E: Do they live on the reservation, too?

H: Gilbert doesn't. No, neither one, after this land's been dissolved. Neither one of 'em live on the reservation.

E: Who are his two counselors?

H: Lavon Blue is one, and Gilbert Blue is the other.

E: Are they cousins or brothers?

H: They're cousins.

E: They're cousins. Then I believe you have a seminary course that is taught in your church by Mrs. Wade, is that correct?

H: That's right. It has been wonderful for the young people.

E: Tell me, what does she do with the young people?

H: She teaches them the Scripture, and they take 'em out on trips and things like that. I think it's been about two weeks ago they went to Cherokee up there and stayed. They go to different places, like Atlanta and Charlotte and different places around they take 'em, that have entertainment.

E: The old days are gone. Is anyone on the reservation or around Rock Hill now that speaks any of the Catawba language?

H: Not any that I know of.

E: Did your father and mother speak the language?

H: My mother did. I don't think my father did. I'm pretty sure he didn't.

E: No one writes it, I don't suppose, either?

H: No, no one writes it.

E: Gilbert remembers some of the chants that his grandfather used to use, but he says he can't speak it either, but he remembers some of the chants.

H: He was the last one that knew the language and could speak it.

E: You remember some of the ones who were wonderful leaders in your Tribe. You were speaking of Ben Harris and Robert Harris who taught themselves to read. Tell me about how those young boys got an education.

H: They got it the hard way. They borrowed books and learned from that, wherever they could get books. I remember after he got where he could read real good, he'd go and borrowed books to read to keep himself up.

E: Was that Ben?

H: That's Ben.

E: Robert was the last one of the full-blooded Indians, I believe, living, was he not?

H: That's right.

E: I remember there was a clipping in the *Evening Herald* on Robert Harris. He was such an outstanding leader. Did Ben Harris ever teach school?

H: Yes, ma'am, he taught school at one time.

E: I know you're too young to remember the school building itself, but maybe your father and mother told you. Where was that little school building that Ben Harris taught, and what kind of a building was it?

H: It was just a weatherboard house—building. Very small, it might've been forty feet long maybe. They eventually added another room to it, I think about eighteen or something by twenty. But that was the school for the children to attend until they built this other schoolhouse.

E: Did the Indians build their buildings themselves, provide their own lumber?

H: They provided their own lumber and built it themselves.

E: There were lots of good carpenters on the reservations, weren't there?

H: There used to be. Used to be some good carpenters. Mr. John Sanders—probably you've heard of him, haven't you?

E: Yes, I have.

H: He was a good carpenter. Bill Sanders, that was his son, Jim Sanders, his son. All of those were carpenters.

E: Some of those worked for White people in the community, didn't they?

H: Yeah, they went out and did work for people. Idle, I guess he told you, he did carpentry, too.

E: What about the pottery? I notice you have some much pretty pottery here on the mantle of your living room. Do you enjoy making it, or do you make it for sale, or what?

H: I just enjoy making it. I haven't made any for sale for years and years. I learned from my grandmother and my mother. I was just small, and they'd be making pottery, and I just loved to sit down and fool with the dirt. My mother used to get after us. We'd get my grandmother's clay, it's, "Get out of there, you'll dirty it up." And she'd says, "Let 'em alone. Let 'em play. That's the only way they're gonna learn."

E: What about the smoothing stones? You had the old smoothing stones.

H: Oh, yeah. I have some that, I guess, are relics. Probably some of 'em a hundred years old.

E: Do you have any old arrowheads or any old artifacts?

H: I don't have any arrowheads. Now, I used to have some, but I got 'em lost somehow, I don't know how.

E: I imagine your father had lots of things of that kind in his home?

H: They used to have some at different times over the years. We didn't think too much about 'em, I guess.

E: Ms. Harris, I know you've seen a lot of changes. Could you tell me some of the changes you've seen in the homes and the ownership of the land? How has that affected the people?

H: I think it's given more pride in knowing they could own their own homes and build better homes than they've been used to. That's one of the things that has helped them out a lot, I think, and improved the situation in their own reservation.

E: What about this school? Has that been a help for them?

H: The school has been a great help because when I was coming up, I didn't have the chances and the privileges that the young people have today.

Of course, I'm proud that my grandchildren and my future grandchildren will be able to go to school and be educated, where I didn't have that privilege.

E: Then you see changes in the health conditions, I know, being a nurse. Tell me about the changes you've seen from a health viewpoint.

H: I think there's a big improvement there because since they've been more educated in the ways of living conditions, they've improved about their health. They can see where they can—what they can do, and education has helped 'em that much.

E: Are there many sick people on the reservation? Are there many crippling conditions among the children that you know about?

H: No, I was talkin' to—well, I told my husband, "Since I've been in the nursing profession, there's one thing." I said, "The Indian people have really been blessed. You didn't see many children that was deformed or mentally retarded children on the reservation like you did elsewhere." And I said I think that was a great blessing that the Lord had put on the people.

E: In the polio epidemic, were there any of the children who had polio on the reservation?

H: Long years ago, I lost two brothers with polio. Course it was known as infantile paralysis then. And since then, everybody has went out and had these shots for taking the prevention to keep from having it.

E: The flu epidemic of 1918 is a date that everyone remembers on the reservation. I believe you were at Cherokee at that time. Is that right?

H: Right.

E: But you heard about this. What do you remember about it?

H: I remember in one family, especially, John Brown's family—he lost about four children, I believe, and one grandchild. Even while they was burying one, another one died in the home. My grandmother was there taking care of 'em. Stayed with the family until they all got better.

E: What doctors do you remember that came to the reservation?

H: The only doctor I remember—he brought me into the world—was Dr. Hill. We thought he was it. [Laughter]

E: How did he travel into the reservation? Did he have the old horse and buggy?

H: He had a old horse and buggy, and I never will forget it, an old gray horse.

E: Did the horse have a name?

H: I don't remember his horse's name, but I remember him driving that ol' gray horse and buggy to the reservation any time of the night or any time of the day.

E: If it was needed, would he sometimes spend the night?

H: Yes, ma'am. He was good enough, he'd spend the night because I remember when my first child was born, he spent the night with me. He brought me into the world, he brought my first son into the world.

E: So the people on the reservation really loved him, didn't they?

H: They sure did. They thought there was nothing like him.

E: Did they call him "Dr. Hill," or did they just call him "Doc?"

H: They called him "Dr. Hill."

E: He must have been a brilliant doctor, along with—

H: We all thought he was at that time.

E: After Dr. Hill, what other doctors did you have on the reservation?

H: We didn't have another doctor out there. The next doctor we had was in Rock Hill after Dr. Hill died. I can't remember his name because he didn't live very long hisself when he died. Then we had Dr. Blackman. We had Dr. Blackman until Dr. Patton moved out here.

E: And then by this time, the Indians could go to the hospitals.

H: Well, they could go to the hospitals before then, but they just depended on these doctors.

E: Being a nurse, you probably know a good deal about the herbs and the medicines that were made on the reservation. Chief Blue used to make some, and other people did, too. Do you remember the ointments or salves or medicines that were made?

H: I guess my folks never did take too much to anything like that. They never did use any, except my grandmother said that my grandfather, Ep Harris, knew the medicine that would cure this venereal disease. She said that he used to cure people, but he never would tell her what it was. And why, I don't know. So when he died, that did, too.

E: When you needed medicine, you bought them in Rock Hill then. There's no medicines made in your grandmother's time.

H: No, no one made any medicines there. They didn't make any.

E: I wonder if there're still any herbs on the reservation that could be made into medicines today?

H: I guess it's still there, what there used to be. 'Cause I remember Chief Blue used to use that bear root for rheumatism.

E: Did it really help?

H: A lot of people say it does. I never did use it. I mean, I should, I guess. Need some now.

E: I hear different stories about the burial customs of the Catawba Indians. Was there any certain time of day that a person was buried?

H: I don't know. Most of 'em, I guess, was buried in the afternoon, as far as I can remember. Always after dinner.

E: Did you go to Chief Blue's funeral service?

H: Yes, ma'am.

E: Do you remember anything about that?

H: I remember he was buried in the afternoon. Excuse me.

[Brek in recording]

E: You were telling me that Chief Blue's funeral was in the afternoon. Was that customary to have it in the afternoon, or could you have it anytime it was convenient?

- H: It could be anytime it's convenient, but most of the time, they have 'em in the afternoons. One of the reasons is a lot of the people have jobs and are out working. Sometimes you make it convenient for other people to attend the funeral.
- E: Your father was in charge of the ferry, at Cureton's Ferry, I believe, when Thomas Stevens crossed over his last night when he froze to death. Will you tell me what you remember your father and mother telling you about Thomas Stevens?
- H: He was there at their house and ate supper there. He said he wanted to go over to visit another friend that night. It was cold and rainy and freezing, and my mother tried to get him to stay the night there, but he refused. He said he just got to get on over there, and so he left. Then the next morning, they learned that he was frozen.
- E: What name did your mother and father call him?
- H: They called him "Uncle Tom Stevens."
- E: That was an affectionate name, "Uncle Tom." Lots of 'em called him that, I believe.
- H: It was something that I'll always remember my mother tellin' me about it. He loved to teach little children. But he was playing with 'em. She said he loved 'em, and he loved attention.
- E: I believe he carried things in his pocket to give to them from time to time.
- H: That's right. I think everybody loved Uncle Tom, as far as I can ever remember about him.

E: Did your mother and father tell you how he looked? He was a hundred and ten years old. Was his hair long and white? How did he look?

H: I think it was kind of 'bout to his ears, his hair was, and it was gray. But his pictures, I couldn't tell you anything how he looked.

E: He was a lover of children. Everyone says that he loved children.

H: That's right.

E: There are many interesting people like that you need to remember and write down in the past because their stories will soon be gone.

H: That's right.

E: Did you ever remember any stories that your father and mother told you about who they were, or where they come from, or what they think about their old Catawba families?

H: You know, that's one of the things I've always regretted, is my father and mother not tellin' us a lot of the past because now, we'd like to get up a genealogy, and we can go only so far, and then we can't go any farther. It leaves a blank space there. I'd loved to know a little more about my generation.

E: We'll have to save all the things we know now, won't we?

H: Yeah, I'll try and prepare for my children that way. I'll try to leave records and things so that they won't be lost like I am.

E: Do you think most of the Catawba people are proud to be a Catawba now?

H: I'm sure they are. They don't have anything to be ashamed of.

E: That's true.

H: Not a thing to be ashamed of.

E: I think that should be stressed everywhere.

H: Yeah, that's one of the things that I want my children to know, is who they are, where they come from, and never be ashamed of it.

[End of interview]

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