

# Along the Robeson Trail

by Dr. Stan Knick, Director, UNCP's Native American Resource Center

[Author's Note: Now that the Congress is seriously talking about Lumbee recognition again, it seems appropriate to re-visit a series from a few years ago which discussed that topic. This is the last in that series.]

As European colonization moved through the cultural landscape of the Eastern Woodlands, Native American population, language and culture had to change. In the 1580s, when Thomas Harriot and his comrades traveled to villages near the soon-to-be "Lost Colony" at Roanoke Island, Harriot recorded that many Native people died immediately after his visit.

He wrote (Harriot 1972:28): "...within a few days after our departure...the people began to die very fast, and many in short space; in some towns about twenty, in some forty, in some sixty, and in one six score [one hundred and twenty], which in truth was very many in respect of their numbers...; the disease [was] also so strange, that they neither knew what it was, nor how to cure it..."

John Lawson, who traveled extensively among the Indians of the Carolinas, estimated that by 1705 the Indian population had already been reduced in epidemics by five-sixths (83%) everywhere within two hundred miles of white settlements (Lawson 1967).

This would encompass all Indians between the Charleston and Jamestown colonies,

including everyone in the land of the Lumbee. By 1738, similar population decimation by epidemics had reached all the way to the Cherokee in the mountains (Adair 1775). Isolation and coalescence into new Indian communities -- such as the one here at "the Settlement (Evans 1971)" -- became the only way for Indian people to survive in eastern North Carolina.

Language also had to change. Because it was located near the geographical interface of three language families (Algonkian, Iroquoian and Eastern Siouan), "the Settlement" was a place where Indian people from different languages and language families coalesced. In the course of a very few generations, all that would remain of the original core Lumbee language was the word itself: Lumbee. By the time of permanent colonial settlements in Robeson County, the Indians had already learned to speak English (Dial and Eliades 1975).

Culture also had to change. Many of the external elements of Native culture had to be hidden as a means of survival. Christianity and European styles of dress became necessary adaptations. But something important remained. The Lumbee knew -- and the vast majority of them still know -- that they are Indian people.

Why should the Lumbee be recognized by the federal

government? There are many reasons.

They should be recognized because this is their ancestral land; they have always been here. They should be recognized because their occupation of this land has been consistent, as is shown in the archaeological, historical and genealogical records. They should be recognized because their name is as old as the river's name. They should be recognized because despite epidemics and wars, disenfranchisement and oppression, they are still here. They should be recognized because they have held onto their Indian identity, their sense of who they are, when it would have been easier to leave all that behind. They should be recognized because even though they no longer speak their core ancestral language, they still remember its name. They should be recognized because they have persisted in the culture of the heart, in holding onto what it means to be Lumbee. And there are many other reasons.

But in the final analysis -- in view of all the evidence -- they should be recognized because it is right.

For more information, visit the Native American Resource Center in historic Old Main Building, on the campus of The University of North Carolina at Pembroke (our web address is [www.uncp.edu/nativemuseum](http://www.uncp.edu/nativemuseum)).

## Keeping the Circle Healthy Forums scheduled

Keeping the Circle Healthy will be the theme for the American Indian Community Health and Human Resources Forums (formerly the American Indian Health Summit) this year.

These health and human resource forums, sponsored by the NC Commission of Indian Affairs, in partner with the US Department of Health and Human Services Office on Women's Health, the NC Department of Health and Human Services Office of Minority Health and Health Disparities, the Division of Public Health, and Eastern Regional American Indian Rural Health Outreach Project will identify federal, state and local resources, describe ways to build state and community partnerships and discuss community capacity building and economic development for improving the health status among American Indians in North Carolina.

### Agenda

- 8:30 - 9:00 am Registration and Continental Breakfast
- 9:00 - 9:15 am Welcome and Opening Remarks
- 9:15 - 10:15 am Strengthening Tribal Communities: Economic Development and Capacity Building
- 10:15 - 10:30 am Break and Exhibits
- 10:30 - 11:00 am NC Mental Health Reform: The Impact of American Indian Communities
- 11:00 - 11:30 am State Health Programs
- Health Insurance for the Children (NC Health Choice) and Senior Prescription Programs
- 11:30 - 12:00 pm Engaging the Tribal Community to Improve Healthcare
- 12:15 - 1:45 pm Buffet Lunch and Exhibits
- 1:45 - 2:45 pm Models for Partnering with American Indian Communities
- 2:45 - 3:00 pm Break and Exhibits
- 3:00 - 4:15 pm Collaboration with State Local Human Service Agencies to Share Resources
- 4:15 - 4:30 pm Closing Remarks

\* INFO Buddy Bell 910- 521-0887

Registration fee: \$25.00 (includes continental breakfast, lunch, breaks, and participants materials).

Exhibitor fee: \$50.00 (includes meals and skinned tables).

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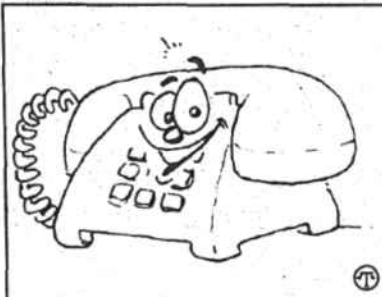
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