



Catawba notes

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Source: *Journal of the Washington Academy of Sciences*, NOVEMBER 19, 1918, Vol. 8, No. 19 (NOVEMBER 19, 1918), pp. 623-629

Published by: Washington Academy of Sciences

Stable URL: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/24521208>

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ANTHROPOLOGY.—*Catawba notes*.¹ JOHN R. SWANTON, Bureau of American Ethnology.

The writer spent the greater part of the month of May, 1918, on the Catawba reservation, South Carolina, collecting linguistic material from some of the few Indians still able to use the old Catawba language. These Indians have been surrounded by whites and negroes for such a long period and their economic condition has altered so completely that one feels uncertain whether the scraps of information regarding the old life and beliefs now to be obtained had a purely Indian origin, and how far they may have been colored by external influences. Nevertheless these scraps may have some value for future investigators who may be in a better position to separate the various elements entering into them. At any rate such scraps are all that we now have, outside of the very limited material from earlier writers such as Lawson, and I give them for what they may be worth. They were collected merely incidentally in the course of the linguistic investigation, and are principally from an old woman named Margaret Brown and her son John Brown. An account of the only important native industry which has come down to modern times, pottery making, has been omitted, since this has been treated very fully by Mr. M. R. Harrington² in a special paper containing also a few notes on other features of Catawba ethnology.

Margaret Brown says that when she was a girl the Catawba lived, not in frame houses as they do today, but in brush dwellings. According to her description these had a single ridgepole supported at either end by a forked stick, a roof of pine bark, and walls of brush. The house was round or oblong, the door in the latter case being midway of one of the longer sides, and along the wall opposite to the door was a bed of the usual southern Indian style, a bench of wattle or matting supported by short poles. The fire was in the middle of the house, and there was no vent for the smoke except the door.

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² HARRINGTON, M. R., *Amer. Anthropol. n. ser.* 10: 399-407.

Spoons, long trays, and other dishes were made of wood from the dogwood and cedar trees. Pipes were of pottery or stone, stone working having been a native industry as well as working in clay. John Brown can make bone and flint arrow points with one or more barbs, but I do not think he has acquired his knowledge from the Indians, or at least from those of his own tribe.

In making baskets they used the following dyes: (1) a red dye from a plant called in Catawba wayûk, popularly "coon roots;" (2) another red dye from the "red root," Catawba tak-tuwia; (3) a yellow dye from a plant called itî wiye^a, "yellow root;" and (4) black from the black walnut. There were probably others which have been forgotten.

The ancient dress seems to have been practically identical with that of other southeastern Indians. Margaret Brown said she had seen aprons in use made of large hickory leaves pinned together with broomstraw. Small knit caps or hoods for children were fabricated out of the inside bark of the slippery elm, but nothing seems to be remembered about the old mulberry-bark textiles. It is, however, recalled that little bags of sand were placed on the foreheads of infants to give them "a heap of sense," an evident reminiscence of the ancient custom of head-flattening. Adult Indians made a hair-wash out of the red sap from broken stems of young grapes.

The Catawba had white, yellow, and blue corn, strawberry corn—corn striped red all over—and popcorn. Which of these were truly aboriginal it would be impossible to say. The old native beans (I^{nye} nuntce) are said to have been of the size of lima beans, colored black with white spots. The native tobacco is reputed to have been about 4 feet high but with broad leaves. It is thought that the "sow weed" (*Oxalis violacea*), called by the Catawba nûpai^atare, was sometimes smoked. Like all of the other southeastern Indians the Catawba pounded their corn into meal in a wooden mortar, usually of hickory. The inside was lined with tacks to keep the wood from fraying out and leaving splinters in the meal. To take off the outer skin of the corn they put it into a pot over the fire along with wood ashes.

They also employed a fanner (wûski'), and two sifters, the coarser known as no^aso' kâtteigne, and the finer as kûs ompa, and the dishes made from it appear to have been identical with those known to the other southern Indians. Among them were hominy (kuspî seratere), cold meal (kûs umpasa'), and the famous dish known to the Creeks as sofki but called by Catawba Indians kusimeyû. The hominy was also mixed with cooked beans and squeezed up into cakes called kusta^a notcepetcö'. When they ate these they commonly sat in a circle around a big dish of gravy into which each dipped his cake. Like the other southern tribes the Catawba also put cornmeal dough mixed with beans into cornhusks, and cooked a number of them together in a pot over the fire. Cornmeal dough was sometimes laid upon oak leaves which had been placed upon sand, other oak leaves being raked over the top, and the whole covered with sand, after which a big fire was lighted over all and the dough roasted. Again cornmeal dough was sometimes placed on a short smooth board and cooked in front of the house fire. This dish was called kusta^a i^apitē^a kîsa ikta^a. It was occasionally enriched by adding persimmons, the seeds of which had been removed. Parenthetically I was assured that persimmon seeds make excellent coffee. I learned nothing about the use of hickory and acorn oil, though it was certainly resorted to but a good flavor was given to hominy by stirring in walnut meats thoroughly, while the pot was boiling.

Beef, and at an earlier period venison, was cut into strips and hung around the fire to dry. When any of this was desired a piece was taken off and broken up fine in a stone mortar with an iron pestle. The resulting fragments were put into a big pan, gravy was poured over them, and all sat around and ate out of the one dish. Meat was boiled in pots hung over the fire or roasted on wooden spits. Cooking was sometimes performed at the fire inside of the house, sometimes at a fire out of doors.

Fish were stupefied and then caught in the usual southeastern style, by pounding up buckeye, devil's shoestring, and some other plants and throwing them into a pool of water.

Medicines were of the same miscellaneous character observable elsewhere among Indians, but were mostly from plants. The following list contains all that I learned of during my short stay, but there were of course many more. For the botanical identifications I am indebted to Mr. Paul Standley, of the Smithsonian Institution.

Ya' suâⁿ wītiwā', "rattle snake medicine," *Agave virginica*, used, as the name implies, in curing snake bites, but sometimes in cases of dropsy. In cases of snakebite the roots were mashed up and put into water, some of which was then taken internally and some applied externally. For dropsy they selected the smaller roots, pounded them up, and added them to a glass of clear water, along with a tablespoonful or two of whisky. Some was then applied externally to the affected parts, but the rest taken internally, one tablespoonful three times a day.

Depôⁿwâⁿ yisi nōⁿne'-i, or poⁿwoⁿ yašină', popularly known to whites as "Sampson's snake root," was used to stop pains in the stomach, an infusion, hot or cold, being drunk or the roots chewed. It was also applied to cure backache.

Wâⁿsa haone' (or wâⁿsa hawinon), popularly called "star grass," *Aletris farinosa*. An infusion was drunk to cure stomach trouble and dysentery.

Yireⁿtce wītiwā', *Cracca virginiana*, popular name "devil's shoestring." In olden times it is said that a tea was made from the roots of this plant along with those of the low sumac, but it is not known for what ailment.

Hāstūk, *Erigeron ramosus*. A drink was made of the roots and taken in cases of heart trouble.

Dōpa sīgrīhere, *Salvia lyrata*. A salve to put on sores was made of the roots.

Itēwārap wētere, *Senecio (smallii?)*, was considered good for consumption.

Isdawāraphere wētikrīⁿare, "it is good medicine for backache," *Arnica acaulis*, was used, as the name implies, for backache; the green leaves were crumpled up and laid on sores.

Serak wāⁿūwē', *Oenothera fruticosa*. The roots were used to wash sores.

I^ayāb wəp (or wərop) krīⁿhere, "good for toothache," *Hypoxis hirsuta*. The roots were pulled up and chewed and some of the chewed root inserted into the cavity in the affected tooth.

Witsaguaⁿ-i skāmpatcī'a, *Parthenium integrifolium*. When a horse had a sore back the leaves were burned and the ashes applied to it. People sometimes placed the fresh leaves over burns.

Wēte wōropkere, *Psoralea pedunculata*, popularly called "bald roots." The roots of this plant were scraped fine, beaten, and stirred up in water and the decoction applied internally and externally to sores or cancers. The cure was said to be infallible.

Witi siⁿwəre, "blossoming medicine." This has a flower like that of self-heal but larger. The roots were used in cases of backache and by women.

Surēare, *Marshallia obovata*, a wild clover, used in certain diseases.

Wāswāⁿ wētīware, *Prunella vulgaris*, used in certain diseases.

The bark of the slippery elm was used in cases of consumption.

The itī wiyeⁿ, "yellow root," from which the yellow basketry dye was obtained, was chewed to heal a sore mouth.

The wayūk, or "coon roots," mentioned as used in dyeing baskets, were also fed to animals to make them lively and improve their appetites.

From broomweed roots they made a drink to administer to malarial patients, and from its stalks, cut up and mixed with water, an eyewash.

A few medicines non-vegetal in character, were also spoken of. It was thought that chills might be cured by swallowing a granddaddy-long-legs rolled up in dough. Rattlesnake rattles were hung about the head to cure headache. In order that newborn babies might have long lives the heart of a "couter" turtle was dried, beaten fine, and stirred up in water which the child was made to drink. To improve the speech of a child unable to talk plainly the green burrs of the sweet gum were taken at the time when they first come out and burnt to an ash which the child was made to blow upon.

When a marriage took place among the older Catawba the couple was seated back to back and a white cloth thrown over

them. It is not believed that the speech of men and women differed, but the present condition of the Catawba language is such that this statement has little value.

Bodies of the dead were anciently put under the beds inside of the houses themselves, some person making a speech on the occasion. If one died in the morning he was buried the same evening; if in the evening he was buried next morning. As soon as a death occurred three live coals were placed upon each piece of cold bread in the house so that the ghost of the deceased would not eat it, and no food of any kind was taken by the people of the household until after the body had been laid away. In the intervening period they frequently warmed their hands at the fire and then rubbed their faces with them; otherwise they feared that the skin of the face would become drawn up and wrinkled something like the skin of a chicken.

When a partridge (ipākä) went through the yard it was a sign that someone in the house would soon die. When the calf of the leg twitched it was a sign that someone was coming. When the arm twitched it was a sign that someone was coming on horseback. When the mouth or eye twitched it was a sign that the person to whom this happened was going to mourn over a death in the family or some other severe affliction.

A relic of the belief in witchcraft is preserved in the story of a woman who once turned into an owl, went out of the house through her chimney, and stole chickens which she brought back in the same way.

At one place in Catawba River is a row of rocks where noises are sometimes heard, said to be caused by old Indians crossing there. At a place near the reserve known as "the old Indian town" people are sometimes heard dancing and singing. Close to the river there, a man once saw a woman dressed in the ancient manner, with a bundle on her back and bow and arrows (!). She disappeared suddenly.

Aside from these tales I learned of only one story that has the appearance of an aboriginal Indian tale, and of this only in outline. It relates that a child was once stolen away from its mother, and the latter began hunting for it. She asked the

various animals and other living creatures which she encountered, one after the other, if they could tell her anything of her child, but in vain. At last, however, she came to the giant red-headed woodpecker (*waṭcāk*) who said that he knew and would inform her if she would give him a pair of earrings. She agreed and the bird said that the child had been stolen by an old woman, the owl, who had carried it far north to the other side of the Cherokee mountains. Upon hearing this the woman gave the bird her earrings and continued on to the place indicated. After she had recovered her child, the old woman who had stolen it began to rise from the ground, and as she ascended her bird tail grew longer and longer, and finally she became the comet.

Two principal dances, possibly vestigial ceremonies, are remembered, the Bear dance and the Wild Goose dance. Originally they took place out of doors, near the full of the moon, the former about roasting-ear time, the latter in the fall. In the later period of decline they were held indoors in winter. A drum was used, and the men carried gourd rattles, while the women had turtle-shell rattles fastened to their ankles in the familiar southeastern manner. The participants imitated bear and wild geese as well as they were able, the leaders being chosen in particular for their skill in representing the parts. Besides these there is said to have been a black snake dance.