

Thomas John Blumer Collection on the Catawba Nation, 1756 - Present

Scope and Content Notes

The collection consists of approximately 106 linear feet of materials documenting Dr. Blumer's studies. In date, this collection covers materials from approximately 1756 to current date, although there are references to events that happened much earlier. The collection is divided into eight major series: Thomas J. Blumer Correspondence, Thomas J. Blumer Personal Journals, Thomas J. Blumer Oral History Interviews, Thomas J. Blumer Writings and Publications, Catawba Indians Diaries and Journals, Catawba Indians Legal and Administrative, Catawba Indians Slides and Photographs and the Reference collection. Correspondence, widely ranging documents, photographs, slides, tapes, clippings, monographs, journals, and ephemera comprise this large collection assembled by Dr. Blumer over the last thirty-five years.

It should be noted that this is a preliminary finding aid. Dr. Blumer continues to add materials to the collection, and this document is the result of the initial processing. Much remains to be done.

Series I, Thomas J. Blumer Correspondence, 1969 –

Dr. Blumer's correspondence is prolific and wide-ranging. For the sake of clarity it has been divided into three major subsets, General, Catawba and Blumer Family. The general and Blumer family series are arranged chronologically. The Catawba Indian correspondence is somewhat problematical however and a different approach has been used.

It should be noted that Dr. Blumer has maintained a long and wide-ranging correspondence with members of the Catawba tribe. These letters represent a virtual cross section of Catawba Society and provide valuable insights to Native American life, culture and politics. Realizing the future value of his Catawba correspondence, Dr. Blumer made copies of almost every letter he sent, so the correspondence is two-way, a bit of an oddity in the archival profession.

Tom also made detailed notes of his telephone conversations and the resultant “verbal correspondence” is included. Of particular note are Tom’s letters to Georgia Harris, perhaps the greatest Master potter of the modern era, spanning thirty years and numbering over a thousand. All of the Catawba correspondence has been arranged alphabetically by correspondent, and then chronologically.

Series II, Thomas J. Blumer Personal Journals, 1995-2006

For a period of approximately ten years Dr. Blumer has kept personal journals. These consist of clippings, correspondence, e-mails and notes on telephone conversations. Basically political in nature, their contents will be sealed and unavailable until 2024. Arrangement is chronological.

Dr. Blumer’s travel journals are another matter. Filled with photographs and ephemera they document his travels to Mexico and other locations around the globe. These materials have yet to be processed.

Series III, Thomas J. Blumer Oral History Interviews, 1971-2004

Dr. Blumer has made extensive attempts to document Catawba life, history and culture through the use of oral history audiotapes. These tapes also cover the Pamunkey Tribe of Virginia, an earlier research interest. Over 150 Catawba audiotapes exist along with 20 of the Pamunkey. Many of these remembrances go back to the early years of the twentieth century and provide links to the Catawba of past eras.

Transcriptions exist for many of these tapes, although most are in an annotated, unpunctuated form. Many are handwritten and on twenty-year-old photocopies that are deteriorating. These documents are currently being typed and reformatted.

A separate audio inventory has been created for the oral history tapes, most of which are cassettes. Cassettes are a somewhat unstable medium, and these were originally recorded on primitive equipment. Serious preservation concerns exist for this segment of the collection. The audio inventory has been compared with the container list and tapes for which no transcription exists will be restored first.

Series IV, Thomas J. Blumer, Writings and Publications, 1977-2006

This series includes drafts, final copies, journal articles, lectures, newspaper columns, and radio addresses (printed and oral recordings) along with manuscript copies of published works. Never published and undated writings are also included. At first glance, apparent duplications exist within the container list. Dr. Blumer has often modified an earlier presentation or article for a different media format. While the overall topic may be the same, subtle informational differences usually exist within the writings themselves. All works arranged alphabetically by title.

Series V, Catawba Indians Diaries and Journals, 1950-2001

Journals from Garfield Harris, and Nola Harris Campbell comprise this series.

Garfield Harris was a respected Mormon Elder and Catawba leader during the Termination period. His journals begin in 1950 and span forty-five years. They are a chronicle of daily life on the reservation and are filled with accounts of the weather and events that Garfield found interesting. Many journals resemble scrapbooks, and include clippings and other ephemeral items. Personal reminiscences include accounts of reservation life between the World Wars and Garfield's military experiences. Of special interest is his mention of the Navajo Wind Talkers who were training across the valley from his unit. Garfield was a devoted husband, and Olga the great love of his life. The two fell in love but separated due to the South Carolina ban on interracial marriage. Fifteen years later, after Garfield's return from military service, they were married. A long and happy marriage ended with Olga's predeceasing Garfield. From this point, almost all of his journal entries are addressed to his "dearest, darling Olga." Some of Garfield's personal effects are also included with the journals. Of special note are clippings regarding his unique family blood type. The Harris variant was so rare that the American Red Cross created a special category for it, and researchers around the world requested samples for study.

Monty "Hawk" Branham is representative of the Catawba Cultural Renaissance that began in the 1990s. A potter of superlative skill, he is a visionary and has been prominent in the move to revive forgotten customs,

lore, and the Catawba language. Monty writes songs in Catawba and English and is a regular performer on the Indian circuit. In 1996 he traveled to Oklahoma, visiting the Creek Nation and studying their rites and rituals. Monty hopes to one day re-establish the Catawba Stomp Ground and return the Sacred Fire to the tribe. In 1997 along with Nola Campbell and former wife Anna, he traveled to the Smithsonian Folklife festival. Clad in tribal costume and regalia, the trio demonstrated Catawba arts and crafts and were very successful. Nola made pottery, Anna did beadwork, and Monty sang, played the flute, recounted tribal stories, and learned to be a better potter with Nola's assistance. The journals of these two trips chronicle Monty's experiences and provide valuable insights into the life experiences of a modern day Native American.

Nola Campbell was a Master Potter of exceptional skill and ability. In 1999 she received the Jean Laney Harris Folk Heritage Award given only to exceptional South Carolina artists. A potter by age 15, she learned her craft from sister-in-law and Master Potter, Georgia Harris. For over sixty years she honed her craft and the ensuing dedication, delight, and superlative workmanship helped ensure the survival of the Catawba pottery tradition. Her demonstrations were a special treat. A consummate performer, she would first enthrall her audience then astonish them by having a child destroy the newly created masterpiece at performance's end. Nola Campbell saw the near demise of Catawba pottery making yet survived to see her people's triumphant return to the clay. After Nola's death, a local reporter, Ray Chandler, provided an apt summation of her life. "A renowned local potter of the Catawba Indian Nation died Monday with the dignity she wanted to preserve." This journal is basically a deathbed account, a chronicle of Nola's last illness written over a period of four months by daughters Betty Harris Blue and Della Harris Oxendine.

Series VI – Catawba Indians Legal and Administrative Materials, 1756-2006

A problematic series due to the fact that the Catawbans have been in litigation for over a century and legal and administrative issues are usually intertwined. This series includes a wide range of materials collected by Blumer for research purposes. Lawsuits, treaties, legislative bills, testimony, and extensive copies from the National Archives and other depositories (notably the Interior Department and the Bureau of Indian Affairs) are included. Correspondence from government agencies, NARF (Native

American Rights Fund) and extensive newspaper clippings also are part of this series. Post-settlement records, current disputes, tribal meeting minutes, bingo records, and executive committee meetings records are also included. The series will be divided into two broad categories: Administrative and Legal with sub-headings arranged chronologically.

Series VII – Slides & Photographs, ca. 1890-2000

Several thousand photographs and slides exist in the collection. Dr. Blumer has created preliminary finding aids for both. The photographs are arranged in folders with an overall description and varying numbers of photographs within each folder. The slides and photographs are arranged numerically. A card index file does exist for the slides. Due to the great length of the slide and photograph finding aids they will be listed separately from the container list.

Series VIII – Reference Collection

A. Monograph Collection – TJB collected numerous works for reference purposes in the course of his studies. These works have been cataloged and arranged by Library of Congress classification number. At this time, there are approximately two hundred volume. A special collection location, NASC (Native American Studies Collection) has been established within the USC Lancaster library catalog.

B. Topical files – As this collection was processed all materials not easily identifiable were filed alphabetically. Approximately 2000 folders (32 linear feet) were placed in file cabinet drawers for eventual processing. The majority pertained to Catawba studies but a wide range of topics are covered. This series includes correspondence, copies of published articles, books, news-clippings, and hand-written research notes, along with Native American excerpts from various publications. The initial processing is complete, but many materials have yet to be added.