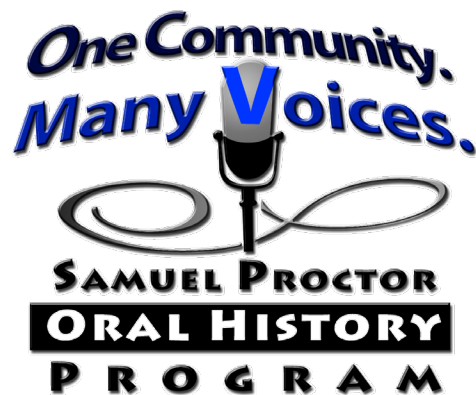


# Wilburn Harris

**Southeastern Indian Oral History Project (SIOHP)  
CAT-042**

**Interview by:**

**Jerry Lee  
August 8, 1972**



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**CAT 042 Wilburn Harris**  
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**1 hour, 16 minutes | 47 pages**

**Abstract:** Wilburn Harris remembers his upbringing on the old reservation, reflects on his experiences in school and the military during World War II, and discusses his family. He speaks about the relationships between the Catawba and the local and federal governments. He gives his opinion about the unity of the Catawba Nation and its future. He comments on issues of race and discrimination, drug and alcohol addiction, and the ongoing Vietnam War. Harris closes the interview by telling a story about his difficulties acquiring materials to build a house.

**Keywords:** [Catawba Nation; Chief Samuel Taylor Blue; South Carolina--Rock Hill; Race relations; Indian reservations]

**SAMUEL PROCTOR**  
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**University of Florida**

CAT 042

Interviewee: Wilburn Harris

Interviewer: Jerry Lee

Date of Interview: August 8, 1972

L: My name is Jerry Lee and I'm interviewing Wilburn Harris, who is a Catawba Indian. This is for the oral history program for the University of Florida. What is your full name, Mr. Harris?

H: Wilburn Harris. W-I-L-B-U-R-N.

L: And where are we at right now?

H: Oh, we're right off the edge of the new part of the reservation now.

L: What is your address here, Mr. Harris?

H: Route 3, Box 51.

L: And what year was you born in?

H: 1922.

L: And you say you're fifty years old?

H: Fifty years old.

L: You sure don't look fifty. What makes you look so young?

H: I don't know. [Laughter] I've been rough.

L: Who are your parents, Mr. Harris?

H: Ida Harris and R. J. Harris, supposed to be my daddy.

L: Who were your grandparents?

H: Mary Harris and Benjamin—let me see now. I'm gettin' that mixed up. Ben Harris, was my momma's daddy.

L: What part Indian are you?

H: Almost full. Well, I guess about—oh, I could very much be a full.

L: Were your parents full-blooded?

H: Just about. My grandma, I believe her momma was half White. So, I don't know. That wouldn't give me too much.

L: What's the farthest back you can remember, your childhood?

H: Oh, I guess from the time I was six years old, I imagine. I don't really know, but I remember way back.

L: Where were you living when you were six years old?

H: On the old reservation.

L: Was that where you were born?

H: Uh-huh.

L: Do you remember the house you lived in?

H: Yeah. My granddaddy had a great big ol' house. I guess it must have been, oh, fifty or sixty foot long. I imagine it was sixty foot long across the front, 'bout thirty or forty foot wide. It had four rooms in the whole thing. He had a whole bunch of—well, I think most all the grandchildren running 'round there all the time.

L: How many was living there at any one time?

H: [Laughter] We had so many we couldn't count 'em.

L: So, it's pretty crowded, huh?

H: Oh, yeah.

L: Did you have indoor plumbing? A toilet?

H: No, we didn't have none of that.

L: Where did you get your drinking water?

H: A spring. Oh, I guess about a—I don't know—that would be a quarter of a mile to the spring.

L: Did you go to the school on the reservation?

H: About two or three years. I didn't go very long. I got sick. Chicken pox or something likely to kill me and I quit going to school.

L: Did you have any medical attention when you were sick?

H: Oh, yeah. Dr. Blackman was the doctor at that time. The state done paid for it.

L: They take you to the hospital?

H: No, I didn't go to the hospital. I stayed at home. I was passed out, I guess, about, might've been a month. Didn't know nothing.

L: Get back to your early childhood. You said you were born on the reservation?

H: Yeah.

L: Born at home?

H: Yeah.

L: It was the same Dr. Blackman?

H: No, it was Dr. Hill then, when I was born. The old country doctor used to live down at Catawba Junction.

L: Did the state pay for that?

H: Yeah. As far as I can remember, the state paid for the doctors up until—I know Dr. Patton was the last one, but I don't remember just—must've been in [19]58, I guess. [19]58, [19]56, somewhere along there. I don't remember.

L: Did you go to school on the reservation when you went?

H: Yeah, what little time I went.

L: What kind of school did they have?

H: Well, they usually had this Mormon elder from Utah or someplace like that to come around and teach school. They had just one big room—well, they had two rooms there toward the last—but they had one big room, you know, about all of ‘em. They didn’t have it cut up this grade and that grade. Everybody was in one place.

L: Is this where the schoolhouse is now?

H: No. You know where Fletcher Beck lives at down there?

L: Yes, sir.

H: It was right, I guess, about a hundred yards or so down below him on the left.

L: It’s still right there at the old reservation, not very far from where the one is today. Well, did the kids that go to school, did they learn very much?

H: Yeah, some of ‘em learned good. Samuel Beck, his wife, Betty Garther, Jerry Wade, and all—I guess it’s just for the kids. Some of ‘em learnt, some ‘em didn’t.

L: Could you go to school in town if you wanted to, to the White school?

H: Well, I did go to school there one time for, oh, I don’t know, about couple weeks. That was way back. Must’ve been [19]31, [19]32, somewhere along there. A little old school there above the Highland Park.

L: You remember the name of it?

H: It’s gone now. No, I don’t remember the name of it.

L: Did any Blacks go to the school?

H: No, unh-uh.

L: Did you have to use the same restroom as everyone else used and—

H: Yeah.

L: Everything was pretty well equal?

H: No, it wasn't equal, but I didn't go to school there too long. It couldn't have been over two or three weeks.

L: Did they look down on the Indian people?

H: Oh, yeah. Well, it's not quite as bad now as it used to be as far as I know. I just don't fool with nobody. But it's been like that ever since time started I guess. I don't know. I might be gettin' the wrong idea. I always figured I never was no better than nobody else, but I don't know if they was any better than me either. The same.

L: How did they discriminate against you at school?

H: Which one?

L: Well, the first school you said you went to in town.

H: Oh, that was in the little kids. I guess, after I growed up I got—that's just the way kids are, I guess.

L: They call you things like Chief and—

H: Oh, yeah. No, they wouldn't call you Chief. They'd just come out and call you little nigger or somethin'. That's just the way it was.

L: What did the teachers say?

H: Nothing. [Laughter] They don't say nothing 'bout it. It still happens today. It still happened right today. You take a little Indian and send 'em to school, there's always some little crazy around kid gonna say, "Oh, you little nigger." All the time. I don't know how they treat the little jigaboos now.

L: Was that the reason you didn't go on to school?

H: I didn't care about going to school back then.

L: That played a lot to do with it didn't it?

H: Yeah, it makes a big difference.

L: How long did you stay on the reservation?

H: Oh, I stayed on the reservation 'til I was fully grown. I went off to the Army and stayed in the Army for about thirty-eight months, I believe it was, during the war, during World War II.

L: Did you join?

H: Well, they were gonna draft me, or they did draft me before it was over with.

L: Well, how did you like the service?

H: Too many bosses. [Laughter]

L: How did they treat you in the service?

H: They treated me about like they would anybody else. In there, anybody gets to pickin' on you, you have to take up for yourself there. You have to fight or go on like a little coward and I always had to wind up fighting. I never did let nobody run over me.

L: Did you get into many fights?

H: Oh, yeah. I'd fight sergeants anybody else—didn't matter to me. [Laughter]

L: [Laughter] What kind of work did your mother and father do?

H: As far as I know, they were right on farms.

L: Just made the living right off the land?

H: Yeah, or go outside, you know, and work for the day for somebody else.

L: Were times pretty hard when you were growing up?



H: Ooh, good gracious alive! There was an old fella over off the river yonder in Grand White had a grocery store—yeah, I guess it'd probably make some of 'em mad to hear this now. [Laughter] But when I was small and coming up, people'd go across there and sign a note saying what money the state would give 'em, they'd give it that old man for groceries.

L: Who was this old man?

H: A fella, Massey.

L: Ran a little store?

H: Yeah. I don't know his first name. I don't remember. I believe it was Bob Massey. I'm not too sure.

L: Yes, sir.

H: That's the way that most of 'em got their food. And then I think they would pay it off in March sometime. Sometime March, sometime April or May. And then when they'd got their money, they'd have one of the biggest squabbles. [Laughter] The old man wanted his money, and they wouldn't let him have it. Then, doggone, he'd turn right around the next year and do the same thing.

L: Let 'em have more stuff?

H: Let 'em have more stuff. The same people. [Laughter] I thought about that a lotta times. I guess hadn't been for him there'd have been a lot of little Indians dying down there.

L: Would he charge them extra for charging it like that or—

H: I don't know how he did that. I never did understand that why in the world somebody beat him out a whole year's supply of groceries and then turn around

the next year and let 'em have more. [Laughter] But in a way, they didn't allow the Indians—too many of 'em to be on outside, you know, on public job work.

And so, I guess they figured that was one way to get some food. [Laughter]

L: How much money did the Indian families get?

H: Well, I think they paid them so much a head. It wasn't too much. I believe fifty, sixty dollars a year I believe. It wasn't too much.

L: I imagine it was awful hard to live on this kinda—

H: **Ooh.** I don't know how in the world I made it.

L: What about during the Depression? Was things any worse for the Indians?

H: Yeah. Now, I don't know about that. I wouldn't know whether it was any worse for 'em or not. I wasn't too old to remember all the—well, I remember the Depression, but I don't remember how other people live and all. I didn't get out very much like that.

L: Did the government cut back any of the money during the Depression? Or did you ever hear anybody—

H: I don't know. They paid all that stuff to the older people and the kids wouldn't know nothing about that.

L: When you went to the White school in town, how did you get from your home to school?

H: Oh, I lived on Statler Street right there by the park.

L: And you just walked to school?

H: Yeah, I just walked to school. Wasn't, oh, I guess about a block and a half, two blocks. I don't remember my brother ever going up there. I don't remember that.

L: Do you remember the name of your teacher?

H: No.

L: Wasn't there long enough to find out? [Laughter]

H: [Laughter] Wasn't interested in it that much.

L: Did you get in fights at school?

H: Oh, yeah.

L: Because you were an Indian?

H: Yeah. I used to get in fights down there on the reservation [inaudible 14:48]

L: Who'd you fight at the reservation?

H: Oh, I'd fight anybody that jumped on me.

L: You'd take 'em all on.

H: Like a little wildcat. Longest time I had to go was two or three of 'em get on me, then I had to go. [Laughter]

L: What did you do as you were a young man when you quit school? What was your first job you had?

H: I cut cord wood, Bluegrass sawmill.

L: Did you always have to do hard work?

H: Ever since I been big enough to remember.

L: You worked hard all your life then?

H: Well, right after I come out of the army I didn't—a lot of time where I wouldn't work. Maybe two or three months out of the year I just wouldn't work.

L: How did you support yourself then?

H: Getting federal government money. They had this thing set up; you get twenty dollars a week for fifty-two weeks. When I quit working then I go to sign up for that.

L: Was this unemployment or—

H: Yeah, it was like the unemployment under the federal government. Had it—

L: For Indians?

H: No, it wasn't for Indians. It was for all veterans.

L: Under the VA then?

H: Yeah.

L: What did you do after you went to work? Did you soon get married?

H: No, I was an old man when I got married, both times. I've been married twice.

L: You married White girls, or?

H: Yeah. Both times, the first when I was thirty-six years old, I think, when I got married the first time.

L: Who did you marry, sir?

H: A woman from Pineville. And then I was about forty-eight, forty-seven years old when I got married this time. I woulda knowed better.

L: [Laughter] How many children do you have?

H: Well, I got one here at home and then I got a little girl in Charlotte.

L: What's your little boy's name here?

H: Billy, Billy Ray.

L: You're quite proud of Billy, aren't you?

H: Oh, goodness, yeah. [Laughter]

L: He's quite a mess. I saw him the other day when he was running around. What do you think of marriage?

H: I guess marriage is whatever you make out of it. Seems to me like every time I got married it's been nothing but a mess.

L: Is this because maybe you're an Indian and they were White?

H: No, I just got the wrong person, that's all. Both times.

L: Your first wife, did her parents object to her marrying you?

H: No, her parents was dead. I used to go visit her brothers and all. They never was mean or nothing with me. This group that I married into now, oh, brother, I can't cut them.

L: What family did you marry into?

H: This family now, Giles.

L: There from right here in—

H: Fort Mill.

L: They objected to you marrying their daughter?

H: Yeah. Well, it started with—she was working down at the mill, and I got a job down there and then—

L: What mill is this?

H: Johnson's Mill.

L: This a couple years ago?

H: Yeah, right down at the muddin' road. And she was working there. That's where I met her, down at the mill. The overseer told her daddy and said if she didn't stay off my job that he was gonna fire her. So, that's what her daddy went and told

her. So, I went to the overseer, and I told him, I said, "I want to tell you something now here. When you're gettin' ready to fire somebody, I mean you just let both of us—you fire her you just let me go too because it wasn't—" What she'd done, she went to the canteen and I asked her, "While you're goin' out there how 'bout bringing me a cup of coffee?" So, when she come back by, she brought the coffee and just went right straight on up there. After I married the girl then the way it is now, I think it was her daddy's idea. What he should've done is he should've come to me his own self in place of putting the overseer up to it and telling me to stay away from her. That's what he should've done.

L: Did her family come to wedding?

H: Nah. Me and her went off up to York and her brother and my little nieces. My little nieces done went with me. I had two nieces and a nephew. They didn't approve of it. They still don't approve of it.

L: Do they speak to you now?

H: Shoot, I don't fool with 'em.

L: Did they ever threaten you, or?

H: They'd like to.

L: They know better than to mess with you, though.

H: They don't fool with me; I don't fool with them. I don't know none of 'em.

L: Do y'all live together now?

H: Yeah. She left here before the baby was born, went back home. That was on Saturday, I called her up on Sunday. She left some stuff and then I asked her what she wanted me to do with it. Said she wanted me to come over to the

house, she wanted to talk to me. On Sunday, I went over there and, oh, everything was just fine and dandy. They wanted me to move to Fort Mill and move all my new furniture that I'd bought over there. They rode me all around all over the place lookin' for a place for me to live. I wasn't interested in it. I couldn't find no place, so I come on back home. About two or three weeks later, I went over there, and I got her an apartment, a furnished apartment. Paying twenty dollars a week for it. It was airconditioned. A real nice place. But then she couldn't stay home with me because of my food farming. Finally at last, she got up and went home one evening, I think it must've been about 1:30 or two o'clock on Thursday. And then I know I went home to fix this deal. I went on to the mill that night and got my check. Come back by the apartment the next morning and picked up my radio and TV set, some clothes, took all the meat outta the refrigerator, and I come home. It made her daddy mad. He said, "Oh, he took all the groceries out." He said, "You got all the meat." I said, "Yeah, the meat that I worked and paid for. If it just wasn't for me. You go to somebody else." It made him mad. I can deal with somebody getting mad. He's a big man, two-hundred and something pounds. 'Bout two-hundred and fifty pounds.

L: You think y'all'll be able to stay together?

H: I doubt it. The only thing I would stay with her for is on account of that baby, to make sure that he got food and clothes and stuff that he needs. I love the baby and he loves me. I know he loves me, but there's so many chases of it, you know. She don't do house right, she can't cook.

L: What's the earliest you remember? Do you remember old Chiefs—I mean earlier before Sam Blue and some of those early Chiefs?

H: No, I guess Uncle Sam is the only one I ever remember, you know. Toad Harris and all—there's been a good many of 'em in Chiefs there.

L: Was he your uncle?

H: No, he was my daddy's daddy. My daddy's father.

L: I mean Sam Blue?

H: Oh, yeah. Before he married this last woman, he married my grandmother's sister. Well, everybody down there called him uncle as far as I can remember.

L: Did he have very much power as a Chief?

H: Well, in a way, yeah. He could control them people. Wouldn't know what he controlled. But now, if there was any of 'em getting in trouble with the cops or anything, he'd go up there and he'd talk for 'em. Usually got 'em a loose one before they even go to court if it wasn't something that was too bad. Naturally, he couldn't go up there and get somebody outta murder or fightin' with a pocketknife or something like that. He couldn't do that. He'd do all he could to help you.

L: Did the police come to the reservation?

H: Yeah, they'd come to the reservation when they had to. That's the funniest thing I've ever heard in my life, though. They'd tell you, "I can't do so and so until something happens." And what you're doing is trying to prevent it from happening. The reason you're going to come is to try to get 'em to do something. [Laughter] "I can't do so and so until something happens."

L: They're helpless until something happens and then it's too late.



- H: Yeah, and then they come and lock you up.
- L: Did y'all have any form of police down the reservation?
- H: No. [Laughter] Used county cops all the time.
- L: Do you remember any of them that were down at the old reservation?
- H: For the county cops?
- L: Yes, sir.
- H: They used county cops just like they do around here now. They had a Camel—I don't remember his first name—a Potts, and a Hose feller.
- L: Were they pretty nice to the Indians or beat on 'em?
- H: No, I never did hear tell of one of 'em beatin' on 'em. Never did hear that.
- L: Did Uncle Sam teach you anything about the Indians?
- H: No, he never did. He had so many grandkids and things of his own, I guess he didn't have time to. [Laughter]
- L: Did your parents teach you about the Indians?
- H: No, unh-uh. They didn't teach me anything about, you know. I knew I was an Indian, that was all. I've sat down and watched my grandma and them build pottery and things like that.
- L: Did you ever make any pottery?
- H: No, I never could do it.
- L: Was that considered women's work?
- H: Yeah, most of it.
- L: Men had to furnish the food and women—

H: Well, they'd take that stuff—I remember when I was kinda small that my grandma used to get out and go through the country with it in the wintertime if it wasn't too bad and trade the old pottery off for food and stuff. Back then about everybody raised sweet potatoes, peas, and all kind of stuff out on the farm. She'd take 'em and swap 'em off for things like chickens, eggs, or anything.

L: She'd trade with the White people?

H: Yeah.

L: What was her name?

H: Mary Harris.

L: She's still living?

H: Yeah, that's the one you come here wanting to talk to the other day, with my sister.

L: How old is she?

H: To me she oughta be a hundred years old but some of 'em say she's not. And doggone my grandma was old from the time I can remember.

L: I heard some say she was ninety-nine, some say a hundred.

H: Yeah. To me she oughta be over a hundred.

L: Who takes care of her?

H: My mother looks after her.

L: Well, does she get any kind of help from the government?

H: She don't get all that much. Just a little, I guess a welfare check a month. It's not very much.

L: Is it enough to take care of her?

H: No. If I didn't stay with 'em to pay house rent, gas bills—well, I don't pay all the light bills, my momma helps me pay that sometimes. A lot of times during the wintertime they'd probably go cold if it wasn't for me helping.

L: Why doesn't someone help them? Why doesn't the government or some welfare agency?

H: I don't know. She helped with all the grandkids. And I've had people tell me and say, "Well, why don't so and so do this and so and so do yonder?" and I said, "Because I don't ask them to." And I don't want 'em to even to start with. I just don't ask 'em.

L: Do you get that from being an Indian, being proud and depending on yourself?

H: I guess so. I don't know. I can get out there and start hitchhiking. If I had to go from here to Charlotte, I'd walk every step of the way before I'd stick my thumb up to get a ride.

L: Howard George is about the same way, isn't he?

H: I don't know about Howard. [Laughter] But that's the way I do it.

L: Do you feel something should be done to help the older people and even the young people get an education?

H: On the education, I think everybody needs an education. They get better jobs.

L: Do you feel lack you've been hurt because of your education?

H: Yeah. If I had a better education—I ain't got no education—but if I'd have knew how to read and write—After I got out of the Army, I took GI training for mechanic. Well, there's a lot of times where I could get jobs in places where you could work on cars but you gotta be able to fill out your paperwork on the thing.

You can't do it, so you can't get the job. I finally gave up foolin' with automobiles and started working in textile plants. I said, "Wilburn, I'll be better off of just going to the textile plant and tough it out there."

L: Do you make good money in plants?

H: Right now, I make a \$156, I believe that's for fifty-two hours. That's not too bad and that's not too good but it's better than a lot of us get.

L: Is there any discrimination now in the mills?

H: Well, they don't bother me. I go to the mills, and I get there maybe sometimes fifteen, twenty minutes 'til and I'll go into the canteen to go get me a Coca-Cola and get around the table and anybody wants to sit down there is fine with me. If they don't it's— [Laughter]

L: You don't go out of your way to be friendly?

H: Yeah. On the job, I stay right on my job most of the time. Only what time I have to go to the bathroom. Sometimes the fella up on the upper end of my job he would come and help me and then I'll go help him. But you don't find it like that all the time.

L: Do any of the Colored people work in the mills?

H: Yeah, there's a good many of 'em working in there now.

L: Do you get along with them?

H: Yeah. It's like I say, I just don't bother nobody. I stay with my job and that's it.

L: Do you feel that perhaps the government has helped the Black people too much?

H: Well, more than they did the Indians. But I guess if it hadn't been for the Colored people getting up, raising so much sand they probably wouldn't've helped them neither.

L: So why doesn't the Indians get up and raise sand?

H: 'Cause they'd put him in jail. They'd slap them in jail. That's exactly what they'd do to 'em.

L: If the Indians would have a protest or something in town, would you join in?

H: Yeah, sure would, but they'd lock 'em up. They'd put 'em right in jail. Even send for the—I don't know what you call it—the National Guard?

L: Yes, sir.

H: Guarantee you that's what they'd do to 'em.

L: Have you ever voted?

H: Nah, they're gonna do what they're gonna want to do anyway. They'll get up in about all these offices, they'll promise you "Oh, we're going to do this and we're going to do yonder," but after they get in there see how much of it they get done.

L: Do most of the Indians feel this way?

H: I don't know how the rest of 'em feels about it, but that's the way it is for me. You just watch 'em. Look at all the promises they make, the things that they gonna do 'til they get in that office, and when they get that office that's the end of it right there. They don't care about it. Damn the oldest thing they're after is money. They don't care about the rest of the people.

L: Has any of 'em ever promised they were gonna help the Indians, or do they even mention the Indians?

H: As far as I know they don't never mention it. I ain't never heard none of 'em say nothing about it.

L: Do you have a sympathy for the Black people? I mean, do you kinda, in a way, feel sorry for them because they're a minority group at the same time you're being a minority group too?

H: Well, I never did give that very much consideration. Sometime I fly hot and I'll say, "Well, I wish they didn't make nothing but niggers and Indians." But I get to thinking about it and that wouldn't be right either. [Laughter]

L: As you're saying that, you'd be saying you wish there wasn't any White people?

H: Well, that's why I say when I fly hot that's when—I don't have no problem out of jigaboos, I guess because I don't associate with them.

L: But you've had enough out of the Whites, ain't you?

H: Well, you know, like my wife's family. People like that, yeah. I'll tell you what: anybody with an education—you know, anybody that knows anything—you don't have no problems with them. It's these people that don't know nothing's the ones you get problems with.

L: It's the ignorant ones that—

H: Yeah. That's the ones you have problems with.

L: Is it because they're too dumb to respect their fellow man?

H: I think that's exactly what it is.

L: Or they don't understand?

H: That's exactly the people that you have problems with.

L: What can be done? Is this gonna always happen?

H: The way it's running, it looks like it.

L: Will the Catawba Tribe be a Tribe very long?

H: I doubt it. Not the way they're marrying out now.

L: Was Sanders still the Chief?

H: Albert?

L: Yes, sir.

H: Far as I know he's not. I never heard nobody say anything about it lately. It never had no meetings or anything on it.

L: But he was the last elected Chief—

H: Yeah, he was the last one. But there's no need for one. Just like I am, I'm not on the reservation. I'm living over here in off of the reservation. I don't need him. He can't come over here and tell me that you do this, or you do that. I don't need him. There's nothing he can do for me.

L: Well, he said that he's been going to Columbia trying to get some help for the elderly people and all.

H: Yeah.

L: And that would possibly help if he could do any good.

H: Yeah, but one person can't do nothing.

L: What about if all the Indians could kinda unite together and sign a petition or something? Would that not help?

H: I doubt whether they'd even pay him any attention. Be just like sending a little dog out there to bark.

L: You said it'd be like sending a little dog to bark?

H: Yeah. [Laughter] They probably wouldn't pay him any attention.

L: Do the Indians have anyone they can turn to for help, like in Washington or in government or here in South Carolina? Anything?

H: Not that I know of. The most of 'em, biggest majority of 'em down there, belong to that Mormon Church. I don't know whether they get any help through that or not.

L: What church do you belong to?

H: Baptist.

L: Do you attend fairly regularly?

H: I haven't been to church in I don't know when. It's been two or three years, I guess.

L: Are there any Indian teachers or policemen or politicians around here?

H: There's a policeman up there in York. That George boy.

L: Is that Moroni's son?

H: Yeah.

L: Why are there not more Indian people in the government around here?

H: I don't know.

L: Is it because of education or people prejudiced?

H: I imagine that's what it is, that they got no education for one thing. They wouldn't know how to run a office if they had one. [Laughter] Gotta have some education for that. I don't know how that George boy—well, he was raised there in York—but I don't know how he got on to be a cop.

L: How could the government have helped the Indians? I mean how could they have gotten an education?



H: Well, they could have done 'em like they done the Cherokee Indians. They built a big school there. They had a big school, and those kids went to school out there on the reservation. Most of 'em never had to go outside nowhere to go to school. They went to school right there on the reservation.

L: You feel it's a mistake to go there for a few years, right there on the reservation, and then be taken out, bused somewhere else and you're in the midst of all these White kids and they don't really want you?

H: That's right.

L: And if this had happened there'd have been a lot better jobs for you and the other Indians and more people in the government?

H: Yeah. I don't know. I don't feel that they owe me anything, but I just believe they could've done a lot better by me than they did. You go in and take a man, just a little but just like me, go in somewhere or another and take a young feller's house over, his farm and everything, and put him on starvation, wonder how you're gonna feel about me.

L: That's right. When the Tribe was divided up—the land on the new reservation and the old reservation—did you get any land?

H: Yeah, I think I got six acres. I believe it was, or right at six acres. It wasn't very much.

L: Where is this land at?

H: It's way down on the Springteam farm.

L: Do you still own it?

H: No, I sold that place. Sold all that and moved out.

L: Would you mind telling us what you sold it for?

H: Wasn't very much. I believe it was seventy-five dollars an acre.

L: And this was good land?

H: No, it was all washed-out fields, gullies. Had about three acres that was, you know, good enough to build houses on. Right along the road front. And I want you to know after I sold that place they went and put a blacktop, a blacktop road down there.

L: The land's very valuable today.

H: It is.

L: You feel like you, in a way, cheated out of this?

H: No, I done it myself.

L: Did a lot of people sell the land when they got it?

H: Yeah. The biggest majority of 'em sold it.

L: Were you in favor of the Tribe ending, terminating?

H: In a way. Some of 'em was benefiting, some wasn't. That's where the big difference come in at.

L: Did anybody stand up and try to keep 'em from—

H: Oh, some of 'em did.

L: Do you remember any of those?

H: Some few of 'em did but didn't do no good.

L: Do you remember their names?

H: No.

L: Was Buck George there?

H: I don't think so. He mighta been.

L: Do you feel like the Indians have a chance now to get the same education as the White people?

H: Well, if the jigaboos can get it, I guess the Indians will too.

L: Do you feel like it's hard for the both of 'em then? That the White man—

H: I imagine it is. Now, I don't never get to talk to anybody about that, but I imagine it's kinda rough. I don't know.

L: Do you think your son will have a chance to go to school wherever he wants to?

H: I hope he does.

L: Will you fight for his right to go?

H: Yeah. I fight for that little boy any kinda way I have to fight. [Laughter]

L: Did the Indians ever marry any Black people?

H: Not as I know of. Not this bunch. As far as I know, they didn't.

L: Did the Indians have much dealings with the Black people?

H: I don't think so.

L: Except, like you said, just work with 'em or around them and just a casual acquaintance.

H: Yeah.

L: Did you ever take part in the councils of the Tribe or assistance to the Chief? Any of your people?

H: I guess some of 'em did. They had a whole big group mess when they settled this place up to start with. You know, when the federal government bought all this other land, and that was—

L: New reservation?

H: Yeah, that was about during the war. Well, I wasn't here then. When I come home, all that stuff was all been settled up and everything. There wasn't nothing for 'em to give **me**. Everything that they had to give away is done gone now.

L: Is that because you wasn't here to get it?

H: Yeah, I guess so. [Laughter]

L: Let me turn this tape over.

[Break in recording]

L: Mr. Harris, do you feel like it's important for the Indian tradition to be carried on?

H: It should've been, but I believe this group here, I believe it's just gone.

L: When you say this group, you're referring to the younger generation?

H: Yeah. Well, this Tribe of Indians here.

L: Oh, the whole Tribe?

H: The whole Tribe.

L: Where did this Tribe come from?

H: Really, I don't know. I can't say where they did come from.

L: You ever thought about it?

H: Some of 'em say that they're supposed to be Sioux Indians, and some say they're supposed to be Cherokee. So, I don't know.

L: Will you teach your son about the Indians, or what you know?

H: What little bit I know.

L: Have you ever wished that you knew more?

H: Yeah.

L: Can you speak any of the Indian language?

H: Unh-uh.

L: Is there anyone alive that speaks it now?

H: As far as I know, there's none of 'em.

L: Who was the last Indian that could speak it?

H: I believe Chief Blue, far as I know.

L: What's going to happen to the Indians now?

H: She just gonna have to go ahead and work and keep on working. All I know.

L: I know there's a resentment inside you and I don't blame you one bit, but you've had a rough life, haven't you?

H: Been pretty rugged.

L: And do you look forward to it getting better or just work hard as long as you live?

H: Just work, just go ahead and work. That's all I can do now. Just go ahead and work.

L: Well, do you feel like an education will help your son?

H: Yeah, it should.

L: Are you going to try to send him to school?

H: Uh-huh, do all I can if anything were to happen to me. If I should die, anything like that before he gets big enough, he should get enough money outta the veteran's administration thing and the social security to take care of him. Yonder that, he could get somebody to manage it, take care of it, know how to use it. He could have a better chance than the one I had, because that's something I didn't have.

L: Is there any way to avoid the Tribe being completely destroyed now?

H: No, most of 'em are getting married on the outside. Girls are marrying White boys, they're not staying together. The men are marrying White women, they're not staying together. There's a lot of 'em busting out.

L: Even if everyone that has a little Indian in 'em would come back and have a meeting place and a hall, eventually it would still all turn out to be Whites after a few generations anyway, wouldn't it?

H: Yeah. You know that's what I'd reckon.

L: Would you like to see the Tribe united?

H: Yeah. I'd like to see it, in fact, like it was when I was a child.

L: How was that?

H: Well, they was a lot more sociable. Even into them people, I guess it's on kinda being mixed up. So, you could even see it in some of those people wanting to resent the other ones. But I guess that's what it is, I don't know. Now, when I was a child coming along the way like that, everybody goes with one another; somebody gets sick, the other ones would go try to help him.

L: Were your parents very strict when you were growing up?

H: No. Well, my grandmother really was the one that raised me. Mary Harris.

L: Are you strict on your son?

H: I try to be. If I tell him to do something, I want him to do it, you know. I know he's little and he don't understand a lot of things. But now if I tell him to not go down that driveway, I don't want him to go down that driveway. And if he goes down that driveway, I'll get real mad.

L: Do you ever watch any movies between the cowboys and the Indians?

H: Yeah.

L: Do you pull for the Indians or the cowboys?

H: That's just a film. Never did bother me. I took one of my first cousins—yeah, she's my first cousin, they were staying in Columbia, I never will forget that—to see a movie. It was *Drums Along the Mohawks* and these people was killing Indians and I want you to know she sat down and cried there in the seat. She'd seen the movies and things before. I said, "Well, what are you crying for?" She said, "Because them people are killing Indians."

L: What was her name?

H: Jewel.

L: Jewel Harris.

H: She's married now. But I never will forget that. I told her, "That's nothing but a film." I guess somehow though she got it in her head that they was really fighting. I don't know, she must've been about fourteen, fifteen years old.

L: Did the Ku Klux Klan ever come on the reservation?

H: I never heard of it, not on the reservation. You know, I've heard people talk about 'em but I've never heard of 'em.

L: Did they ever mess with any of the Indians?

H: Not that I know of.

L: Never heard of—

H: Not this group down here.

L: You heard about 'em Lumbee Indians?

H: That big bunch over in—yeah, I heard about that. That preacher was involved in that thing, wasn't he? Preacher from Greenville, I believe. I believe he was a Baptist preacher.

L: Have you ever thought of why the Catawba Indians didn't put up teepees and little trading posts and have the tourists trade as the Cherokee Indians have?

H: No, I never did give that very much thought.

L: Why could the Cherokee do this and the Catawbas not do it?

H: Well, one thing about that, see, there's a lot of people who goes through up there just to be going to the mountains. And them trading posts and things there to start with. Them Indians don't run them things. They just own the land, and some White man comes in and leases it, puts all that stuff out there.

L: Whitey's back in the picture again making the money.

H: That's right. That's exactly what it is. But that's where get all they tourists, from mostly just going to the mountains. People just want to get away, you know. Whether there's something or just have some reason they want to be loping around in the mountains. But that's where they get all of their stuff. And we don't have that down here.

L: Is there any dope problem among the young Indians today?

H: I don't know. You remember that Harris boy that killed that man over yonder at that beer joint?

L: Yes, sir.



H: They tell me them two boys was on dope, now. He'd been to Vietnam, so if he had I guess that's where he picked the habit up from down there. I can't say for sure that he was on it.

L: Yes, sir.

H: That's just something that I heard.

L: That's the one that's in prison now.

H: Yeah.

L: What about whiskey? Were a lot of people—

H: Woo!

L: What'd you say? [Laughter]

H: I said, "Woo!"

L: [Laughter]

H: As far as I can remember, they never did have no law against these people down here having liquor. But now, most places around the reservation you can't get alcohol at all. I was over in Arizona one time working at a service station in Mesa, Arizona.

L: How'd you get out in Mesa?

H: I want out there—took this first cousin of mine out there and I was working for this preacher. They had a service station and there was a café in behind it and they sold beer back there. It was hot in the summertime, and I'd been working pretty hard fixing flat tires and everything and I said, "Well." I got me a break and I just walked around the corner in there and asked the waitress, "Give me two beers." She looked at me right quick and she said, "You Indian ain't you?" And I

said, "Yeah." She said, "Well, I can't let you have no beer." I said, "huh." I walked right on back out the door and I sent my wife around there and then doggone I could get it.

L: [Laughter]

H: No way for 'em to stop me. [Laughter]

L: Have you ever been denied service anywhere else, like in a restaurant or?

H: No, unh-uh. That beer, they just get you over there. She says, "I can't let you have no beer." Well, it wasn't only me. All them Indians out there. Had a little old reservation out there at Scottsdale. That's where that boy died from drinking so much wine. You know that fella who was supposed to help raise that flag on Iwo Jima?

L: Yes, sir.

H: That was his little Tribe of Indians there. They couldn't sell them no beer or liquor.

L: Where do the Catawba Indians get their whiskey? Did they ever make it, or they buy most of it?

H: They buy most of it up here at the Red Dot store.

L: Regular government control. Do they ever fool with white?

H: They used to. I think maybe one or two of 'em used to fool with trying to make it and then they couldn't sell it.

L: So, they couldn't sell it?

H: No, they couldn't sell it.

L: Did they ever make it on the reservation?

H: I think some of 'em did.

L: But the equipment, because it wasn't profitable, they were losing money on it?

[Laughter]

H: Somebody'd find out about it and they'd tell on 'em or get mad at 'em because they wouldn't let 'em have it on credit or something. I know one time there was a feller—I left Ohio to come home in the wintertime—

L: What were you doing in Ohio?

H: Working a steel mill. The moon was shining real bright one night and it was real cold. Oh my God, it was cold! And this dog kept barking and barking and barking. I went outside and there was a nigger standing out there in the front yard. He said he wanted somebody to take him to town and I said, "Well, there's nobody here to take you to town." I tell him, "Go back up the road yonder." There's a fella up there would probably take you to town. I turned around went on back in the house. Wasn't ten minutes later I hear the dog again. He was barking and a-yapping, and I had a horseshoe driveway. And I went back out and he was standing out there in the driveway again. I asked him, "What in the devil is wrong with you?" He said, "You know, sir, the cops run in there and said I had a sack full of liquor already bagged up. Said I took it and run and that I brought it off a pen, I laid it down here, and I can't find it." In an old croaker sack and the grass and the old croaker sack blended together, you know, the grass being dried up and everything. And he couldn't see that bag of liquor and I looked, and I seen it. I told him, "You better get the hell on up the road, or I'll call the cops to you." Seeing the liquor sitting down on my place. So, he kept off and when he got gone

up the road about fifty yards I picked the bag of liquor up, went down to the woods with it. [Laughter] And I had it. I guess I kept it for about six weeks, around there. And I started selling it. I got started selling and it wasn't long doggone people got saying they wanted to fight in the yard. I said, "Unh-uh." I can give the last half a gallon that I had away. I said, "No, I can't with it." I done give it away.

L: Anybody ever die from drinking moonshine?

H: No. There was one Indian—I guess maybe you heard about him—died down there. I believe they said he drunk rubbing alcohol, I believe it was.

L: Who was that?

H: Frank Canty.

L: Why'd he drink that? Did somebody pour it in—

H: I don't know. He'd been on a chain gang or something or other and he got off that day and come through town. 'Bout tried he got drunk, and he drunk that rubbing alcohol.

L: Just probably out of his head when he drank it or either got mixed up.

H: They didn't know 'til way up in the day. The next day he was dead. He was in a old T-model, in the backseat.

L: A lot of people say the Indians are just lazy and shiftless.

H: Yeah, I guess they are. But some of 'em are not like that.

L: I know a lot of 'em work hard and all, like you yourself. Well, why would people say they're lazy and shiftless? Is this because they don't have an education and they can't do a good job?

H: It's probably that and then a lot of times, if they look back, other people the same way. You can take an Indian and take him off up town yonder and let him buy something on credit and if that one don't pay, they'll say, "You know them Indians won't pay you." They don't say, "That one Indian won't pay you," they say, "Them Indians won't pay you."

L: Anything one Indian does, the whole Indians get blamed for it.

H: That's right. [Laughter] That's the way it's done.

L: What about the Whites? If one White man does something, do y'all blame all the Whites?

H: I really don't think so. Just that one person. I don't know about the rest of the people, but that's the way I do it. I blame one person.

L: Do you resent the White people?

H: No, I don't resent 'em. As long as he don't try to pass me a bunch of junk, I don't—but now, when he starts trying to pass me a bunch of junk, I'm gonna get mad.

L: You ever been in a fight with any of the policeman?

H: No, I never have fought no cop. I've been in fights around beer joints, but I never have fought no cops. I think my brother did one time. I think he busted one open right there at Grease Point or somewhere one time. I was still in the Army then.

L: What did they do to him for fighting a policeman?

H: I don't know. I wasn't here then. He tell me about it when I come home. I don't think they caught him. I believe he got on a bus and went on back to Maryland or somewhere or another.

L: Well, then as we were talking, maybe might be just a few of the Indians that do take dope now—a very few and—

H: Yeah. Now, it could be possible. I don't get out no more. All I do is go to work and come home and that's it. And go to the grocery store. The baby needs clothes, I go to town and buy it clothes. I don't fool around like that no more.

L: Do you ever fool around with dope at all or anyone that—

H: Unh-uh.

L: That seems to be mostly just the younger ones that—

H: Seems to be in the teenagers. I don't know whether some grown person is behind that.

L: And who's that usually end up through? White man making money?

H: I don't know who it's through. Could be just anybody. I don't know because most of the time when they catch one of these ringleaders, he's not no teenager. He's always some grown person. Some man that knows better.

L: It's never an Indian either, is it? [Laughter]

H: Well. I hear preachers giving teenagers addicted one time, he said, "I want to ask you something. Do you see a teenager running a liquor store anywhere? Do you see 'em running a prostitute house anywhere?" Now, who's behind all this stuff? It's always the grownups. It's not the teenagers that gets it all started. They get a teenager hooked on something like that and say, "Well, heck, they done now." They probably usually start 'em off, maybe they'll sell you some pills for maybe two or three dollars. Next thing you know they got you hooked and they're gonna go up on them pills.

L: Today, you're always hearing on the radio and TV about teenagers protesting and raising Cain and don't wanna go to war. What do you feel about these protests?

H: On that war deal, like that Vietnam thing down there, I don't know why they're protesting that. They ain't got nothing to back 'em up. The federal government's backing them boys up.

L: You feel like we ought to not even be there?

H: That's the way I feel about that if they're gonna fight a war there. Ought to go ahead and fight it and quit playing tag.

L: What would you do if your son—if this was still going on, say, seventeen years from now? Would you send your son to war?

H: I wouldn't want him to go in nothing like this.

L: Would you try to keep him out?

H: I'd do everything possible I could to keep him out of it. I know what that thing is. With this thing that they got going on down yonder, they ain't winning nothing down there. How long then they've been down there? They've been down there about—

L: The French were there 'til [19]54. It's been going on for twenty years and then the United States invaded—

H: They ain't gained a thing. They ain't gained one thing. All them billions of pounds of bombs that they've dropped down there. If they'd have dropped in the right place, they wouldn't've had no people left. Now, I'm not saying that they should kill them people. It's not that. But they say we dropped so many tons of bombs

and things down there. All right, they must be taking 'em out there and dropping 'em in a empty field somewhere or another because as little as that place is, there must be nothing left. They must be bombing the same place every day over and over and over. They got the same thing happened to that Korea thing. Look at all them boys they got hemmed up, prisoned up down there that's been there ever since that Korea thing. It's been over with for a good goddamn I don't know how long. And they still got them boys in prison down there. The federal government don't try to get 'em loose.

L: Were you wounded when you were in the war?

H: No, I didn't get wounded. I got scared to death. [Laughter] I didn't get wounded.

L: How'd you get scared to death? [Laughter]

H: Good gracious alive. Those shells come popping in there.

L: Where was this at?

H: Up through Africa and Italy.

L: What did you do in the service?

H: I was field artillery, on a big gun.

L: Have they always drafted the Indians?

H: I don't know whether they did or not, now. I know they couldn't draft them down there on Florida. I don't know about the rest of us.

L: That the Seminole Indians?

H: Yeah. I don't think they ever did sign no kind of treaty or nothing with the government.

L: Think that was the Catawba's mistake?



H: I don't know, now, whether that was a mistake or not. I'll tell you the truth about it, I don't believe these people right around here is bad on Indians as a lot of other places are.

L: Like where?

H: Well, like in around Cherokee places. All different little places. Now, I tell from Arizona, them people out there are really treated bad. They're in worse shape than these people here and these here are bad on us.

L: How are they treated in Arizona?

H: Ooh, good God! They're treated like dogs.

L: They can't go anywhere or?

H: Oh, they can go, but good gracious alive—

L: They're not wanted, and they know better than to go.

H: They're not wanted.

L: Do you feel any kin to these other Indian Tribes? I mean do you look at 'em like your brother, or?

H: I imagine they have to be some kind of relation there somewhere or another. To me an Indian's an Indian, don't matter what Tribe he's from. He's just Indian, that's all. They might speak different languages or something like that but to me he's just an Indian.

L: You would accept him into your home just as you would another Catawba?

H: Yeah.

L: Winona George made the same statement. That she said it didn't matter—that's Buck George's daughter—she said it didn't matter what Tribe. They were all

brothers, and they should look out for one another. Some of the Indians are protesting and getting things done. Do you reckon this will ever help you and your family?

H: No, I doubt it. I done got too old. It might help my family or something like that, but I done got too old. I might live to see it, but it wouldn't be very much help to me.

L: We've talked about a lot of different things, and I've enjoyed talking with you. Do you have anything else you'd like to add?

H: No. The only thing I'd like to get that tape, see what it sounds like. [Laughter]

L: Well, how about just when I get the copy of it back, bringing you a copy of it?

H: Okay.

L: I'll do that because it'll take about another hour and a half just to listen to it back. We'll close now and I appreciate it a lot, Mr. Harris. And I'd like to add again that this is August 8, and this is a oral history interview by Jerry Lee for Dr. Sam Proctor at the University of Florida.

[Break in recording]

H: And we're gonna allow you to have so much lumber to build your house with. Well, you gotta go up there. First time I went, Roy Neely was throwing it. He said, "Yes, I'll be glad to cut your lumber for you. But you gotta go see this fella, you gotta go see that one yonder." I said just go ahead and forget about it. I took my money and went on back home. So, I stayed in this other little old shack for about a year and half. It was maybe two years later, and I said, "Well, I'll go back up there again." And I had some money, and I went back up there again. He said,

“Yeah, I’ll cut it.” He didn’t ask me about going to see this fella or that fella or the other one. He said, “Yeah, I’ll go ahead and cut it. How much you want, and I’ll cut it.” About two or four thousand feet of lumber. So, I had to ask another fella about the land where I could build it. He said, “Yeah, go ahead and build it there.” And after I got it started—you know, got the good old frame where it was and all that bit of the building. Got the framework and everything—

L: Was this on the old reservation?

H: On the new part. Here come that Indian agent down there with a camera, he take a picture. I said, “Yeah, you’re gonna take a picture of it and send it over yonder to another one of them reservations and tell ‘em, ‘Well, here’s what the federal government done for these people down here.’” I said, “You ain’t doing a dern thing with this. Running around here getting in the way.” [Laughter]

L: What was that agent’s name?

H: A fella **Suda**. They was building a barn one time—

L: What was his name?

H: Suda.

L: Suda?

H: Uh-huh.

L: What kinda name is that?

H: I don’t know. [Laughter] Kentucky, I think.

L: Was he an Indian?

H: Unh-uh. But anyway, we were building this barn and it was wide. It was about a hundred foot wide. About three hundred foot long, somewhere along there. Wide

thing. It wasn't just putting some studs up to hold the plate. He wanted to put up two braces about every ten foot or eight foot out over yonder east. I said, "How come you wanna do that? And doggone as wide as this thing is, it needs braced up." He said, "Well, that's how we save money." I said, "Save money! What are you gonna save money for?" He said, "To help you people." I said, "Help me? What you ain't helping me." He said, "What if you die in the next three or four years? You get two or three hundred dollars." I said, "You call that helping me? I'm going to die to get three or four hundred dollars. Ain't gonna be helping me?" [Laughter]

L: [Laughter] You saying the government deliberately trying to get y'all to skimp on your building and build something that wasn't as good?

H: [Laughter] Well, he was. I don't say that the government was doing it, but that's what he was trying to do. I know darn good and well that that's what he was going to do when he took the picture of my little building, now, that they were gonna send it to another reservation over yonder and say, "Look at what the government's doing for these people over here." [Laughter]

L: Make it look like they were doing an awful lot for y'all.

H: Yeah.

L: What would the government give you on this house? Just the lumber?

H: Just the lumber. It was already bought, the timber, and I had to pay for having it cut and everything.

L: So actually, they didn't give you too much then?

H: They didn't give me nothing because it was already bought and paid for, which they probably had paid about, say, ten or fifteen dollars an acre for it to start with. And all that timber was on that. I can't really say how much an acre they paid for it because I didn't see no bill or nothing. I never did hear nobody say anything about it.

L: Roy Neely was making the money then, his lumber company.

H: Yeah. He was getting the money for it.

L: And he was howling at buying it from you cheap and selling it back to you?

H: He'd go to the woods and cut it. Well, he had to pay his labor to go to the woods and cut it, bring it out, and take it to the sawmill.

L: He was just cutting it off Indian land?

H: Yeah, he was cutting it off Indian land.

L: And the government let him do this?

H: Yeah. I think then we was paying about thirty-two dollars a thousand to get it cut and I don't know how much they would—they couldn't've been paying much more than that to go out there and just buy the lumber straight out. So that was way back yonder in [19]47 or [19]48, somewhere along there. They couldn't have been paying much more than thirty-two dollars a thousand to start with. I mean if you'd have just went to some lumber yard uptown here and bought your lumber, you wouldn't have paid more than thirty-two dollars a thousand there.

L: You could've got it just as cheap uptown as you—

H: Yeah. Maybe for ten dollars more. You wasn't saving nothing.

L: But this way the government was saying, well, we're doing you people such a big favor. Well, before we close, you have any more little stories?

H: No, that's all. [Laughter] I gotta go eat me some dinner now and go to bed.

L: Yeah. I appreciate you taking time out of your sleep because I know, like you said, you work hard, and you need all the rest you can get. Well, thank you a lot.

H: Yeah.

[Break in recording]

L: The story that you will hear as soon as the tape has been concluded was that I mentioned to Mr. Harris that the Indian had been screwed a lot on certain deals, and that's when he starts on the story of when he wanted to get the lumber to build his home. About how the Indian was getting not much of a discount but yet the government officials and the Indian agent made them try to feel like they were getting a good deal from the government, whereas in reality, they could've went to town and may have bought the same amount of lumber for just ten dollars more. Mr. Harris lives in a more-or-less two- or three-room shack and they do have indoor plumbing and a toilet, but conditions are poor, and his household furnishings are very poor. Wilburn Harris is extremely proud, arrogant type person. As mentioned, he would not even hitchhike a ride. He would walk hisself every step of the way to Charlotte before he'd accept a ride. And this concludes this tape at this time.

[End of interview]

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