

# EDITORIAL AND OPINION PAGE

We Cannot Know Where We Are Going If We Don't Know Where We've Been...

## So fittingly we honor our Pioneer Fathers

### AS I SEE IT

An Editor's Note

by Bruce Barton

## In Reply 'Learn From The Lumbee'

(The writer is an Indian Law attorney representing the Lumbee and other eastern North Carolina tribes.)

Geoffrey C. Mangum

As one of the individuals quoted in Eve Oakley's August 5th piece on Red Banks, I find only a few minor errors of fact. Unfortunately, the article as a whole greatly confuses the main issues and contains remarks by non-Indians that border dangerously close to blatant racism.

The idea for the article is to point up the different perspectives of Indians and non-Indians about Red Banks. But the article loses sight entirely of the state's planned Indian Culture Center, which promises to become one of the most important facilities of its kind in the southeastern United States. Some historical clarity is desperately needed.

The Red Banks area is not the site of repeated "raids" by the Indians, as many non-Indians appear to believe. In the 1930s, when a handful of white landowners were treating the Indians like dirt and exploiting them by the sharecropping regime (frequently leaving whole families with \$5 or less a year for clothing), the Indians pulled themselves together and sought to take advantage of New Deal programs for the destitute. A small leadership group headed by Joseph Brooks haunted the Congress and executive agencies, finally persuading the Department of Agriculture in 1936 to locate one of its many resettlement projects in Robeson County for Indian families. After several studies, the government chose Red Banks as the best farming area, acquired nearly 17,000 acres on either side of the Lumber River, and began accepting applications from needy families for eventually 40 to 70 farms.

These resettlement farms gave us the phrase "40 acres and a mule," and were hardly extravagant. Much of the area was never settled. And the farms were not given to the families but were sold with 40-year mortgages. The whole idea was to give poor people an alternative to the horrendous sharecropping system in the hope that land ownership could provide an escape from destitution.

In fact, Joseph Brooks and others originally began the whole project as part of their century-old effort to gain tribal recognition from the federal government. The Bureau of Indian Affairs at that time was sympathetic but without funds, and referred Brooks to the Rural Resettlement Administration in an effort to help the tribe.

The Red Banks Mutual Association was born in 1938 as a smaller part of the larger Pembroke Indian Farm. The RBMA was a 15-family farming cooperative that leased 1,700 acres from Agriculture (out of the unsettled area of the Indian Farm). The cooperative employed the latest horticultural and farm management techniques available. After rent and expenses, the RBMA families showed only a minuscule profit (perhaps \$5 per family per year), but this was heads and shoulders above the related cooperative for whites, Scuppernon Farm, which consistently ran thousands of dollars in the red. RBMA was the only Indian cooperative in the nation.

During and immediately after World War II, communist-baiters in Congress began to view the nation's farm cooperatives as "tinged by socialism." Under intense pressure, they all died like flies, except the Indian cooperative at Red Banks. RBMA survived the McCarthy era as well, lasting 30 years (about three times longer than all others).

When the government's push to end RBMA was finally accepted in 1968, some of the families were sufficiently well-off that they could purchase their farms, and did so with the same type of financing used by everyone else.

The Lumbee Recreation Center, born at the end of RBMA, showed a similar spirit of Indian determination and cooperation. The government was looking to sell off the Red Banks land, now that the cooperative had finally come to an end, and the Indian people wanted a decent recreational area. In the 1950s, Red Bank was twice under consideration by the state as a site for a state park, but the idea didn't come together. So the Indian people organized and bought the land to help themselves when others would not.

The Lumbee Recreation Center plan was too ambitious, and some measure of its failure can be laid at the door of the racism prevalent at the time. Although heavily advertised in white newspapers, the Center was not used by whites. (In contrast, Indians were not allowed access to white recreational areas.) When Lumbee Recreation Center proved to be too ambitious for the community, several of its leading citizens again sought to preserve the area for the community. Some of the successful leaders of the Lumbee

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Joined together in Riverside Country Club to bail out LRC and the government.

The article implies that the Riverside people were given the land, which is hardly true. For 16 years now, the organization has been faithfully paying its way under terms structured by the government.

Since 1978, the Red Banks area has hosted the widely acclaimed outdoor drama, "Strike at the Wind." The drama, which tells the history of the Lumbee people, is the culmination of efforts that began before 1910. Its opening night in July, 1978, was seen by over 1,000 people. Obviously the Lumbee, through various organizations and determined efforts, have been completely successful in preserving the recreational value of Red Banks.

So what about the Indian Culture Center? The Oakley article cites non-Indian critics who charge that the North Carolina Indian Commission acted in a "sneaky way" to obtain an interest in the area. This allegation is utterly false and would be comic were it not for the tragic ignorance and mental laziness of non-Indian critics that it reveals.

For over two years now, Bruce Jones (the Indian Commission's executive director) and the commission's board of directors have been working in the light of day with the governor's office, the North Carolina Council of State, and numerous legislators to develop an Indian Culture Center for eastern North Carolina. It is the Council of State, not the commission, that has full authority for property acquisitions by the state.

The Red Banks area was settled on by both the Indian Commission and the Council of State after extensive surveys of other areas in eastern North Carolina (as far away as Halifax County). Based on the excellent traffic flow along the I-95 corridor and Highway 74, as well as the existing recreational facilities, the consultant's report recommended the Red Banks site.

The Indian Culture Center plans call for an anthropological museum, convention facilities, shops and restaurants and attractions for tourists. The academic, social and entertainment potential is unlimited. Such a center could easily benefit Robeson County and the state for decades to come.

Perhaps the most troubling aspect of the article was the comments by a "well-known Scotland County historian," who asked to remain anonymous. While erroneously naming the government as wasteful and the Indians as inept, the "historian" said, "It was crazy to put an 18-hole golf course there to begin with... in an area of people who probably never lifted a golf club in their lives."

The remark is nothing if not racist. (The only "historian" in Scotland County is Dick Brown, known there as an amateur historian. Mr. Brown can hardly be said to be a historian in the sense of Hugh Lefler or William Powell, and he is in no sense an Indian historian. Although Mr. Brown, a former staff writer for The Observer, has written occasionally about the Lumbee, including items on Henry Berry Lowry, Red Banks and "Strike at the Wind," his writing displays only the most superficial acquaintance with Lumbee history.)

My own theory is that racism today is less frequently malicious in nature than it is the result of mental laziness and a disinclination to recognize another group's point of view. The racist remark can be viewed as benign only in the sense that it is a result of laziness. I challenge the "well-known Scotland County historian" to inquire more deeply into the history and culture of a great Indian people living practically next door.

The Lumbee have consistently found ways to make progress possible, despite the great and numerous obstacles placed in their way by white people. More importantly, they strive to live in harmony with whites, despite the past, and move on toward positive goals in all endeavors. The non-Indian critics quoted in the article should learn from the Lumbee example.

## Earl Hughes Oxendine reflects on life in Education and Hoke County

To The Editor:

When one has consistently made public education an integral part of their life, it is almost frightening to think about such a drastic change as either retirement or resignation. However, after twenty eight years in the field of public education, twenty-three of which have been spent in the Hoke County Public Schools, I find it necessary to tender my resignation due to medical reasons effective October 1, 1984.

I am taking this opportunity to reminisce about my experiences in Hoke County in an attempt to inform the many students, teachers and staff, parents and community leaders about how highly I value their confidence in my ability to contribute to a better education and improved educational opportunities in the Hoke County Schools.

I am especially proud of the many fine accomplishments which Hoke County has made in the past twenty years. When I joined the Hoke County Public Schools in 1962 as Principal of Hawkeye Indian School, I was charged with the responsibility of moving forward a K-12 school with ten teachers and a total student enrollment of 300 to 33 teachers and a total student enrollment of over 700 students in 1968, some 200 of whom were high school students. We were confronted with a limited curriculum due to the small number of students, we encountered a large number of students who did not enroll in school until the second or third month of school, and student achievement and progress was tremendously affected by this annual record of poor school attendance and late school enrollment. I remember well the many long hours which the teachers spent in visiting the tobacco and cotton fields to encourage parents to enroll their children in school, and how we worked to plan and provide for a broad-based extra curricular program to involve students in school activities, to motivate and increase the awareness of parents for the need for education, and to develop a high level of community support and school pride.

I am also reminded of the initiatives undertaken during the late sixties as Chairman of the Board, Mr. D.R. Huff and Board members, Dr. Riley Jordan, Mr. Bobby Gibson, Mr. Bill Howell and Mr. Wilton Wood led the school district in meeting one of the greatest challenges to ensure a sound future and a quality education for all students in the Hoke County Schools. In the spring of 1968, these men voted for districtwide school consolidation in order to meet federal requirements for school desegregation. While their decision was unpopular at the time, their decision was founded on the best interests of the students, the parents, the teachers and the communities as evidenced by the successful desegregation of the Hoke County Schools without incident. Their courage, wisdom and vision for the future contributed to the greatness of the Hoke County Schools today.

In 1973, I was called upon to serve the Hoke County Schools as Principal of Upchurch Junior High School, and in 1977, to fill the principalship at South Hoke

High School. These two appointments were followed in 1979 with my appointment to the central administrative staff to assist with the administration of federal educational programs including Chapter I, Migrant Education and Title IV Indian Education. Upon the occasion of each of these appointments, I always responded that I was willing to serve the Hoke County Schools in whatever capacity the Superintendent and the Board of Education deemed that I could be most effective. While many of these appointments may not have been in my personal best interest, at all times I reaffirmed my commitment to the best interests of students and the Hoke County Schools. These varied experiences allowed me the opportunity to serve some of my students in the principalship for as many as eight of their twelve years in school, and the greatest reward that I have received has been the satisfaction, the pride, and the sharing of success as many of the youngsters went on to greater achievement in colleges and universities, in successful jobs, and into productive roles in the community.

For eight years I served as a member of the North Carolina State Board of Education. While visiting public schools across the state, at no time did I visit any school district with which I did not feel that the Hoke County Schools could favorably compare. Today, Hoke County Schools can boast of forward leadership in keeping first and foremost in the decision-making processes the best interests of the students. The school district employs many fine teachers, aides, maintenance workers, custodians, cafeteria and food services staff, educational support personnel and outstanding central office personnel and administrators. I am convinced that Hoke County can hold its own with other school districts across the state.

I have had the opportunity and privilege to serve with five outstanding school superintendents: Mr. W.T. Gibson, Mr. Don Abernathy, Mr. Raz Autry, Mr. John D. McAllister and the current superintendent, Dr. Bob Nelson. Each of these individuals are to be commended for their fine leadership of the Hoke County Schools, and I am certainly indebted to each of them for the many considerations and kindnesses extended to me as a member of the Hoke County educational team.

On several occasions I have been afforded an opportunity to serve in the field of public education in other school districts, but at no time have I had any desire to serve anywhere other than in the Hoke County Schools. I sincerely appreciate the confidence, the support, the respect and the fine cooperation extended to me over the years by the students, the parents, the teachers and staff, and the administration and larger Hoke County community.

Hoke County has been both good for me and to me, and I sincerely and honestly hope that in some way I have contributed some good and something worthwhile to Hoke County and to the future generations of Hoke County.

Respectfully,  
Earl Hughes Oxendine

## RANTING & RAVING with Gary Barton

Remember folks: These views are mine. They are not necessarily anyone else's. Heck! They ain't even necessarily visual! Just my rantings and ravings, I guess!

### COLUMBUS HAD A WARPED SENSE OF HUMOR!

Now get this folk: "Indian Heritage Week" has been proclaimed here in North Carolina for Sept. 16-22, 1984. I know ol' Columbus is rolling over in his grave in glee. You see, the week is not called "Native American Heritage Week" as it should be. But, "Indian Heritage Week." Heck! How are we gonna celebrate this observation? Travel to India?

I'll just be danged if I can get excited about being called an "Indian." It aggravates the spirit of Henry Berry Lowry that courses through my veins. Well, I'm not going to India to call attention to my heritage. 'Cause my heritage is not linked to India. And I am a Native American. Not an "Indian." You be what you please.

Let's be realistic for a moment, if we may. Simply put, ol' Columbus done a job on we "Native Americans" when he hung the name "Indian" on us.

I don't hold ol' Columbus in too high a regard. You see, he's exposed me and my ancestors to too much ridicule by hanging that silly name on us. Heck! He weren't looking for America. The wayward yokel set sail in search of a short cut to the West Indies for trade purposes. He weren't even close. Heck! If he missed heaven as far as he did the West Indies, he's probably burning now.

And the distorted history books credit this incompetent sailor and even worse explorer with discovering America. That's almost as big a joke as him hanging my ancestors with the name "Indian."

When ol' Columbus disembarked on the shores of America, he noticed some half-naked "savages" (his word, not mine) scurrying about. Still suffering from the pitiful delusion that he had found the short cut to the West Indies (heaven knows what other maladies he suffered from), good ol' Columbus called my ancestors "Indians." Now, neither I nor my ancestors have ever set foot on the scorching soils of India. And, honestly speaking, I have no immediate plans to do so. All this notwithstanding, ol' Columbus labeled us "Indians." As far as I'm concerned, ol' Columbus inflicted a grave injustice upon Native Americans that day.

What is so sad, though, is that an even greater and graver injustice is inflicted upon us daily as even the majority of our own people continue to label us "Indians." It's a baffling mystery, to say the least. Our ancestors have fought for and rectified many injustices throughout our exciting history. Yet, this one stinging joke remains to haunt and ridicule us. I hate to say it, but I believe the biggest problem is that the white-written history books hate to admit that they are wrong. It is a lot easier to continue calling us "Indians" than it is to have to correct the history books.

I am of the opinion that ol' Columbus must have been a better comedian than he was an

explorer or sailor. Heck, if he was any comedian at all, he had to be better than he was at sailing or exploring 'cause that yokel couldn't sail or explore worth a good continental. I do know that he started one of the biggest jokes in all the history of humanity when he hung the name "Indian" on us. Heck! Rodney Dangerfield is one of my all-time favorite comedians. And he has never cracked a joke that could even come close to rivaling the "Indian" joke of ol' Columbus.

What truly distresses me, though, is that it is folk like you and I who keep the joke alive. We have become too complacent. If not for us insisted upon being called "Native Americans," then ol' Columbus' "Indian" joke would die. And we could bury it at sea, where it all began.

Lumbee Regional Development Association is in the process of petitioning the government, on behalf of Robeson County "Indians" (sic) for federal recognition. This is all well and good. But, I doubt the government will take our efforts to become federally recognized seriously as long as we continue to not take our own identity seriously. I'm not knocking L.R.D.A. I think the agency serves a needed function in Indian country. All I'm saying is that as long as we continue to call ourselves "Indian," we are living a lie and a joke. And other folk will continue to treat us accordingly.

Considering our complacency in accepting the "Indian" slap to our face delivered by ol' Columbus, and being an eternal optimist, I'm just glad he didn't land on the Virgin Islands. I'm serious folk. I just don't know if my male ego could stand being called a 33-year-old "Virgin." You think that's absurd, don't you? Well, I dare say it's no more absurd, or harder for me to swallow, than being called a 33-year-old "Indian."

Yea! The white man came and raped us. He took our land. Stripped us of our customs and heritage, not to mention our identity. Heck! He soiled everything he came in contact with. So, after being raped, it's absurd to think that we could possibly have been called "Virgins" had ol' Columbus inadvertently landed on the Virgin Islands. About as absurd, in fact, as us being called "Indians." Oh yea! Ol' Columbus must'a had a warped sense of humor.

At least now I understand what our ancestors meant when they greeted someone and held up their right hand and said, "How!" They're probably like me. I, too, want to know "how?" How in the world has this "Indian" fiasco lasted so long?

I'll talk at y'all some more next week. Meanwhile, don't get mad 'cause I don't like being the butt of a joke. If you have to get anything, then for God's--and Native American's--sake, get excited. And get determined to let's unite and stifle this "Indian" joke once and for all.

## Readers says, 'I don't want to see another Pearl Harbor!'

To The Editor:

As a retired TSgt. of the U.S. Air Force, with 30 years of service to my country, also a Pearl Harbor survivor and a supporter of the American Defense Insitute, I'm shocked that the Soviets have grown so brazen that they would send new nuclear missile submarines to America and dare us to do anything about it.

I remember when Communists did not dare insult America. It is vital that Congress untie President Reagan's hands and permit him to give us new sub-

marnes America needs so badly.

The news is bad and I feel that the American people need to wake up and write their Congressmen demanding that they vote for a strong defense so that America will stay free.

The Soviet Union has just announced that it is moving additional nuclear missile submarines to the coast of the United States and our own Pentagon experts confess that these modern Soviet submarines are now capable of launching their deadly nuclear

missiles into America's cities in only seven to nine minutes.

Now we don't need a nuclear freeze as some would have us believe. The Soviets will not freeze theirs. Their word isn't worth the paper that's it's written on!

God has blessed America and we need to keep it free at all cost. I don't want to see another Pearl Harbor!

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Dr. Sherwood Hinson, Jr.

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## Commissioners urged to pursue sources to right Wrongs at D.S.S.

I am not surprised that Wyvis Oxendine, Robeson County Commissioner, was unhappy with the vote as per the motion by Jack Morgan to ask the state division of DSS to evaluate the Robeson County D.S.S. This meeting of the commissioners happened on Sept. 4, 1984.

When there are seven votes to be cast with 3 votes yes and 3 votes no, we have 6 votes cast that cancel each other out. There is no way that 1 vote can become a majority in a total of 7 votes cast when the no votes void the yes votes. Think about it. What the electorate of Robeson County should do is demand that there be either 6, 8, 10, or 12 members on the Board of

Robeson County Commissioners, or any other governing body.

I commend J.W. Hunt, Wyvis Oxendine, and Jack Morgan for taking a stand against the way this charade at the Robeson County D.S.S. is being carried out.

In my opinion, H.T. Taylor wants to continue with the director of DSS, Russell Sessoms, although Sessoms admitted he could not interpret the guide lines for the dispensation of funds at the DSS. Bill Herndon who is chairman of the board of DSS, Sammy Cox and Carl Britt are running interference along with H.T. Taylor for Sessoms, who in my opinion does not have his head in the game.

Bill Herndon says the members of the DSS are underpaid and overworked. In my opinion, if the Commissioners would refrain from spending money for obsolete railroads, paying for landfill dirt when the county was offered free dirt adjacent to the landfill where the dirt was needed, spending money for testing landfill sites when there is a site already approved by the state which is 20 acres in size. For those who do not know it, Bill Herndon is chairman of the landfill committee. Is this type spending the reason members of DSS are underpaid along with other county employees? In my opinion this type spending is about as essential and

progressively productive as tests on a male cow.

In my opinion H.T. Taylor, Bill Herndon, Sammy Cox or Carl Britt offered a valid reason for voting down (if the vote was valid) Jack Morgan's proposal. I urge J.W. Hunt, Wyvis Oxendine and Jack Morgan to pursue every source available to right the wrongs imposed on your fellow Robeson Countians by those who have no compassion, respect or moral obligation to the voters who elected them to office, as I see it.

H.T. Taylor thinks the commissioners should not ask the state division of DSS to evaluate the Robeson County

DSS because some of the DSS board directors are appointed by the County Commissioners. In my opinion, H.T. Taylor is saying the Commissioners have made a mess of things at the DSS and they want it left alone. Mr. and Ms. Taxpayer-voter: Are you satisfied with the facts as stated? Are you satisfied with the present reckless spending and lack of qualified leadership in the dispensation of your hard earned tax money? If you are satisfied, then you condone these practices in my opinion.

John L. Godwin  
Pembroke, N.C.