

A REVIEW...SORT OF RANDOLPH UMBERGER'S

by Bruce Barton



CARNELL LOCKLEAR



DORA CHAVIS



ROBERT BRYANT



LEE WIGGINS

These four have performed in "Strike at the Wind!" since its inception in 1976.

They are: Carnell Locklear, the general manager, who also doubles as the irrepressible "Boss Strong"; Dora Chavis, "Aunt Mary"; Lee Wiggins, "Linna McNab"; and Robert Bryant, "Shoemaker John."

A Review...Sort of

"Strike at the Wind!", the popular outdoor musical drama, completes its seventh season Saturday night, and it has to be one of the most exciting and fulfilling seasons yet.

I play a small part (I have seven lines and then I am drug off stage and shot summarily) in the drama, but I have enjoyed it tremendously. I have made many new friends with the cast members and production people. My role is "Alleh Lowry," or "Pa" as most of the cast refer to me now. It has been a wonderful experience, and I hope I have been an adequate "Pa Lowry." Lord knows I have tried.

"Strike at the Wind!" is a unique happening. Whites play Whites, Blacks play Blacks and Indians play Indians. It makes for good characterization, one simply has to act out his life's experience to be believable.

"Strike at the Wind!" is fortunate to have a strong cast. And a poetical script by Randy UMBERGER and haunting lyrics by Willie Lowry. There are absolutely haunting and poetical lines in the show

that stand the scrutiny of the years.

The director this year is Chet Jordan, a PSU professor of theatre. Stage manager is Sherry Levy, the catalyst who holds things together back stage.

And of course, Carnell Locklear, the peripatetic general manager, doubles, as he has since the drama began in 1976, as the lovable and irrepressible "Boss Strong." He has a gift for comedy that is intrinsic and not learned from books. His strong counter part is Robert Bryant, "Shoemaker John," a rich baritone and a wonderful actor. Those who have seen the show affirm that "Strike at the Wind!" would lack something without the crowd pleasing antics of Carnell Locklear and Robert Bryant.

RHODA AND "HENRY BEAR"

Henry Berry Lowrie and Melton Lowery, who plays his famous great, great, great grandfather, are almost one and the same. Melton plays "Henry Bear" like I always imagined he should be played. His characterization is sensitive and moving. Ruby Hammonds, who plays "Rhoda" is quite effective as the head strong bride of a head strong man.

THE LEADER AND THE BOY

Derek Lowery is the Leader and prococious Mark Oxendine is the Boy. They are the transition between the spoken and the unspoken. They take the audience, hand in hand, through the plot, the story line. Derek Lowery is a visual delight, in his Indian regalia, and he speaks with pride of "our hero, Henry Berry Lowrie." He is poetry in motion. One line in particular seems to set the stage, makes the drama unfolding before us, understandable. "There are the people," he says, with a sweep of his hand, "but where is the reason." That line makes sense out of the paranoia of the Civil War era in which the drama is set.

THE LOWRIE FAMILY

As noted, I play "Henry Bear's" father. I attempt to do it as haughtily as possible. I see Allen Lowrie as a proud man about to be destroyed by the madness about him.

Magdaline Lowry is brilliant as "Momma Cumbo," and Dora Chavis will be a tough act to follow as "Aunt Mary."

Tony Clark, Corbin Eddings and Frankie Hunt are all great as Young Allen, Wesley and William Lowrie respectively.

THE LOWRIE GANG is lovable and poignant, every one of them. Besides "Boss Strong" and "Shoemaker John" already mentioned, Bill Ray shines brightly as "Steve Lowrie." Ray has grown tremendously this year. Other members of the gang are Kenny Hunt, Frank Carter, Joe McMillian, and Michael Deeseand Stephen Lowery. Accolades to all!

AND THE REST OF THEM

Frank Creasy, in my estimation, is the best Sheriff

Reuben King in the seven year history of the drama. Dolly King is played by Lisa Taylor. She attacks the role. And she sings mightily. As I see it, Dolly King has the hardest lines in the show. When Lisa Taylor emotes "What kind of people are you?" we all feel a little ashamed of ourselves.

Victoria Oxendine is an absolute darling as the daughter of the Kings, and I like Steve Swint's characterization as Hector McCord, a White Robesonian with a conscience.

Janet Graham has continued to improve nightly as "Polly Oxendine." That's the mark of a good actor, the ability to expand in a role, grow nightly. "John Saunders" is played well by Melvin Kennedy.

Hugh McGregor is played to perfection by Frank Harrison. The dark beard, the mean guy who knows, deep within himself, that conservatism, not the Yankees, will prevail in the end.

Ben Jacobs plays "Donahoe McQueen," the meanest "half breed I have saw," as one of the home guard exclaims. Jacobs laughs evilly.

Colonel J. Brantley Harris is created this season by Rocky Brisson. Rocky loves to swagger and create havoc wherever he goes. It's a compliment to Rocky that the audience usually applauds when he bites the dirt. And Danny Wilson is "Rod McMillian"--a weak kneed fellow that audiences love to hate.

One of my favorite characterizations is "Lina McNair" as created by Lee Wiggins, one of a number of cast members who have been with the show since its beginning. She's a consummate actress and "Strike at the Wind!" is fortunate to have her.

"Reverend Sinclair," who smacks of condescension, is played with vim and vigor by David Payne. If I gave an acting award on technical ability Payne might be the recipient.

And Richard Rundus, Randy Pait, Steve Fletcher, Stephen McGirt, Neil Weber and all the rest of them make us a motley home guard. And Edith Ward and Stephen Lowry, Charlie Locklear, Jr., Andrew Hunt, and the rest of the marvelous cast make "Strike at the Wind!" better for their presence.

Scuffletown citizens are Martha Chavis, Teresa Carter, Twyla Jacobs, twins: Amelia and Amira Locklear, Edwina Chambers, Norma Lowery, Carolyn Oxendine, Vinita Oxendine, Karen Revels, Christopher Locklear, and Chochise Clark. They give "Strike at the Wind!" its essence, its beauty and its life.

I'm sure I left someone out, but not by design. Every single person in "Strike at the Wind!" was crucial to its successful season, and "Strike at the Wind!" would not be as good without any single person mentioned, or not mentioned.

The cast became friends. That makes it all worthwhile. Long Live "Strike at the Wind!"

"WHAT IN FACT DID HAPPEN TO HENRY BERRY LOWRIE?"

What did happen to Henry Berry Lowrie? The tales go: Drowned while fishing ... a report, March 1872. Escaped to Mexico ... Clarence Lowry, Brother Tom killed him ... The Robesonian, Dec. 1871. Shot by brother Stephen ... The Robesonian, Feb. 1872. Accidentally shot himself while cleaning gun ... New York Herald March 7, 1872. Escaped North Carolina by disguising himself ... Wilmington Daily Journal Mar. 16, 1872. Escaped by "arranging his funeral." According to the story Henry Berry Lowrie made a dummy out of straw. He fired the shot and Tom told everyone he killed himself accidentally. The coffin was made into a cart and he escaped in the darkness to another state ... Dr. Earl Lowry in Raleigh News and Observer, May 9, 1937. The home guard interrupted a worship service near Rowland to inquire if anyone had seen Henry Berry. The preacher asked his organist who nodded negatively. After the guard left, the organist turned out to be Henry in disguise.

STRIKE AT THE WIND

ORIGINS of the LUMBEE INDIANS?

While most Indian tribes have an established position in American history, the Lumbee Indians do not. They are virtually unknown, and the immediate question becomes who are the Lumbees and where did they come from? The answer is complex. They are the largest body of Indians east of the Mississippi River. And yet, despite their numbers and achievements, the Lumbees remain a visible - invisible people.

While confusion and mystery surround their origins, the Lumbees are unquestionably of Indian blood and outlook. Though conclusive proof has not yet been offered, many historians believe them to be descendants of the Hatteras Indians of coastal North Carolina and Sir Walter Raleigh's famous "Lost Colony" of 1587; others believe them to be descendants of the Eastern Sioux tribes located in the North Carolina area. Many Lumbees and some scholars believe the people to be descendants both of John White's "Lost Colony" and the Eastern Sioux, amalgamation having occurred over a long period of time.

Since the "Lost Colony" theory is the one most accepted by most Lumbee people, it demands more thorough examination. John White, an adventurer - artist, was chosen to head Walter Raleigh's second colony to the New World in 1587. The colony arrived off Hatteras, July 22, 1587, and proceeded to Roanoke Island. In August of that year, finding that their supplies were inadequate for the coming winter, the settlers prevailed upon White to return to England for additional settlers and supplies, leaving his colony behind. Before White's departure, he discussed with the colony the possibility of moving inland. White reached England in November, 1587, a time when his country was threatened by Spain. Other problems arose and it was not until August, 1590, that White finally returned to Roanoke Island. The noted North Carolina historian, Hugh Lefler, says: He (White) found the place overgrown with grass and weeds, and about the only traces of the settlers were a few pieces of broken armor and the word CROATOAN carved on a tree and the letters CRO on another tree, but with no cross, a sign to be used to indicate that the settlers were in distress. The colony thus passed out of history, but not from the field of historical speculation."

North Carolina and Virginia historians of the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries believed that a remnant of the colony survived. For example, in 1709 John Lawson, North Carolina's first historian, wrote of the "Lost Colony": "A farther confirmation of this we have from the Hatteras (Croatoan) Indians who lived on Roanoke Island, or much frequented it. These tell us that several of their ancestors were white people and could talk in a book as we do; the truth of which is confirmed by gray eyes being frequently amongst these Indians and no others. They value themselves for their affinity to the English and are ready to do them all friendly offices. It is probable that the treachery of the natives, for we may reasonably suppose that the English were forced to cohabit with them for relief and conservation; and that in process of time they conformed themselves to the manners of their Indian relations ..."

Clifton Oxendine, professor emeritus of history at Pembroke State University, states: "In 1730 Scotchmen began to arrive in what is now Robeson County. The universal tradition among the descendants of these first White settlers is that their ancestors found an Indian settlement on the Lumber (Lumbee) River. They were living in houses, speaking English, tilling the soil in a rude manner, and practicing in rather imperfect ways some of the arts practiced by the civilized people of Europe." While the seventeenth century provides little historical knowledge about the Lumbee people, the eighteenth sheds more light.

The Lumbees were never a nomadic group; once they settled on the banks of the Lumbee River, they held their lands in common by right of possession and this continued until the coming of white man to Robeson County around 1730.

A number of the Indians of Robeson County served in the Continental Army during the Revolutionary War and received pensions for their services. They also fought in the War of 1812. But when the Civil War came it was different; the North Carolina Constitution, amended in 1835, spelled doom to the Lumbee people. The period after 1830 saw North Carolina become increasingly a closed society, and under its revised constitution all people not of white blood were disfranchised and denied the privilege to vote or carry weapons.

During the Civil War, Indians from Robeson County were conscripted for labor camps at Fort Fisher and other places on the North Carolina coast. They were mostly engaged in building batteries and making salt. There were Indians in Robeson County who refused to serve in labor camps but were willing to serve in the Confederate Army if given an opportunity. Unfortunately, their refusal caused the Home Guard, to watch the Indians with suspicion. Allen Lowrie soon found himself accused of having stolen goods on his farms. Also he was accused of housing Union soldiers who had escaped from a Confederate prison camp near Florence, South Carolina. Enmity between the whites and the Indians of Robeson County grew as the war years passed, and the Confederacy came closer to defeat. The tension between the races finally exploded into violence following the execution of Allen Lowrie and his son William by the Home Guard. This was the beginning of the Lowrie War. (For more information on the Lowrie War, 1864-1874, refer to the Henry Berry Lowrie Story.)

The period from 1875-1885 can be called a decade of despair. In 1885 under the able leadership of Hamilton McMillian, the North Carolina Legislature passed a bill that gave the Indians of Robeson County separate schools and designated them as Croatan Indians. Two years later, Croatan Normal opened her doors under the leadership of Rev. W. L. Moore.

In 1905 the Rev. D.F. Lowry, a nephew of Henry Berry Lowrie, received the first diploma from Croatan Normal School. In June, 1928, the first two-year normal class was graduated, and the normal school was given accreditation by the State Board of Education. In the early thirties college classes were initiated, and by 1938 three full years of college work were available. Then, in 1939, a fourth year of college work was added, and in June, 1940, the first four year college degrees were conferred.

Like its people the school has had many names: Croatan Normal School, 1887; Indian Normal School of Robeson County, 1911; Cherokee Indian Normal School, 1913; Pembroke State College, 1949; and Pembroke State University, 1969.

During the last decade Lumbees have become actively involved in Indian movements throughout the country. While there has been some national cooperation among Lumbees and other tribes, there has also been some dissension within the Lumbee community with the emergence of the group who are known as Tuscaroras. They believe that Tuscaroras moved into the Robeson area during the period of the Tuscarora War, either to escape enslavement or to avoid further hostilities, and in the process became a factor in the existing society. If this is true some of the Tuscaroras became a part of the Lumbee settlement a short time before the arrival of the white settlers. It is also possible some Tuscaroras settled in the area following their defeat in the war of 1711-1743, when the power of the Tuscarora nation was broken. Dick Brown, a local historian, says the number of Tuscaroras was probably small and their arrival in Robeson came too late to have much bearing on the origin of the Indians already there.

There is also another view of the Robeson County Indians. They are hard workers and basically a peaceful people. On December 22, 1971, the Lumbees established the first Indian-controlled bank in the United States. Lumbee Bank was chartered with more than 600 stockholders, of which approximately 90% are Lumbee Indians. Many Lumbees are working in Indian Affairs in the various agencies of the United States Government. In 1973 four Lumbees completed law school. Among the four was Robeson County's first female lawyer to be admitted to the North Carolina Bar. Several Lumbees hold Ph.D and M.D. degrees as well as having expertise in many other professional fields, though most have not returned to Robeson County.

Today, Lumbees are saying, "Come to see us." They no longer talk about leaving. Many who are away expect to return. But they will not find the place they once knew. They are a progressive striving community.