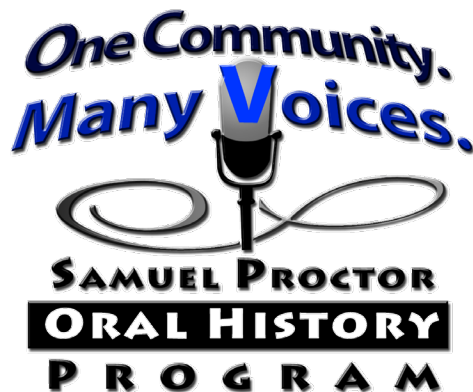


Edith Bertha Harris Brown

**Southeastern Indian Oral History Project (SIOHP)
CAT-140**

Interview by:

**Emma Reid Echols
October 27, 1977**



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14 minutes | 11 pages

Abstract: Bertha Harris speaks about her pottery making. She shares her experiences teaching at the pottery school. She goes in-depth into the processes behind making various pieces of pottery, from shaping to firing the clay. She remembers learning to make pottery in her grandmother's house along with her mother. She discusses her early life and schooling, and she speaks about her family. She reflects on the wildlife she remembers seeing on the reservation.

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 140

Interviewee: Edith Bertha Harris Brown

Interviewer: Emma Reid Echols

Date of Interview: October 27, 1977

E: This is Emma Reid Echols, Rock Hill, South Carolina, Route 6, Box 260, and I'm working on the oral history of the Catawba Indians. This is October 27. I'm visiting in the home of Mrs. Bertha Harris, and I'm particularly interested in the pottery making because Mrs. Harris is one of the fine pottery makers in the Catawba Nation. Mrs. Harris, you were at the pottery school summer before last, isn't that right?

H: Last summer.

E: Last summer. And how long did that last?

H: It lasted from April to September.

E: Oh, that was good. Now, what were your hours for working out there?

H: At first, I worked about three hours a day.

E: I bought one of your beautiful bowls, turned out to be such a lovely golden bowl. About how long would it take you to make a bowl that size?

H: Well, it wouldn't take too long to build it, but it would take a while to get it ready.

E: To scrape it and then to smooth it with your rubbing stones, and then to fire it. Would you say it would take at least five hours?

H: You couldn't rush it through that quick. You'd had to build it and let it stand a day or so to let it dry out—maybe two or three days to dry out.

E: Where you went to the old schoolhouse for this pottery school—the clay was provided there for you, is that right?

H: That's right.

E: Now, how many of you—there were some of you who were teachers and some of you who were the students. You were one of the teachers, is that right?

H: That's right.

E: Who were the other teachers?

H: Nola Campbell worked Mondays only with me down there.

E: And then who else, besides that?

H: Well, they had Georgia Harris, Edith Brown, and Sally Beck.

E: Oh, yes. I didn't realize Sally Beck was still making pottery.

H: Yeah, she still makes pottery.

E: Is hers pretty?

H: She taught down there at first—I think about a month or something like that. She and—

E: She's one of the older Indians, isn't she?

H: That's right. She's about eighty-four years old.

E: What kind of pottery do you like best to make? The one I bought from you—and I wish these people could see it—it's a lovely golden bowl with a fluted edge at the top. What other pieces did you make beside that bowl-type pottery?

H: I made some small vases and pitchers, canoes, ashtrays. I like to make small pottery.

E: Did you make some of the canoes that have the head of a Indian on the end?

H: I made one or two.

E: You have to use a mold to make that Indian head, don't you?

H: Yes.

E: Do you have your own mold to make that Indian head?

H: Yes—well, I can make some heads with my hands.

E: I bet you can. Now, do all of your sisters make pottery, too?

H: No.

E: You're the only one?

H: Only one.

E: You know, they're sort of proud of that. They tell me that you're the one that makes the pottery in their family.

H: Is that right?

E: Now, your mother was married, Madeline George, and she was a White girl, but yet she made beautiful pottery, didn't she?

H: That's right.

E: Does your mother still have some of her pottery?

H: I don't know whether she has any of hers now or not.

E: Who taught you to make the pottery that you make today?

H: Well, from her and my grandmother. My grandmother taught her, and I worked along with them as a child.

E: Let's go back to the other generation then. Who was your grandmother?

H: Emily Cobb George. Daddy's mother.

E: And who was your grandmother on the other side of the family?

H: On my mother's?

E: Mother's side.

H: Margaret Rebecca Millens—or Margaret Rebecca Deal before she met a Millens.
My mother was a Millens.

E: Yes. Now then, you are not a full-blooded Indians.

H: No.

E: Did you marry an Indian?

H: That's right, I did.

E: And tell me about his background.

H: George Furman Harris—most of 'em call him Furman Harris—and he grew up on the reservation. His dad died before he was born. His mother died when he was about fourteen years old.

E: Do you remember some of the illnesses that they had on the reservation years ago? There was a time when there was smallpox, and there was a time when there was flu down there. What illnesses do you remember on the reservation?

H: Well, they had that epidemic of flu in 1918. I didn't live on the reservation, but there were quite a few of 'em died there with it.

E: And they depended upon the doctors who'd come out to the reservation, Dr. Hill and Dr. Blackman. Did you have a family doctor like that in your family?

H: When we didn't live on the reservation, we had different doctors. I went to Dr. Massey; I don't know that you'd remember him. Somebody named **Carruthers** and different ones. Some of 'em died in 1918 that we used for our doctors.

E: You were telling me the other day that you remembered your school and your first teachers in your school. Tell me about your first school.

H: My first teacher was Henry Blair, a Mormon elder. I started school when I was eight years old, and I made two grades in one year. I didn't go to school very much because we had cotton to pick. We got that cotton out of the field before we went to school, and we had to finish that up. School didn't last as long as it does now—not as many months.

E: That's right. What kind of books? Did you use slates? Where did you get your books?

H: Our books were furnished by the state, and we had blackboards just like they have now.

E: Did you use paper and pencil, or did you write on a slate?

H: We had paper and pencil.

E: Besides your first teacher, the Mormon teacher, who was your next teacher? Did you have Miss Henderson?

H: My next teacher, I believe, was in Columbia, South Carolina—was a Mrs. Pollard at Logan School there. I attended public school, but I might be wrong. I went to school with Mrs. Henderson.

E: The school building and the church building, as you remember them, were almost exactly alike, weren't they?

H: Yeah.

E: You had a bell to call the children to come into classes.

H: Yeah, on top of the school, they'd ring the bell.

E: The boys would have charge of bringing in the firewood.

H: Bringing in the wood, carrying the water.

E: Carrying the water.

H: And having a fire going.

E: Did they have a pot-bellied stove, or did they have one of those long stoves?

H: At first, they had a long stove. It was one of those old wood stoves that was long. Then they got a different type, one of those round pot-bellied stoves.

E: What would you girls be doing when they were doing that?

H: When school was out in the afternoon, we always would sweep the floors and get everything ready for the next day.

E: That was good; that was a very fine thing for you to be doing. Then did you sometimes help some of the younger children with their lessons? The older girls would help the younger ones?

H: Yeah, sometimes.

E: Do you have any idea how many children would be in your schools?

H: No, I don't really know. At first, we had 'em all in one room. One teacher taught several grades.

E: You remember the teachers that came over from Lancaster to teach?

H: That Mrs. Henderson.

E: Mrs. Henderson—was she one of your teachers?

H: Yes.

E: I understand she was a very fine one. Do you remember when they started serving lunches at the school?

H: They didn't start serving lunches 'til, I believe, I had children in school.

E: Oh, really? All of your children have gotten an education, haven't they?

H: Yes.

E: Some of your grandchildren, of course, are in Rock Hill schools now.

H: Well, I've got some that finished school.

E: From where?

H: Grandchildren's already finished school.

E: Oh, really?

H: Yeah. Two granddaughters married. I have great-grandchildren.

E: They have good jobs, the ones that are working, haven't they?

H: Yeah.

E: Your husband is an Indian, too. And tell me about his job.

H: He works at **Bilow's** as a security guard up there; but he's retired, and he's just doing that as a part-time job.

E: What did he do before—?

H: He worked in the industrial [inaudible 9:00]

E: Now, you're glad he's got something to do now in his retirement, aren't you?

H: Yeah.

E: Do you go down on the reservation to church, or do you go to church in town?

H: We go to church in town.

E: Do your Indians get together for picnics or for family gatherings now?

H: They have picnics Fourth of July. I didn't go this year, but I went last year.

E: You enjoy seeing all your cousins and your relatives and so forth. Your own family—how many of you are living now?

H: In my immediate family?

E: Yes, your brothers and sisters.

H: Brothers and sisters, all.

E: All of 'em.

H: Yeah, there are nine of us.

E: Nine of us. And your father is Moroni George; he's the oldest living Catawba, I believe. Is that right?

H: That's right.

E: I have a picture of him, and I have a tape of him.

[Break in recording]

E: Miss Bertha, you have brought out here some beautiful pottery for me to see. Here's a swan—a beautiful swan, a large boat, a small boat, the Indian arrowhead, Indian head that you have molded yourself without any mold to use, a pitcher, and a fluted bowl. They're all very beautiful. How many years had it been since you had made pottery?

H: I reckon it'd been twenty-eight years last year when I started back making pottery.

E: Was it difficult for you to remember exactly how to do it?

H: Not too difficult. I had made about a half a dozen pitchers when Frances Wade asked me to go out and instruct pottery at the school.

E: Now, there's a tall vase over there with a fluted edge. Is that made all in one piece, or did you add the top of it later?

H: I added the top later.

E: You made the bowl first, then you added the top, and then with your fingers you fluted it around, isn't that right?

H: That's right.

E: What did you use to scrape them with?

H: A knife.

E: I guess your husband loans you a knife for finishing.

H: Sometime I have some old tools of my own.

E: Now, I see a beautiful little pitcher over there. Let's see how many parts to that: the bowl, the bottom part of it, then the fluted spout—

H: The bowl, the neck, then the lip, and the handles.

E: That's four stages in molding that much. Then of course scraping it with a knife, then smoothing it with the rubbing stones, and then you're ready to fire 'em. Her name is on the bottom of these—of course that's very important. Now, I'm anxious to see of these boats. What color do you think these boats are going to turn out?

H: I believe one of 'em will be red.

E: You think because of the clay?

H: The clay.

E: Where are you going to fire these?

H: Well, I'll either burn them out at my sister-in-law's or at my son's in Filbert because he has fireplaces there that I can burn 'em in.

E: It'll take you a couple of hours at least to burn them, won't it?

H: It'll take longer than that—because you have to heat 'em 'til they're real black, and then you burn them [inaudible 12:08]

E: It'll take several hours to do that. They're very beautiful. Are you selling all the pottery that you can make?

H: Well, I haven't sold any of them, just let some out on consignment.

E: I'm anxious to get you to save me that boat and let me see what color it's going to be because I think it's very beautiful. Then at the top of your little boat, you've taken a knife and you have little indentions all along the edges of the boat. These are just the kind of boats that the children or the adults have been using to cross the Catawba River, is that right?

H: That's right.

E: Did you ever see any of 'em down on the river when you were going to school on the reservation?

H: I saw some of 'em, but they weren't in that deep.

E: That's right.

H: I crossed in those boats they used to have on the river, but not to go to school with.

E: Oh, you did? How many people would be in a little boat like that?

H: I never did cross with too many people. I've crossed there with my husband; I've crossed there with my father and maybe a couple of my sisters.

E: Are they made of wood, or were they made of leather sometimes?

H: They were made of wood, the one I crossed in.

E: When you were a young girl growing up on the reservation, did you ever see any of the deer?

H: No, I never did see no deer.

E: They say there's still some deer down on the reservation now.

H: I think they've returned since the forest has grown up a whole lot. There used to be a lot of **fires and they'd cut it and clear everything away.**

E: What animals do you remember seeing on the reservation?

H: Well, I've seen rabbits and squirrels and things like that, but I never did see a deer on the reservation.

E: There were big owls on the reservation, too. Have you ever made an owl with your—?

H: No, I haven't made an owl. I've been thinking about making one.

E: What about a frog—have you made any frogs?

H: Well, I have when I was a little girl used to make frogs and squirrels, and I would make turtles.

E: Well, I hope you go back to that, too, because people are interested in that kind of thing. You've got some very beautiful pottery here. Does Frances Wade plan to have any other schools for teaching pottery?

H: Not as I know of.

E: I hope that you'll continue here, and I hope you teach these grandchildren to make pottery, too.

[End of interview]

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