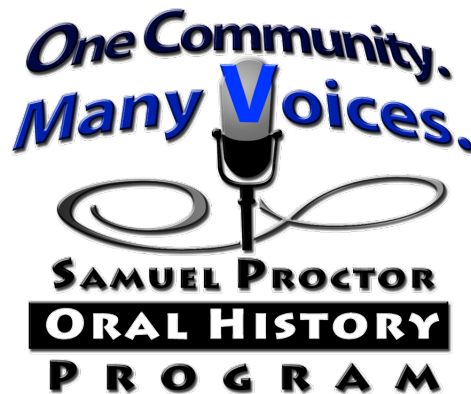


# Claude Yates Allen

**Southeastern Indian Oral History Project  
MISS CHOC-008**

**Interview by:**

**Dr. Samuel Proctor  
December 2, 1973**



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**MISS CHOC 008 Claude Yates Allen**  
**Southeastern Indian Oral History Project (SIOHP)**  
**Interviewed by Dr. Samuel Proctor on December 2, 1973**  
**12 minutes | 6 pages**

**Abstract:** Claude Allen talks about his schooling and dropping out at seventeen years old to enlist in the military. He speaks about growing up in the Pearl Water community and being raised by his mother. He ends by detailing his experiences growing up not knowing he was Indian and realizing after he was not let into a public swimming pool.

**Keywords:** [Mississippi Band of Choctaw Indians; Mississippi-Choctaw; Discrimination; Health]

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MISS CHOC 008

Interviewee: Claude Yates Allen

Interviewer: Dr. Samuel Proctor

Date of Interview: December 2, 1973

P: I'm doing an interview this afternoon with Mr. Claude Allen. This is Monday, December 2. It's twenty minutes to three. We're doing this interview on the Choctaw Reservation, Pearl River Community, in the gymnasium of the high school on the reservation. Claude, I hope you don't mind if I call you by your first name, is that all right? How do you spell your name?

A: C-L-A-U-D-E.

P: Got a middle initial? Middle name?

A: Y.

P: Y? What's the Y stand for?

A: Yates.

P: Yates. Is that a family name?

A: No, it's not. [Laughter]

P: How do you spell it?

A: Y-A-T-E-S.

P: Just something that your parents found in a book or something?

A: Uh, I don't think they had a choice, or something like that.

P: Where're you from, Claude?

A: I'm from Pearl River Reservation. I guess we can call that the headquarters of the Tribal government—that's where it's held.

P: Were you born here?

A: Yes.

P: When?

A: October 21, 1948.

[Break in recording]

P: All right, let's continue with this interview now and see how we move along with it. Claude, you said that you're a native of these parts. Were you educated here in the Pearl River community?

A: Yes, I was. I went to the only high school that we have—that's Choctaw Central High School, here also in Pearl River community. And I went as far as tenth grade. Then I finally got tired of school, for the reason that I was seventeen and I was in the tenth grade [inaudible 2:30] restless, that's all. **So I decided finally I wanted to be free, be on my own schedule, I figured I'd follow my dream a lot faster if I was on my own,** not tied down to the high school. After I dropped out, I went into the service.

P: Claude, before you tell me about what you did after you got out of school, let's go back just a little bit and talk something about your family. Tell me about your father.

A: Well, my father, his family lived in the Redwater Community, which is about fifteen miles west of Pearl River. And my father died when I was three years old, and—

P: You were raised by your mother?

A: Right.

P: What's her name?

A: My mother is Sudie Willis. She was Allen, but then she remarried, and—

P: You say her first name was Sudie?

A: Right.

P: How do you spell that?

A: S-U-D-I-E.

P: S-U-D-I-E.

A: Yes.

P: Now, you were raised by your mother. Did that have any effect at all, being raised in that kind of a household without a father figure? Did that have any effect on you?

A: When I think back, it does now. Yes. I could sure of used a man in the—

P: Was this a conservative Indian family?

A: I believe it was, yes.

P: Were there any grandparents in the family?

A: Yes. I'm happy to say that my grandmother is still living. I don't really know what her age is, but it's somewhere in the eighties.

P: Do you remember any of the stories that your grandmother may have told you? Was she a story-telling lady?

A: Uh, no—

P: About the past, did she talk about the past?

A: No, I can't remember too much. She didn't really tell me all that. Maybe trying to keep me around the house, not to wander off so far, she'd tell me about, if you wander off, something will get you and all that. Just like regular ghost stories and all that stuff.

P: While growing up, were you aware of the fact that you were an Indian child?

A: No, I didn't. I didn't really know. [Laughter]

P: Why?

A: [inaudible 5:38] How 'about that. We had T.V., and what I saw on T.V., well, the White man was it, you know. He was making things happen. And, like when I was little, I used to play cowboy instead of Indian.

P: What were you, a cowboy or an Indian?

A: I was a cowboy. [Laughter]

P: And the Indians were bad people?

A: They were bad, right.

P: To you.

A: Right.

P: This was true of the other children in your community?

A: Yes. The majority—when we played cowboys and Indians, we used to play cowboys and we used to be chasing the Indians.

P: When did you first become aware that you were an Indian?

A: Let me see. Uh, it had a lot to do with this man that I went to live with about a year in my early teens. He was a White man. Before that, before we met, I had an eye surgery in Memphis, Tennessee. This man, he came down to Memphis to study—or, rather, he was a filmmaker for the Game and Fish Commission, at that time, anyway. And we met, and—this was summer of [19]61—we met, and we got acquainted. And that summer, I found that the right side of my eye was—well, I didn't know I was going blind then, but anyway it was going out, partly. So, I told him about this, my friend there, and said I should go see a doctor. I said, "Sure,

take me to the biggest hospital in Memphis." They took me to one of the hospitals there, that was the biggest. And we found out that I had a detached retina at that time. It required surgery, and there was no funds available. I think they contacted the Neshoba County—I don't remember what foundation it was, anyway—but he contacted them, and I had the surgery done. From there I went to live with the man for the reason that they had to watch my eyes that certain year that I was there.

P: Claude, tell me—getting back to the question I raised before—how did you discover you were an Indian? In what way was this brought home to by this operation?

A: Well, I was getting to that.

P: Oh, okay, excuse me.

A: I said this pertains to this man. This man is very well-known now among the Choctaws. Anyway, as I went to live with him, he had—how would you say, he was fond of Indians, really, and that he had grown interested in them and that he started buying books and had read a lot. And that year—guess he bought a dictionary somewhere—he learned to read and talk the language. And from there, still, in my mind, I really didn't think that I was an Indian. Because, after I entered public school, it never bothered me, because they never said I was an Indian or ... [phone rings]

[Break in recording]

A: The thing about it, I stayed with this man, anyway. It was summertime again and I was gonna go to a swimming pool with a group of my classmates that I'd

become acquainted with this certain summer, and that everybody else got admitted except me. [Laughter] So, I said, "Why?" Kinda occurred to me there. I realized that I was dark-complected and all that. That was the first incident that ever kinda brought to my attention that I was an Indian. I finally realized that it was some kind of a challenge that these people kinda tried to put me down, that I am an Indian, I want to stand up, **I won't** be told. I started doing Indian ways, and when I say "Indian ways," I would ....

[End of Interview]

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