



Caroleen Sanders
Concord, NC
Rock Hill, SC

Catawba Indian master Potter, Caroleen Sanders, learned to make pottery in the traditional Catawba method by observing her mother, Verdie Harris Sanders, and many extended family members including her aunts Nola Harris Campbell, Viola Harris Robbins, and Reola Harris. Within the Catawba culture, pottery making is taken very seriously and children do not simply ‘play with clay’. It is important adult work with each part of the process treated with great respect. The clay is scarce, dug from old sites or holes that remain protected and essentially closed to those outside the reservation. As a child, Caroleen remembers being allowed to work with the clay, but could not keep anything she made because of its rarity and the labor involved in digging it by hand. By the time she was twenty, she was burnishing some of the work. She remembers clearly, as an adult, her uncle Master Potter Earl Robbins handing her clay, and later completing her first pitcher, knowing then she had found her calling.

Caroleen, like her aunt Master Potter Nola Harris Campbell, worked professionally off the reservation for many years, and began serious work in clay in 1992. She now continues the tradition handed to her. She creates her work from the two traditional materials, pipe clay and pan clay, dug from two separate sites and mixed together in rations according to the shape being made. After digging her clay, water is added forming a slurry which she filter through a screen. Once the clay has dried to proper consistency, it is ready for use. The pieces are fired in an outdoor pit after the works are preheated by placing them near the fire or in a conventional oven. Caroleen elects to fire only a few pieces at a time using hardwood, then finishing with pine bark. She carefully controls the firing and oxidation process, giving her work a wide range of color. She considers making the shapes that have been handed down for generations a great responsibility; therefore, primarily creating historical Catawba vessels. However, she has also become well known for her work as a sculptor of busts of historic Catawba figures.

Before the arrival of the first Spanish explorers in the mid 1500s, the Catawba Indian Nation controlled a land base of approximately 55,000 square miles which included portions of North Carolina and Virginia and most of South Carolina. Within the next two centuries, European settlements left the Catawba population decimated by disease, enslavement, and war with treaties made and broken, hunting grounds and land for traditional farming methods taken from them.

Yet through this great destruction, the Catawba nation maintained the longest unbroken pottery making tradition in the United States. Pottery provided much needed capital both for sale and trade. But just as importantly, the process and forms used to create the work preserved and conveyed cultural identity. Functional ware, ceremonial pieces, and work made for barter have been an integral part of the Catawba

culture and its antecedents for thousands of years. Today Caroleen's work continues to evolve within the historical and prescriptive shapes and methods she honors.

Caroleen is registered with the Indian Arts and Crafts Board, US Department of Interior which promotes authentic Native American art.

Caroleen has been privileged to serve on the Board of Directors at the Catawba Cultural Preservation Project and involved with tribal events. She has demonstrated and exhibited her work in NC, SC and GA. Her work and voice have allowed her many opportunities for the Catawba People and this is her mission.

Caroleen was commissioned by the North Carolina Pottery Center to show the many steps involved in Catawba pottery making which is part of the permanent exhibit.

Caroleen was honored to have participated in a week long seminar at Moundville in Tuscaloosa, AL. Along with archeologists, she visited native sites and then had the opportunity to visit the archives in Montgomery, AL which houses the history of Native Peoples.

Caroleen currently serves on the Board of Directors at the North Carolina Pottery Center. She has been asked to demonstrate her pottery for The Joara Foundation at the Berry Site in Morganton, NC and was the featured artist for the opening exhibit at the Old Jailhouse Gallery in Morganton. Through the Joara Foundation, she also conducted a workshop with other artists at Western Piedmont Community College.

Caroleen is currently in Phase I at USC-Lancaster collaborating her work as a potter with the art instructor. This work is called, "Drawing In Clay". She is looking forward to the day when she will be able to implement both art forms in helping both the younger and elder potters perfect their work in clay. The clay is who we are.