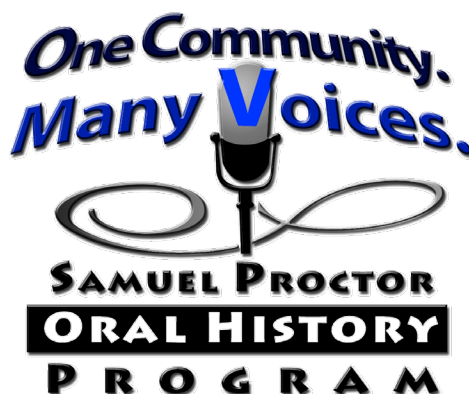


Martha Henrietta Harris Johnson and Sallie Harris Hester Wade

**Southeastern Indian Oral History Project (SIOHP)
CAT-135**

Interview by:

**Edith Frances Canty Wade
January 12, 1977**



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CAT 135 Martha Henrietta Harris Johnson and Sallie Harris Hester Wade
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31 minutes | 20 pages

Abstract: Martha Johnson and her niece, Sallie Harris Wade, discuss their respective upbringings on the Catawba reservation. They talk about their family lineage and talk about the fact that they are full-blooded Catawba. Martha discusses her memories going to school, recalling heckling the teachers and games she used to play. Sallie talks about their involvement in making movies around the Southeast and learning music in Georgia.

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

SAMUEL PROCTOR
ORAL HISTORY
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CAT 135

Interviewee: Martha Henrietta Harris Johnson and Sallie Harris Hester Wade

Interviewer: Edith Frances Canty Wade

Date of Interview: January 12, 1977

FW: This is Frances Wade. I live on Route 3, Box 304, Rock Hill, South Carolina. I

am gathering oral history of the Catawba Indians for the University of Florida.

Today is January 12, 1977. I am visiting the home of Martha Johnson, and she is a great deal of fun to be around. But she says that she is not going to talk tonight, so only time will take care of whether she talks or not. Martha, I don't call you Martha, I call you Marthie. What is your full name?

J: Martha Henrietta Harris Johnson.

FW: Henrietta. When were you born, Marthie?

J: January 14, 1902.

FW: I know there's are a lot of people who call you Marthie, just the same as I do. Do you know why they started calling you Marthie, rather than what your—rather than Martha?

J: No, people never had called me that. They always called me Mutt, Charlie, or two by four. [Laughter]

FW: Well, my goodness. You don't look two by four. Who were your parents, Marthie?

J: Ben Harris and Mary Dovie George Harris.

FW: How old were they when they—how old are they?

J: Mama would have been around 102 now, but she was ninety-eight when she died.

FW: She was ninety-eight when she died. What about your father?

J: Papa wasn't but fifty when he died.

FW: He was still a young man, wasn't he? How many brothers and sisters do you

have?

J: I have three brothers and five sisters.

FW: What are their names?

J: Sallie Harris Wade, Nancy Harris, Ida Harris, Emmaline Harris, and Minnie Harris, and Bertha Harris.

FW: I didn't know her. Was she just a baby when she died?

J: Mmhm.

FW: What about your brothers?

J: Robert Harris, Joseph Harris, and John Harris.

FW: Marthie, are your parents Indians?

J: Full-blooded Catawbas.

FW: Both of 'em are?

J: As far as I know.

FW: This really makes me feel good, because you are the first person that I've heard say that their parents were full-blooded. Now that would make you full-blooded.

J: That's right.

FW: That's right, so now you're full-blooded, and Sallie, you're full-blooded. Right here, I'd like to say that I'm talking to Sallie Wade. She is one of Marthie's sisters, and I might be talking to both of 'em before I finish here tonight. This, to me, is really something because everybody said that there wasn't any full blooded Catawbas down here. Since Martha's momma and daddy both are full-blooded, she and her sister both certainly are full-blooded Catawbas. Were you born here on the reservation, Marthie?

J: Yes, born right here on Old Sticks. Over there where Lynn lives.

FW: Over where Lynn Wurdemann lives now?

J: Yeah.

FW: Was that your daddy's house? I can remember that old house but—

J: It was an old log house.

FW: Aunt Martha Jean lived there when I—

J: The one that you are talking about—

SW: The one she was born in you cannot remember—

J: It was an old log house.

SW: —but it was just a little old log house, and it had one door in it and a little window in the corner of the fireplace.

FW: Wait just a minute now, Sallie, I am afraid I might not be getting you on—

[Break in recording]

FW: So if you are full-blooded Indian, that means that there are at least four of you who are full-blooded Indians down here.

SW: Is Sallie Beck full?

FW: Is Sallie—

FW: Yeah, I think Uncle John was full. If Uncle John was full, Sallie and Arzada and Mary and them would have been—supposed to be full.

FW: I believe, though, that Sallie told me that one of her parents was not full, so if—

J: It might have been Uncle John.

FW: Well, it might have been. Marthie, did you go to school any?

J: Yeah.

FW: How far did you go?

J: Seventh.

FW: To the seventh. Who were your teachers?

J: My daddy, Ms. Lesslie, and I cannot remember that other man's name, can you?

It was an old deep man; I can tell you that.

FW: Yeah.

SW: And Ms. Stevens.

J: Yeah, Ms. Stevens, but this deep fellow—me and your mammy used to steal his lunch and take it to the branch and eat it. [Laughter]

FW: Well, that's the type of things I want to know, too. So, you were about my mamma's age, you were born in 1902?

J: Yeah.

FW: Well, she was born in 1900, so she was two years older than you.

J: Her and October was as well.

FW: Yes, they were born in the same year.

J: Yeah.

FW: What subjects did you like best in school?

J: What subjects? Arithmetic and history.

FW: Well, you know, it makes me feel good to hear people talk about they like arithmetic, because it seems like arithmetic is hard for a lot of people, you know, today. What was it like going to school back then, Marthie? What kind of school did you go to?

J: Just a little old grammar school.

FW: Was it a—

J: It wasn't no public school.

FW: What kind of a building was it?

J: Just like a plain old house.

FW: Was it logs or—

J: Nope.

FW: And where was it?

J: Right down here above Sallie Beck's. Right where Sammy's at.

FW: Where Sammy Beck lives?

J: Yeah.

FW: I went to a school there too.

SW: The same old schoolhouse been down there for a long time.

FW: And they remodeled it?

J: No, they just added two rooms to it.

FW: Oh, all right.

SW: I mean Sammy and them [inaudible 6:59]

FW: Well, I know that, but I didn't know that it was the same building.

SW: First building that was ever built on the reservation.

FW: Marthie, when you went to school down there, was the teacher very strict with y'all?

J: Yeah, but we were strict with him then too, boy. [Laughter]

FW: Well, I heard that you all had done quite a few things that the teacher wouldn't approve of.

J: [Laughter] There was one we were scared of, and that was my daddy.

FW: I want to ask you about your daddy. Now, he didn't go to school to become a teacher. How did he get to be the teacher?

J: Well, he always told it that he had got his education from Mrs. Gryder.

SW: Well, some from Ms. Gryder [inaudible 7:56]

FW: From Mrs. Gryder? That's Roy Gryder's mother?

J: Yeah.

FW: That is interesting to know, because I had never heard that before. Was there many students going to school at the time you was?

J: "Yes, ma'am," the little nigger says. You going to get to when me and your mammie stole the peaches down there and eat it? [Laughter]

FW: No, I have not gotten to that. I was going to ask you something about that, but first I was going to ask you if you think that most of the people who went to school at that time, were they really trying to learn, or were they interested in learning?

J: Yeah.

FW: Well, that's good to know. Did you have clocks to know what time to go to school in your houses? The reason I'm asking this is because Uncle Richard told me that people didn't even have fire. They'd go and borrow coals from each other to start their fire. He said he remembered many a days when his grandmother would go and take the shovel and borrow coals from somebody's fireplace, because they didn't always have matches. So, I'm just wondering if everybody had clocks?

J: Well, I don't remember about the clocks.

FW: How did you know what time to go to school?

J: My feet told me so! [Laughter]

FW: Other than your feet telling you so, how did you know when to go to school?

J: Well, the teacher would get there and ring the bell.

FW: They rung the bell. You know that bell was still here just a few years ago, and I asked last week of several people where it went—what happened to it.

Everybody that I asked don't seem to know, but I don't really think any Indian has it. It was up at the new schoolhouse. I will ask you: did you go home at dinnertime, or did you stay all day?

J: We went home at dinnertime. We would go back and then get out at three o'clock.

FW: What did you keep warm with?

J: Wood fire!

FW: Did you have a heater, or did it have a fireplace like it?

J: You mean in schoolhouse?

FW: Uh-huh.

J: They had a big heater.

FW: They had a big heater when I first started, too. I didn't know whether they had an open fire or something when you went. Did you all have to carry water from the spring to drink?

J: Yes sir.

FW: We did the same thing. I would like to know some of the things that you all did at

school that was kind of rowdy, and that the teacher would not approve of.

Besides you and my momma stealing the teacher's lunch and going down on the branch and eating it, what are some of the things you all did?

J: We whooped the teachers we didn't like! [Laughter]

FW: You really whipped the teachers?

J: We whooped the one and when he left, he never did come back.

FW: Well, what did you whip him with?

J: With our fists. [Laughter]

FW: And why did you do it?

J: Because we wanted to.

FW: I mean did he do anything to make you want to beat him up or you just wanted to be ugly?

J: We just wanted to have fun!

FW: Oh. Well, if he left and did not come back, I don't believe he thought it was too much fun, did he? What were some of the other things you did?

J: I don't know of anything else.

FW: What kind of games did y'all play at school?

J: A little bit of everything. I just can't name it.

FW: Yeah. Marthie, who did you marry?

J: Isaac Johnson.

FW: He's now deceased?

J: Yeah.

FW: Was he a Catawba Indian?

J: No ma'am, he was a Cherokee.

FW: A Cherokee. How many children do you have, Marthie?

J: One.

FW: What is his name?

J: Hadden Delano Johnson.

FW: What's his birth date?

J: February 17, 1943.

FW: When it came to Christmas time or any of the holidays like Thanksgiving or the Fourth of July, did your parents have any type of special celebration that you all had on those day?

J: Not that I can remember.

FW: When it was Christmas—let's take Christmas—did your folks put up a Christmas tree?

J: No, I don't remember that either.

FW: Did you get toys for Christmas?

J: Sometimes.

FW: Did you get fruit and candies and nuts?

J: Yeah.

FW: Well now, I do not know where yours came from, but I can remember when I was little, we got fruit. I guess the monies was supplied by the state of South Carolina.

J: Yeah.

FW: I don't know, a group of people would get the fruit and put it all in big bags and

each individual would get a bag full of fruit.

J: Yeah.

FW: Was it the same way when you were coming up?

J: That's right.

FW: Did your mother make pots?

J: Yeah.

FW: Did she make small ones or large ones?

J: She made both.

FW: She made both small and large. Did she ever have to make your living by making pots?

J: No, she didn't have to.

FW: What kind of work did your daddy do beside teaching school?

J: Cotton mill.

FW: He worked in the cotton mill. Were there very many Indians working in the cotton mill, or can you remember?

J: Now, the first Indian down here was Uncle Billy—that ever went to work in a cotton mill, wasn't he?

SW: Yes, he was the first that South Carolina allowed to get out and [inaudible 14:08]. That must have been back in 1910.

FW: All right, now. That's something that I want to really know about. Billy—

J: Billy Harris.

FW: Billy Harris. That was your daddy's brother?

J: Yeah.

FW: He was the first Indian who was ever allowed by the state of South Carolina to work—

SW: Out in a public place.

FW: Out in a public place.

J: That's right.

FW: Did he live on the reservation and work off or did he move—

J: No, he had to board in town and then come back down.

FW: Marthie, I know that this little old microphone, it seems to make you lose your mind about what you're going to tell me. But I know there's a lot of things that I just sat and listened to you and Sallie and a lot of people talk about. Then, when we start taping, we forget everything that we—

SW: That we've been want to talk about.

FW: That we've been wanting to talk about, or we'd like to have on the tape. What kind of games did you all play when you were small? You didn't have a lot of toys, I know that.

J: Hopscotch. That's all I remember. [Laughter]

FW: Hopscotch.

J: I know you know that.

FW: Yes, I do.

SW: Hide and seek.

J: Hide and seek, I reckon that's about all.

FW: Well now, let me ask you this, were your parents very strict on you as children?

J: Yes, ma'am.

FW: Do you think—now, you know what it's like today, that most parents are not very strict with their children. Do you think that's a good idea, or do you think they should be strict like your parents were?

J: Well, if they was like my parents, I'd say, "yes," but if they wasn't, I'd say—well, I'd still be like the little nigger, I'd say, "Go, boy, go!" [Laughter]

FW: Well, I don't know hardly how to answer that, Marthie. Do you think it was a good idea that your parents were strict on you?

J: Yeah.

FW: I know that you brought up your son in the same manner, didn't you?

J: I tried, but did I?

FW: Once they are grown, you have got to realize that you have done what you can do. Then, they are agents unto themselves really. They are responsible for their own actions after they're grown. Marthie, do you belong to any church?

J: I belong to Wooddale Baptist Church.

FW: How long have you been a member of that church?

J: Six years.

FW: Did you ever go to the Mormon church when you were small?

J: Yeah.

FW: You know, most of people that I have talked to, they are Mormons. Is there any reason why you—were you ever baptized into the Mormon church?

J: Yeah, I was.

FW: Oh, you were. I didn't know that.

J: Yeah, but now I'm going to tell you something: it's according to your belief.

FW: Well, that's true. I'm not making any judgment on that. I'm just asking if you were ever baptized into the Mormon church.

J: Yeah.

FW: Well, Sallie. I'm just going to talk to both of y'all, and maybe we can get a relaxed atmosphere around here. Now, because you're sitting so far away from the microphone, you're going to have to talk kind of loud. Sallie, what is your full name?

SW: Sallie Hester Wade Harris.

FW: I'm not sure that I can hear you good from over there.

SW: Sallie Hester Wade Harris. I mean Sallie Harris Hester. Girl, I can't hear you—

J: Get over there, girl.

FW: No, I'll just sit right there.

FW: When is your birthday, Sallie?

SW: It's April 28.

FW: What is the year? You can't remember. But you are eighty-two years old?

SW: I will be eighty-three in April.

FW: Even though I am asking Sallie what her name and age is, I'll be getting her on another tape, because she has told me so many things. I'm hoping I'll get just a few of them on tape at least. Sallie, as Martha said just a few minutes ago, that her momma and daddy were full-blooded. So, since you have the same momma and daddy, you are full-blooded Indian too. So now, since you're my mother-in-law, that makes my children more Indian than I thought.

SW: Yes.

FW: It really does, because I didn't realize, but it makes me feel proud, too, to know that my children have that much Indian in them. Immediately, when I go home tonight, I'm going to call them up and tell them they have got more Indian than I had first thought. Sallie, how many children do you have?

SW: Six.

FW: What are their names and their ages, their birthdates?

SW: I can't tell you their ages because, see, I can't remember my own age. [inaudible 20:00] You know, I can at times, other times I can't. Rella is my oldest, Rella Wade, and he was born in 1917.

FW: 1917.

FW: Now, Sallie, you're calling him Rella Wade. Did he have another name besides Rella?

SW: Yes, he had another name and, you know, I don't know what, I could never use it.

FW: What was his name?

SW: Well, I named him Rella. See, we was in the mountains up there. This man that we was working for, well, he was named by a station there. At that time, it was protocol. Oh right. His real name, full name is Lawrence Esmeralda Wade.

FW: Lawrence Esmeralda Wade.

SW: That's what his real full name is. That's what he is before was baptized, anyway.

FW: And what happened? I guess somebody probably just shortened it—

SW: [inaudible 21:07] and he came home with it.

FW: And it just stuck, and he continued—all right, what is your next child?

SW: Carlene.

FW: Angela.

SW: Yeah. Carlene Angela.

FW: Can you remember her birthdate?

SW: No.

FW: We'll just go ahead and bypass it because I—

SW: Anyway, I've got all the—

FW: Things written down.

SW: [inaudible 21:40]

FW: Who was your next child?

SW: Gary Wade.

FW: His name is Horace Gary Wade. I know him well. [Laughter] All right, who was your next?

SW: William Perry Wade. No, Ruth May Wade.

FW: She died while she was still—

SW: No, she had two weeks.

FW: She lived two weeks. So, William Perry Wade is your—

SW: He's the last one.

FW: —is your last one, and since you can't remember the birthdates, that's all right. You said when Rella was born, you were up in the mountains. What were you doing up there after you came from the reservation?

SW: Up there making pictures.

FW: Up making pictures. Now you are about the third person that I have heard talk

about—you were in movies. I want to try to find out something about that if I can. I don't know whether I'll be able to or not, but I want to. Do you remember who you were making pictures for?

SW: John Packard. I guess his home state was in New York. But I guess he'd go around, and he'd picture make with the camera. That's where the pictures would go back to, was to New York.

FW: Was he an Indian?

SW: No.

FW: Since you all lived down here in South Carolina and you went to the mountains of North Carolina to make the pictures, how did he get in touch with you all?

SW: Well, I think how he did—well when my daddy—when me and Robert was the only two children, Mama and Paul Harris—and how he ever got in with them I don't know. But he took my daddy and the family, you know. And my grandmother, my daddy's mama.

FW: What was her name?

SW: Nancy Harris. We went to Arkansas with him that time and done the picture, but we were—me and Robert weren't old enough. I guess I was about two years old, Robert was about three because October hadn't been born. So that's the way he got in with Paul Grainer, and how I don't know. Unless it was through Ms. Dunlap, you know, when she'd come and teach in the school room. Then we stayed up there five years, I believe it was. Nope, yeah. We stayed up there two years and come back. Then he went back and stayed with them for a long while.

FW: You're talking about in Arkansas?

SW: Yeah, that is in Pine Bluff, Arkansas. That's where we went first. That's when I was about two years old. So, I reckon, what I think—after so long he kept thinking of making pictures, so he kept Pa's address somewhere and asked him if he'd interested in making pictures, you know, and continue it. So, Pa went ahead and wrote to him and then he'd come down here and **sing something**, well then, he'd pack up and go make pictures in the mountains.

FW: Sallie, who did you marry?

SW: William Wade.

FW: Do you know when his birth date? I'll bypass that. Was he an Indian?

SW: Half.

FW: He was half, but he was not a Catawba, was he?

SW: His mama was a Cherokee, and his daddy was White.

FW: Where did he come from?

SW: Here.

FW: How did you meet him?

SW: I met him in Rock Hill at the cotton mill.

FW: He was working in the cotton mill, and you were, too, at the time.

SW: Yeah.

FW: Sallie, you were married more than once, who was the person you next married?

SW: Charlie Sharps.

FW: Charlie Sharps. He was not an Indian?

SW: No, he was full White.

FW: I hear most of the old people—well, these ladies, they're not old, but I'll rephrase

it. I'll hear most of the people say ma and pa. Did most of the Indians at that time call their parents by that name?

SW: I don't know why we ever started that. We used to call mama, mama. I don't know why we started that. We got older, I guess.

FW: I just wondered. Most of the Indians down here call their parents mama and daddy, and I hear the old people—I know Uncle Richard says pa all the time. I just didn't know. I've heard Sallie Beck say the same thing.

SW: I know we used to, all of us, call them papa and momma. But after we get away from them, I guess, when we used to come back, we would call them pa and ma.

FW: How far did you go in school, Sallie?

SW: I went to the tenth.

FW: To the tenth. Well, did the school here on the reservation go to the tenth?

SW: No, I went as far as I the fifth down here on the reservation. But I left the reservation, and I went to live with a teacher to Atlanta, Georgia.

FW: What was that teacher's name?

SW: Mrs. Richardson, Mable Richardson.

FW: How did that happen? She didn't teach down here on the reservation, did she?

SW: Unh-uh. She was a member of the Mormon church, her and her old man.

Through him—come through here on the line. He was some kind of big man on the train or something, for some company. Well, he got down here at the Catawba Junction and found out about the Indians down there and he contacted Uncle Sam about coming in here. So, he took several of us down there, I wasn't the only one that went down there but I was the only one that down there long

enough to classes. That's where I learnt music in. And so—

FW: I want to ask you something else about that. If you were in the fifth grade down here, that meant that you were not really old when you went to Atlanta.

SW: Oh no.

FW: Was it hard for your parents to let you go?

SW: I don't know whether it was hard. They let me go. They'd bring me back and forth from down there when they would give us time off for vacation, we'd come back in the car. She wanted to come up here and teach school one time, but I don't know why they never did come. They was, well, you know, rich people. They were no poor people. They had their own plantation, **harvested their own cotton too.**

FW: That is something news to me, too, because I never knew that you went away. You were talking about you learned music there. What kind of music did you learn?

SW: I took all the lessons there, you know, piano lessons. I used to play for the church all the time.

FW: I can remember when you played for the church.

SW: I didn't play by ear. I had to play by note. Now, I couldn't play—you know, if I tried to play by ear, I couldn't. I'd have to play by note.

FW: You had told me once that some other local woman had taught you some music too.

SW: After I came back to Rock Hill, they was teaching some of the rest of the children—I mean, grown-ups could **also** come in—Ms. Macey Stuart, she taught

classes.

J: Well, that Gryder gal, Grady—

SW: Grady Gryder took up some of the other ones.

J: I remember a couple that she taught, and Lucy went to 'em too.

FW: I can remember when Lucy played in the church too.

SW: Lucy was a grown woman, but she took lessons from that Gryder gal.

FW: Mmhm. Now, that would be Roy Gryder's sister?

SW: Yeah, Grady Gryder.

FW: Uh-huh. Did she have you up to her house?

J: Yeah. I went to her house.

FW: Did those people treat you real good, Sallie, at that time?

SW: Yeah, at that time they did. Well, I have seen the Gryders at that time, I haven't seen them lately. But the last time I saw Roy, he was just as friendly as he was when he was a kid.

FW: He would be about your age, would he? Be somewhere around your age?

SW: No, he was more **Roy's age**. He got killed. [inaudible 30:55]

[End of interview]

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