

Thelma Canty Hendrix

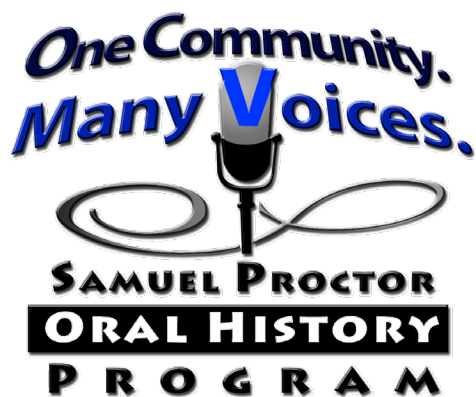
Southeastern Indian Oral History Project (SIOHP)

CAT-110

Interview by:

Edith Frances Canty Wade

January 13, 1975



University of Florida • Samuel Proctor Oral History Program • Paul Ortiz, Director
P.O. Box 115215, 241 Pugh Hall, University of Florida, Gainesville, FL 32611-5215
(352) 392-7168 www.clas.ufl.edu/history/oral

Samuel Proctor Oral History Program
College of Liberal Arts and Sciences
Program Director: Dr. Paul Ortiz

241 Pugh Hall
PO Box 115215
Gainesville, FL 32611
(352) 392-7168
<https://oral.history.ufl.edu>

CAT 110 Thelma Canty Hendrix
Southeastern Indian Oral History Project (SIOHP)
Interviewed by Edith Frances Canty Wade on January 13, 1975
21 minutes | 15 pages

Abstract: Thelma Hendrix is one of seven girls and one boy born to Fanny Harris George and Alonzo Canty. Speaking with her sister Frances Wade, Hendrix reflects on memories of life with her family when she was young and what school was like on the reservation. She describes the circumstances for her dropping out of school, but explains how new Indian initiatives have encouraged her decision to finish her high school education and to receive training as a nurse. She and Wade also discuss the importance of these assistance programs to the community and how they directly benefit those living on the reservation.

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

SAMUEL PROCTOR
ORAL HISTORY
PROGRAM
University of Florida

CAT 110

Interviewee: Thelma Canty Hendrix

Interviewer: Edith Frances Canty Wade

Date of Interview: January 13, 1975

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

Today is January 13, 1975. I'm gathering oral histories of the Catawba Indians for the University of Florida. Today I am talking with Thelma Hendrix. Thelma, what is your full name?

H: Thelma Canty Hendrix.

W: What is your address?

H: Route 7, Box 32. I live with my aunt, Isabel George.

W: Thelma, when is your birthday?

H: January 25, [19]32.

W: And, so how old are you?

H: Forty-two, ma'am.

W: I would like to describe Thelma. She has coal black hair with speckles of gray in it. She has dark brown eyes, and she looks just like an Indian, and she's slim, she has a good figure. I would say also that she is one of my many sisters.

Thelma, who are your parents?

H: Fanny Harris George and Alonzo Canty.

W: Are they Indians?

H: Yes.

W: Are they alive?

H: My mother's dead, my father's alive.

W: What brothers and sisters do you have, Thelma?

H: I have—there's seven girls in the family and one boy.

W: Would you tell me who they are and their birth dates if you can think of them?

H: Well, I can just tell you their names, not their birthdays.

W: All right.

H: There is Helen Beck, Frances Wade, Alberta Farrell, Hayward Kenny, and **Geneva**, I do not know her last name.

W: I do not know her last name either.

H: Well, Geneva, and Joyce and Diane.

W: All right now we—I can't think of Geneva's last name, but Joyce's last name is Green, and Diane's last name is—what?

H: **Helowell.**

W: Helowell. Do all of your sisters live in and around this area?

H: Three live out west. Joyce Green and Geneva and Diane.

W: Thelma, are you married?

H: No, I'm divorced.

W: You have children though, don't you?

H: Yes.

W: Did you marry an Indian?

H: No.

W: What are your children's names and their birthdates?

H: There's Anthony Canty, he's born June 8, [19]56, and Lisa Canty was born June 2, [19]58. Lisa Hendrix was born May 18, [19]62 and Robert Hendrix Jr. was born May 19, [19]64.

W: Thelma, what do you remember about the old reservation? You were born on the old reservation. Do you—can you remember anything about the old reservation?

H: No, but I remember when I used to live with you, Frances Wade, we would lay in bed to see the stars through the roof.

W: Alright, what else can you remember about—?

H: I remember when we lived there, there used to be some men who would come in from town and they would throw money out for us to scramble for, and that money would go to buy candy or whatever we wanted.

W: Now that was when we were all young and at home. These men that did that, they rented the bottoms, and they would stop by the house and do that, wouldn't they? I'm glad you brought that up, it just made me—I had forgotten all about it. What kind of a house, Thelma, did you live in when you were growing up?

H: A frame house.

W: How many rooms did it have?

H: What, this house?

W: No, the one that you were born in on the reservation.

H: It had, as far as I could remember, it had three rooms.

W: It had three rooms, and so that meant there were seven girls and one boy and our mother.

H: Well, I had to sleep with three girls. I always had to sleep in the middle, and they would draw up. and I would holler for Mama to make them straighten out where I could sleep warm.

W: All right. Thelma, you went to school part of the time on the reservation. What kind of—can you remember what the school was like down there?

H: Yes, it had three classrooms, and I went to school in the biggest part. It had a kitchen too, yeah, and Brother Hays was my teacher, and it had one of those big bells that he would ring to get the children to school every morning and to dismiss them by. And that's about all—

W: Do you remember how the school was heated?

H: With a wood heater.

W: Did you use coal or wood?

H: Wood, as far as I can remember.

W: And who got the wood?

H: Who did?

W: Uh-huh.

H: Who—Uncle Sam.

W: Uncle Sam got the wood sometimes. Now when we say Uncle Sam, we talking about the former Chief Samuel T. Blue. But who brought it into the schoolhouse?

H: The children.

W: The children did. Who went and got the water?

H: The children.

W: And where did they get it?

H: We got it from the well.

W: And who wanted to go and get that?

H: Just about everybody in order to get out of the classroom.

W: And who was your teacher, Thelma?

H: Brother Hays.

W: That's Willard M. Hays?

H: Yes.

W: Did you have lunch—

H: Yes.

W: —at that school?

H: A lot of times Mama would pack us a lunch to take.

W: Did you have to pay for lunch at school?

H: No—I don't think?

W: I don't believe you did—I don't think that you did either. I wonder why Mama packed lunch, rather than letting you eat at school?

H: She used to think we didn't get enough to eat.

W: Well, that's a good reason for packing it. Thelma, what did you like most about school?

H: I liked sports mostly in school, and science. That was about all I was interested in.

W: How did you get to school when you lived on the reservation?

H: We walked.

W: And how many years did you go, down on the reservation?

H: Three years.

W: And then where did you go?

H: To Northside.

W: Why did you go to Northside? Northside is in Rock Hill?

H: Well, we moved to another part of the town. On the new reservation, would that be?

W: Yes, about three miles from Rock Hill. And do you remember who your teachers were then?

H: At Northside?

W: Mmhm.

H: I remember some of them. I know the principal's name was Mr. Riser and my— one of the teacher's name was Ms. Lesslie, and another—let's see. I don't remember all of them, it's been so long.

W: Well, you're talking about Mr. Riser, I saw in the paper, Saturday's paper, where he died.

H: Yes.

W: And you said, of all the subjects you liked science best. What sports Thelma, do you like?

H: Basketball and football, and softball.

W: Well, I would just like to say here, that I know that Thelma is a good softball player. I've never seen her play basketball and I am sure she is good at that. She'd be a rough tackler if she played football.

H: Well, I took basketball at high school, and I was on the varsity team, but Mother wouldn't let me go because I didn't have no way to ride back at night, and I couldn't take it anymore.

W: Did you—could you ride the bus?

H: No, we had to walk about three miles. I'd say about three miles and a half from here to the nearest school, which was Northside.

W: At that time, Indians were not allowed to ride the school bus, was they?

H: No.

W: Thelma, there was another thing that I was wanting to ask you about school. Did you finish school? Did you finish high school?

H: No, I went as far as the eleventh grade.

W: That's as far as it went at that time?

H: No, twelfth.

W: They had the twelfth at that time?

H: Mmhm.

W: Why did you quit, Thelma?

H: Well, I started working. I couldn't work and go to school, so my mother let me quit.

W: Do you think that your Mama wanted you to quit work—quit school and go to work, or did you want to do it and she just let you?

H: I wanted to do it and she let me.

W: Do you think that she thought education was important?

H: Yes. Mmhm, I did.

W: All right. What about you? Do you think education is important enough for your children to go on? Do you want your children to go to school?

H: Yes, I'd like for them all to finish. In fact, my oldest one will finish up this coming Wednesday. He'll be out of high school.

W: Do you think that he will go on and get more training of any kind?

H: I hope he will.

W: Thelma, you were not one of the people who set out pines on the reservation, was you?

H: No.

W: Can you remember Thelma when we used to draw money? Everybody talked about drawing money, and when I say this, the state paid every Indian a certain amount of money once a year. Can you remember that?

H: I don't remember about the money part, but I know that we used to get what Mama called commodities and that was food for us.

W: Well, that was like the W.P.A., somehow connected that was. But there was a time when all Indians drew a certain amount of money from the state of South Carolina. Thelma, you—all the time when you were growing up, you were taken to the doctor when you were sick. What doctor did you get taken to?

H: Dr. **Blattman**.

W: Did you have to pay?

H: No, the government paid for that.

W: Does the government still pay for your schooling or for your doctor?

H: No.

W: How long has it been since you have not had a free doctor?

H: Let's see ... It was when Lisa was born, in [19]58.

W: It was somewhere in there. Thelma, we ceased to have free doctors when the reservation was terminated, do you think that was a good idea?

H: No.

W: Why don't you think that was not a good idea?

H: Because a lot of these people can't afford to pay the doctors now. They couldn't back then, except we got overruled on that when we had the meeting that night. The ones that were making good pay said they could afford it, but the rest of us couldn't.

W: And so actually, there were less than twenty-some people that decided what would happen to the reservation out of a—the Tribe of six hundred. Over six hundred people, twenty-some people decided our fate, didn't they?

H: Yes.

W: Thelma, what can you remember about Christmas?

H: I remember I used to get a—what you call, a hand-me-down doll.

W: What is a hand-me-down doll?

H: Not a new doll, it's a used doll, baby doll. Been fixed up with new clothes made for it. That was about all, and a little bit of candy and maybe fruit.

W: All right, do you remember getting any fruit from the church? Ah well it wasn't from the church it just was, sorted out in the church building.

H: Yes.

W: That was given from money appropriated by the state, too. Thelma, are you a member of any church?

H: The Mormon.

W: The Mormon church's proper name is the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. Of course, we all call it Mormon, and we know when anyone mentions the

name Mormon, we know that this is just a shorter name for it. Did you attend church when you were small Thelma?

H: Yes.

W: When did you become a member of it? Not the year but how old were you when you became a member?

H: I don't know.

W: You must have been eight, because we all—Mama had us all baptized when we were eight.

H: I remember being baptized in a little branch behind where my Aunt Edith used to live.

W: That's down below where I live now.

H: Yes.

W: Thelma, do you know who baptized you?

H: **Ezel Thezel.**

W: He was a missionary?

H: Yes.

W: Where did you attend church?

H: On the old reservation.

W: And where do you attend church now?

H: Whenever I go, it's on the new part.

W: Thelma when you were young, you attended church real regular, didn't you?

H: Yes.

W: Do you have any reason for not attending regular now?

H: No.

W: Quite often, I think that we just get out of the habit, and it happens to each and every one of us. If we get out of the habit of doing things, well, it just is easier to stay away than it is to go. You know, Thelma, we have got a new Tribal committee. We have a Chief, two councilmen and a secretary—well we have an assistant Chief also. Do you think this is a good idea?

H: Yes.

W: Why, Thelma, do you think it is a good idea?

H: Well, right now they do more for the Tribe, they can do more for the Tribe than like we were just not having nothing at all and not getting an advance in our school learning and training—job training.

W: Well, do you know some of the things that they are already doing for the people?

H: As far as I know, there are some people already take the job training and they are trying to get others to take their training so they can advance in their skills, whatever they have to do.

W: And we have other grants coming up that will benefit Indians as far as pottery and arts and crafts. We have—we're in the process of working out the problems where the young people can go to college. In fact, we have a young man that started to Winthrop tonight. This will be his first night at Winthrop and he's going under this Indian program. **Roddy Brown**. Thelma, are you proud to be an Indian?

H: Yes.

W: Why are you proud to be an Indian?

H: Hmm. I just am. I have heard a lot of the White people say that they sure would like to be an Indian and I do not understand why they'd like to be it. I just am proud to be an Indian.

W: You are not ashamed to let anybody know that you are an Indian?

H: No.

W: I found that this is true with everybody. They're real proud of their heritage. Do you think this pottery making business should be continued?

H: Yes.

W: Do you know how to make pottery Thelma?

H: No, but I—my mother taught me how to rub and beat the clay and mix it up, but I never did have the will to make it.

W: Well, neither did we have the time, did we? We were so busy doing all those other things pertaining to the pottery, that we didn't have time to make them. Thelma, what kind of jobs did you have to perform when you were little?

H: Well, we had to milk the cows and get feed out for them and take—carry up our water every day. We did the washing on a rub board and had to cut and carry wood. Because we was the oldest girls and one boy was in the service, we had to do a lot that he had done while he was at home.

W: Thelma, now I know that you're real sports-minded and you probably have done lots of things that even Mama did not know about. What are some of the things that you liked to do?

H: Well, I liked to ride horses. My Uncle Richard used to come up the house about every Sunday and he would trade horses every so often. So, this was a new one

he brought up on a Sunday and he told my mother, he said, "Don't let the children go out there and bother the horse, because it is new. I do not know how it will be." But I, being stupid, went on out, slipped out and got the horse and rode it over the road, brought it back and tied it back up. My mother said, "Well, where have you been? I said, "I rode the horse." And she—she didn't give me a whipping, she gave me a good talking to but it tickled Uncle Richard, because I rode his horse.

W: Thelma, do you work anywhere?

H: No. I worked at a mill here in town, but it closed down.

W: Do you think when you worked, you got a good wage for the work you did?

H: Yes.

W: Now I know that you are one of the people who will soon take advantage of this program that the Indians have started. What are you going to take?

H: Well, I'm going to finish up my high school education and then take nurses training.

W: To be a practical nurse?

H: To be a practical nurse, yes.

W: Where are you going to take this training?

H: At York Tech.

W: And under the Indian program will you get paid to go?

H: Yes.

W: How much money will you get paid an hour to go?

H: Two dollars an hour.

W: And so, this Indian program will certainly benefit you?

H: Yes.

W: You have a daughter also that is getting ready to go under the same program?

H: Yes.

W: Is she going to take the same nurses training that you're planning to take?

H: Yes.

[Break in recording]

W: Thelma, you just started telling me something that I had completely forgotten about us taking baths when we were young. Would you tell us now?

H: **What?**

W: I had just mentioned the fact to you that you mentioned about us taking baths, would you tell it so it can be on tape?

H: Well, in the summertime we would have to go take our bath in the branch which was up behind the house and our mother would go with us. We would take our washcloth and our soap and towel, put on a pair of cut-off shorts and take our bath. The girls would be down in one part of the branch and the boys up at the other part. Most of the time when we'd go, there'd be a bunch of children go with us and we'd have to divide off, and Mama would be sitting about middle ways, keeping her eye on everybody. In the wintertime, we would just have to warm our water in the house and take a bath in a big tub.

W: And everybody else would have to get out of the living room and stay outdoors until the other person got through taking a bath, wouldn't they?

H: Yes.

W: It's really good to talk to—whether it's your sister or other people who remember things that you might have forgotten. Thelma, I am sure, is proud to be an Indian and I know that she takes part in what goes on around. Thelma, do you get along well with Black people as well as White?

H: Yes, I do because I used to be a supervisor at **Austro**, and I had colored women work under me as well as White so I got along with them real fine.

[End of interview]

Transcribed by: Callum Karoleski, November 2, 2021

Audit-edited by: Rayyan Merchant, March 17, 2022

Final edited by: Evangeline Giaconia, July 26, 2022