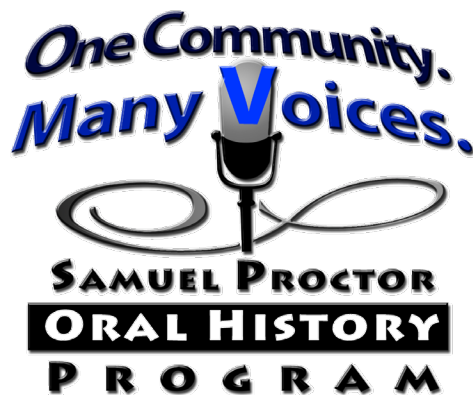


John Marvin George

**Southeastern Indian Oral History Project (SIOHP)
CAT-064**

Interview by:

**Emma Reid Echols
October 3, 1972**



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CAT 064 John Marvin George
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31 minutes | 18 pages

Abstract: John Marvin George provides the genealogy of his family and describes his life in Rock Hill, including father's work at the sawmill and his time at Cherokee Indian School. He talks about his unsuccessful attempts to join the marines, his work at the mill, and his first marriage to Evelyn Brown. He moves on to talk about his children, his later career as a carpenter, and his experience when the land was divided. He talks about his second wife and describes various sports he participated in throughout his life. George provides details about the reservation's mail carrier, doctor, and schoolteachers, and he closes with a discussion of the 1916 flood.

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

SAMUEL PROCTOR
ORAL HISTORY
PROGRAM
University of Florida

CAT 064

Interviewee: John Marvin George

Interviewer: Emma Reid Echols

Date of Interview: October 3, 1972

E: This is Emma Reid Echols, Route 6, Box 260, Rock Hill, South Carolina. I'm working on the oral history of the Catawba Indians. This is October 3, 1972. I'm visiting the home of Mr. George. Mr. George, tell us your full name.

G: John Marvin George.

E: And what's your address?

G: Rock Hill, Route 6, Box 430. Zip code is 29730.

E: Now, who was your father and your mother?

G: Well, J.P. George was my father, and Hester Catherine George was my mother.

E: Hester Catherine was your mother. Who was your mother before she married?

G: Who was her mother? Nancy Elizabeth Harris.

E: Nancy Elizabeth Harris?

G: Yeah.

E: And her father?

G: Her father, I think, was Westminster. I just can't recall.

E: That's all right. Do you know your grandparents on your father's side?

G: Well, Nelson George and—The biggest history of this is recorded over here on this here monument at Fort Mill. Their names are over there on that monument in Fort Mill.

E: Sure. And then you've got the chronological history on that sheet you showed me, I believe, yesterday, haven't you?

G: Yes, ma'am.

E: Do you have it with you?

G: It's a genealogy.

E: That's right.

[Break in recording]

E: Mr. George, now, let's pick up with—you got your line, your genealogy line there. Let's pick up. Your father and your mother were—?

G: J.P. George and Hester Harris.

E: Who was your grandparents on your mother's side?

G: Well, my grandfather from my mother's side was Thomas Harris and Nancy Elizabeth Gordon Harris.

E: And your grandparents on your father's side were?

G: Well, it comes down. William George was my great-grandfather, and now it's down to Nelson George and Sarah Harris.

E: That's right. Well, thank you. That sort of helps straighten us out. There's so many in the family, it's hard to keep 'em all straight. Now, when you were brought up, how many brothers and sister did you have?

G: I had two brothers and two sisters and one half-sister.

E: Are they all living?

G: No, ma'am. All except Dick. One brother living, and one half-sister.

E: Where is your brother living?

G: My brother stays in Chicago.

E: What about your half-sister?

G: That's a good question, I don't know. She's here in Rock Hill here somewhere.

E: When you were brought up as a young boy living with your parents, what was life like then, living in an Indian home?

G: Well, life was normal, just like anyone else.

E: What did your father do for a living?

G: He worked at the sawmill for Guy Pursley. He worked, I think, about twenty-five cents a day. You could really understand what life was about making twenty-five cents a day because things were a whole lot different than they are now.

Because you could take the amount of money that you worked for twenty-five cents a day and buy what you could with forty or fifty dollars now.

E: He worked for Guy Pursley as a carpenter?

G: No, he just worked at the sawmill.

E: Worked in the sawmill? I bet he learned a good deal of carpentry work along with that, did he?

G: No, they only done sawmill work, you know, sawin' lumber out and stuff like that for buildin' houses, or maybe crossties, or whatever they needed.

E: Where was that sawmill located?

G: It was located over there in Lancaster County for a short period of time, and then they moved to Ridgeway and I think down to Camden.

E: Wherever they could find the timber.

G: Wherever they could buy the timber and saw it.

E: Now, how did you learn the carpentry trade? You've been a carpenter.

G: That's after I went to school. I went to school, I think it was 1918, in the fall of 1918. I went to Cherokee Indian School, which is the C.I.S. school. That's the

abbreviation for Cherokee Indian School. They started us off up there learning our ABCs. That's something they don't do now. As I progressed in my grades and got a little older, you had to pick a trade. So, carpenter was one trade back then, and I went forty weeks in carpenter work. It's studying it and actually doing the work—and plumbing forty weeks and actually doing the work out there and electrical work. The same amount as it was. But in the meantime, you come about an education like that, you really appreciate it because a person that has to get out there and work for an education really can be proud of it. Because people nowadays and time, you know, they get up in the morning and go to school, ask their parents for the money. Money was scarce then. I worked for fifty cents a week—fifteen cents a day. Fifteen dollars a month during the summer, and that was mine to run me through nine months of school. Forty-five dollars in the summer took care of what little of the needs I had to have during the winter months.

E: That's amazing.

G: And things like that. You know, I worked at the dairy up there in the wintertime, I worked the dairy. Up at three o'clock, snow knee deep, and goin' to milk cows at three o'clock in the morning. Had to be at breakfast by six-thirty. And I had already gone to work, and I was ready to go to school by seven-thirty, eight o'clock. So I think back then, school done you more good than—teachers done you more good than they really do now.

E: You really wanted an education, didn't you?

G: I really did. Because I got an education, but I got it the hard way.

E: How long were you at Cherokee during this time?

G: Well, I stayed over there from 1918, I guess, up 'til about 1926.

E: And then you went to get married, and who did you marry?

G: Well, I didn't marry right then. Because I left from school, I went to work. Went to Florida. Went to work on a island, Mandalay Island down there. They call it "Isle of a Thousand Palms," for L.B. Skinner. He owned a couple large orange groves down there. So I come back, got married and come back home. I stayed with my grandmother and my uncle when I came back home.

E: Which grandmother was that?

G: Nancy Harris.

E: Nancy Harris.

G: Mhm, and Walter Harris.

E: And Walter Harris, yes.

G: They lived up there at the Highland Park mill back in 1926. I came back here—I left from Florida with just little old thin clothes on, you know. Came back here, everything was covered with ice. That was the big difference in the climate. I'm telling you it made a big difference. I like to froze to death before I got to the house. But I went to work, got me a job and went to work. And stayed with my grandmother and uncle there for a long time. I wanted to join the Marines. Went up and passed, up there, the physical, but I just couldn't find my father, where he was located at, to sign the papers. My brother, **Wheely**, joined the Marines. He forged the old man's name on the papers, and he went on. I didn't. I stayed at my grandmother's and worked in the mill, at the Highland Park Industrial, until she

died in 1927, I think it was. And I continued to work, stayed with my Aunt Lucy, Landrum George's mother. My brother and I worked at Evans'—he's dead. We both worked there in the mill at the industrial with my uncle until I got married, I think it was in 1930, which was the biggest mistake in my life, I think. [Laughter]

E: Now, who did you marry?

G: Evelyn Brown.

E: Evelyn Brown was Edith Brown and Early Brown's daughter.

G: Edith Brown's daughter and Early Brown. And she had three brothers, I think: Richard Brown, Edward Brown, and Pete Brown—William, they call him—and one sister called Lily. So, we raised our children.

E: How many children did you have by this marriage?

G: We had five boys and three girls. And one boy and one girl died. That makes six boys and four girls.

E: Are most of those living now?

G: Five boys and three girls are.

E: Would you name the boys and girls off?

G: Well, it's Howard George—

E: He's in Rock Hill.

G: —in Rock Hill, and Charles is in Norfolk, Virginia. John's in Rock Hill. Wayne is in Rock Hill. Susan's in Rock Hill. Lee, he's in Rock Hill, and JoAnne, she's in Williston, Texas. JoAnne Bowers—she married a Bowers, Lawrence Bowers from Georgetown.

E: So then most of you are still around this area. How many grandchildren do you have now?

G: Oh, boy.

E: You can't count those.

G: I think it's twenty-five.

E: Twenty-five grandchildren.

G: I'd have to start counting 'em. I don't know.

E: You've got a big family, I know.

G: Yes. Oh, yeah, I have one more son, Philip.

E: Where's Philip?

G: He's in Key West, Florida.

E: Oh, yes.

G: He's in the Navy.

E: Now, when you were married, you were doing this carpentry work, is that right?

G: No, ma'am, I was working in a cotton mill in textile work. I didn't start carpenter work back until about [19]48, I think, somewhere along in there, [19]49.

E: Where did you and your wife live and raise that big family?

G: Well, I lived part-time down here on the reservation and biggest portion of time in Rock Hill. I couldn't say just how many years down here or however many years in Rock Hill.

E: You were closer to the mill from here to Rock Hill?

G: That's right. But I remember I had lived down here at the reservation, I could catch a ride to town on the second shift, but I had to walk back at night. I mean, I

walked from Rock Hill at the Highland Park a million nights back. After getting off at eleven o'clock, I'd walk back down here, then go back to work the next day.

E: That was a hard schedule. Your children were educated where?

G: Here in Rock Hill.

E: In Rock Hill?

G: They went to Northside and Richmond Drive. Charlie, I think, and JoAnne and Lee and John and Susan, I know, went to high school when it was there, and I think Wayne did, too.

E: When the land was divided up, did you get your share of the land, or did you take yours in money?

G: I took mine in land.

E: Where's your land located?

G: Well, I don't have any now, 'cause I sold it 'bout a year ago. I held out on it long as I could, then I just sold it.

E: You're renting the house you live in now?

G: Yes, ma'am.

E: You became a carpenter. You could still get some part-time jobs doing that now, couldn't you, if you wanted to?

G: Oh, I can get all the part-time work that I want right now if I want it. But see, being retired, I've made my quota, and I can't go back to work 'til after the first of the year. I only have sixteen-hundred and eighty dollars I can make count. I wish it was where they could make all they wanted to, and then you could make a living.

- E: Yes. When you're retired from the mill, you don't get any retirement pension or anything from the mill, do you?
- G: Oh yeah, you get a retirement pension. I mean, I guess you do. They may have a retirement fund now, I don't know. But I retired from carpenter work on the social security.
- E: Now, I noticed you've got a good garden. That helps out.
- G: It takes lots of hard work for that. [Laughter]
- E: Yeah, it does. Now, you married a second time. Tell me your second wife's name.
- G: Betty.
- E: Betty. And her last name?
- G: Betty May Phipps.
- E: Betty May Phipps. And when did you marry Betty?
- G: July 24.
- E: 1970. And you do not have any children by this marriage?
- G: Too late in life to start that kind of foolishness. [Laughter]
- E: You've already raised a very big family. Do you remember what the older people used to do down here for a living? I know times were hard. You said you were earning twenty-five cents a day. Was there any trapping and fishing or things of that kind done by the older ones? Do you remember that?
- G: No, what the older people used to do—I mean, there was plenty of wood around here. There's a bunch of 'em that had a mule and wagon, and they would cut wood, and haul it to Rock Hill and sell it.

E: What would a cord of wood sell for?

G: They didn't sell it by the cord. They just sold it with a wagonload, maybe three or four dollars, maybe something like that. I don't know just exactly what it brought in, but that's been a long time ago. Maybe they'd get a dollar or a dollar and a half for it, I don't know.

E: And the women would supplement that by making pottery and selling pottery?

G: Well, it was very hard. The pottery industry then wasn't known too well here. But they did, you know, make pottery. And maybe they'd take maybe two to three or four dozen pieces and go out here and travel and walk and work through the country and swap it for eggs and chickens and meat and stuff like that. Maybe potatoes and stuff, mostly something—commodities, something they could use right then.

E: Now, your son went with a group that went up to Ohio to demonstrate pottery and to live up there several summers. I believe Early Brown went and, oh, some of the others. Did you ever go with that group?

G: I went up there with 'em. I played ball when I was up there and worked for the Ohio Archeological Historical Society.

E: What was the nature of your work with them?

G: Well, see, I had to take care of parks up there. Cuttin' grass, done repair work on the fences, and stuff like that.

E: They paid you to do that and also provided your housing and your food?

G: No, we had to buy our own food. No one furnished it.

E: Oh, you had to buy your food?

G: Yes, ma'am. Nobody furnished anything for us up there except for a little place to stay, and that was already in the provisions, I mean, taken care of when we went up there.

E: Mr. George, what are some of the things you did as a young boy—here on the reservation or up on Cherokee, either one?

G: Well, you take a person like myself, been active all my life up 'til I got too old to be an athlete. I used to play a lot of ball, baseball. I never did play no softball, nothing like that. It's always been baseball, regular baseball. I used to pitch. You can ask mostly any of these people around here that knows me, you know, something like Gene Crosby or William Simpson Jr., or any of the people around here. You know, they go to church over there at that Presbyterian church. And when I was going to school, I played baseball up there and played basketball, played football up there, tennis. I even played Cherokee stickball.

E: Cherokee stickball. Now, what was it like?

G: You really don't know? Well, they have a stick 'bout that long with a little head on it about that big, and it's kind of scooped just like that. Made to pass over a ball. The ball was about that big. You can't pick it up with your hands, but you have to scoop it up with that stick. And you had to wear a pair of trunks, just like a pair of swimming trunks. And you get out there and play that, and it's man for man. It's no boys for boys, it's man for man. You had to be a man to play it.

E: Now, have you ever seen it played anywhere else except up in Cherokee?

G: Never have. I haven't seen it. I'd love to see it. I'd love to see it started down here.

E: Mr. Ernest Patton started a team of baseball boys. Did you ever play with that group, or was that a little bit later?

G: I played baseball with Ernest Patton. Ernest Patton's a fine fella.

E: Yes, and he was mail carrier over in your reservation.

G: He carried mail here for many, many years. Ernest Patton carried mail through the reservation in a horse and buggy. And lots of times, he'd stop at the houses. They would invite him in when he come by. Somebody's cooking dinner, had dinner on the table, and he happened up about that time with the mail, they'd pull him in the house and give him his dinner. He'd eat dinner, and he'd be on his way.

E: Well, that's interesting.

G: Because I don't think those people over there are like the people other people think they are. They're a bunch of fine people. They'd give the shirt off their back to you, I believe, because I know this. Ernest Patton carried mail through there, and they'd feed him. They'd give him something to eat. Dr. Hill, an old country doctor, lived down here at Catawba Junction there. He spent a many a night up here at the reservation in some of these homes. They'd make him a bed there, and he'd get in the bed and sleep. They'd give him his supper and breakfast. He'd be called up there late like, you know, coming out late at night, and he'd just spend the night there.

E: Did he bring any of your children into the world?

G: No, ma'am.

E: Well, he can certainly be proud—

G: He was a doctor up here, mostly amongst the Indians up here, and down around in there, too.

E: If someone were to become ill, how would you send a message to Dr. Hill?

G: Somebody'd just get on a horse and go down there and get him. Or they'd pass the word that so-and-so was sick up here and tell him who it was.

E: Now, how did he travel, in a horse and buggy?

G: Well, horse and buggy or just ride horseback.

E: What did Dr. Hill look like?

G: Well, he was kind of an old guy from the first time I ever met him. Wore glasses, but he was a good doctor to be a country doctor.

E: He was paid by the government; you all did not pay him.

G: No, he wasn't paid by the government.

E: I mean, by the state of South Carolina.

G: I don't know whether he was or not, but I think he might've been. But I couldn't say he was or not. Now, some of the rest of 'em might know.

E: I think that there was a certain amount of money set aside, and the Indian agent was in charge of distributing that fund, and the Indian agent was responsible for paying the doctor.

G: I know that they were then. They were still responsible for all debts made by a physician then. If you went to a doctor then, well, it's not like that anymore.

E: That's right. I believe you're a member of the Mormon church, are you not?

G: I am, I'm a member of the Mormon church down here. Quite well.

E: What school teachers do you remember on the reservation? You didn't go to school here on the reservation, but you sent your children here on the reservation, I suppose.

G: Well, the schoolteachers were missionaries, folks that got sent here on a mission. Elder Hayes, for one. He was a teacher here for about three or four years. And there was a lady from Columbia. She was sent here on a mission and taught school a year, but I can't think of her name right now. And then J.C. Davis and his wife was here teaching school.

E: You remember the Dunlaps?

G: I don't remember a Dunlap from teaching here. Because evidently that was done while I was away at school.

E: What do you remember about the oldest building on the reservation? Do you remember the old, old church? It was kind of a combination church and schoolhouse, with a bell in the steeple.

G: Well, there was one over there. A schoolhouse had a bell in the steeple, but the old church was down at the foot of the hill. As far as I know, I mean, old frame building down there.

E: I believe it was later moved across the road, and some of the Blue family lived in that building. The Mormon church was built.

G: Yeah, well, it was moved over, and I think they—Landrum—no, Guy Blue and them moved in there, and then Landrum and his wife after they built a new chapel up here. Because you speakin' of the Mormons, the churches, I well can remember that old church down there at the reservation when I was a small kid.

We got up on Sunday morning, we trotted four miles to that church through the woods over here at Catawba Road, wagon roads going back in there to 'em. And that was every Sunday morning. And we stayed all day over there, come back at night by lantern light.

E: You'd take something to eat?

G: Well, no, there was people that would invite us to dinner. People were, you know, they were more or less friendly then. They would just ask you, "Come over to eat dinner with us or eat supper with us, spend a day with us," or something like that.

E: Then you'd come home by lantern light at night?

G: Come by lantern light at night. And that seemed like the longest four miles I ever walked in my life. [Laughter]

E: What kind of music did you have? Did you have an organ in the church?

G: They had an old organ, and they kept that in use for a good many years until they got a piano.

E: Did you ever hear your parents or your grandparents tell any of the old stories about the Indians—where you came from or the history of the Indians?

G: Well, as a matter of fact, my grandfather, and there was—he didn't say that much, but I guess it really doesn't matter because I think we have a history of the Indians 'bout as near direct as anybody can give us. And they came from Jerusalem and around through there, they came across the Pacific Ocean. That's something nobody knows. They came over here before Columbus did. They landed in South America and Central America and ended up over there. There was three parties that came over here. Four, at least. But yet, there was enough

of 'em left to survive a battle that was going on to inhabit the rest of the earth up here, pardon me, North America.

E: Now, didn't your parents talk about any of the fairies or the little men? To me, they would do that at night, my father would frighten me.

G: Well, no, they never did. I mean, there's very little I can remember about them because I used to stay at my grandfather and grandmother all the time. You see, my father and mother, they worked for Edmund Edwards over here. We came across that old Taylor Bridge up here, what used to be up here. I remember that very distinctly, comin' across that bridge before the big water, the big flood hit.

E: That was 1918, somewhere along in there? You mean the big flood?

G: 1916 or [19]17.

E: That's right. I was thinking it was 1916.

G: In August.

E: That's right.

G: That's when it washed the bridge away up there, that Taylor Bridge. My grandmother and grandfather lived right there where Roy Brown lives now. I know that old house for many, many years.

E: What did you Indians do when the bridge was swept away and people tried to get across from one side to the other?

G: Well, it swept the bridges away. They built boats after the bridges was swept away. They built boats to carry people back and forth across the river. Large enough, you know—

E: To take care of their baggage and so forth?

G: They take them across and then take their baggage in a boat separate, 'cause they couldn't be responsible for the baggage because of the high water.

E: That's right. When you transferred them, is that the site of the present Catawba River Bridge on the Charlotte Highway?

G: No, this was right up here.

E: Right up here.

G: And down here at the southern **trussell**.

E: Then there's two bridges, one that Early Brown operated, that ferry?

G: Yeah, that's the ferry down here where southern trussell.

E: And then the Cureton Ferry on lower down?

G: That's the **Hilton** Ferry down there right above the southern trussell.

E: Right above.

[End of interview]

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