

ALONG THE ROBESON TRAIL

by Dr. Stan Knick, Director,
PSU Native American Resource Center

What is "truth?" Webster tells us that truth is "a statement...that accords with fact or reality, an established or verified fact," and goes on to say that truth is "a particular belief or teaching regarded by the speaker as the true one." This leaves a lot of room for interpretation, since we know different speakers regard different beliefs to be "true." An old friend of mine who was a Special Forces Information Officer in Vietnam always said truth is "whatever you can convince somebody of."

I got to thinking about the "truth" when I read a letter from another friend in the last Carolina Indian Voice (13 January 1994). This brother was writing about a conversation he had with some Native Americans from out west about Lumbee Indians and the word "Lumbee." In his letter he said that the name Lumbee "came from a white man," and that he told these folks "the history of the name Lumbee, which only came into being less than forty years ago."

Now this is not just some uninformed guy from out in left field — this is a good man who knows a lot about Native American traditions, who walks the Good Road himself, and for whom I have a great deal of respect. And although I've heard this statement made by others before, I figure if he thinks this is the truth about the word Lumbee, then a lot of other people probably think it, too.

Opponents of Lumbee recognition have used the statement that the Indians of Robeson County were only recently given the name "Lumbee" as one of their main arguments. They seem to use this to mean that the word "Lumbee" didn't really exist before the mid-Fifties, and thus that the Lumbee people didn't either. So what is the "truth" about the word "Lumbee?" Was it invented by a white man in the Fifties?

The earliest written reference I can find to the word "Lumbee" is in the 1888 work of Hamilton McMillan. Yes, McMillan was a white man, but it wasn't the 1950's. So did he invent the word? What he said was this (in a discussion of the geographical extent

of Indians in North Carolina in the 1730's): "These Indians built great roads connecting the distant settlements with their principal seat on the Lumbee, as the Lumber River was then called."

Why would McMillan say this? Was he trying to convince the world that the Indians of Robeson County ought to be called Lumbee? If that had been his intent, then we might assume that he would lean heavily on the word Lumbee as the original name of the river, in order to strengthen his case that the people should be called Lumbee. But that's not what McMillan was trying to do.

He wanted to convince the world that the Indians of Robeson County ought to be called Croatan! All he was doing with the statement about the ancient name of the Lumbee River was repeating what he was told by elders of the day. These elders in the 1880's were taught when they were young that the original word was Lumbee — this bit of information means that the word was in use earlier than anybody in the 1880's could remember! This makes "Lumbee" a very old word.

Other writers around the turn of the century reflect this same oral history. Angus McLean wrote: "When...white settlers first arrived they found located on the waters of the Lumbee, as Lumber River was then called, a tribe of Indians speaking broken English..." Like McMillan, McLean had nothing to gain from the use of the word "Lumbee."

O. M. McPherson, an Indian Agent for the U.S. government, wrote in 1914 that "...the Lumber River was anciently called the Lumbee... The Lumbee River is a branch of the Pedee and the similarity of the names would suggest the same origin. All these small Siouan tribes were originally parts of, or confederated with, the Cheraws."

McPherson's conclusion about the Indians of Robeson County being of predominantly Siouan origin probably comes closer to the truth than McLean's (who thought they were really Cherokee). But neither writer

had any special investment in the word "Lumbee." They were just telling the truth as they believed it — not that the word Lumbee was recently derived from the word Lumber as some people want us to believe, but that the original name of the river was Lumbee.

Before the federal government recognized the name Lumbee in 1956, there was the "Lumbee Tatler," a yearbook at Pembroke State College (now Pembroke State University). Were the local Native American students who wrote the "Lumbee Tatler" in 1941 trying in some way to force the name Lumbee on their own people? Could it be true that "Lumbee" was a word that came from within the Indian community, not one planted on it from the outside?

If it is the "truth" that Lumbee is the original name of the river along which the people lived, then it is reasonable to conclude that Lumbee was also the original name of the people as well. This is especially true in light of the fact that several other Eastern Siouan tribes who lived nearby (but are now extinct) also shared their names with the rivers along which they lived (i.e., Santee, Wateree, Congaree, Sugaree, etc.).

As the effects of European conquest swept across the Carolinas during the 16th and 17th centuries, almost everything in Robeson County changed. The population was quickly and drastically reduced by epidemics. Whole languages disappeared as Indian tribes merged and/or vanished. The day-to-day culture of the Indian people changed in the face of overwhelming contact with the outside world. But some things did not change — one was the unfailing will of the people to hold onto their Indian identity; another was the word, sometimes unspoken but never completely forgotten, Lumbee.

So what is the "truth?" One thing is certain — we seldom if ever arrive at the whole truth by looking at only a part of the story. For more information, visit the Native American Resource Center in Old Main Building, on the campus of Pembroke State University.

Lumbee people are different and sometimes separate, but also connected

To the Readers Forum of our Native American community. Like the symbol shown the native community of the Lumbee-Cheraw region are different and sometimes separate from one another but we all are interconnected. The cornerstones and the middle stones are needed to hold up the main stone. The main stone being the Lumbee-Cheraw people as a whole, the other stones being community groups like our church committees, LRDA board, Lumbee River Legal Services committee, Township committees to name a few. All the people of the community need a voice in the tribal government. People need to get involved, men and women both should educate themselves about the issues at hand and let the thoughts of the people be carried to these committees and then those representatives go together for the greater good of the whole tribe. No not all of these people will agree on all of the issues, but that is all right. The gathering of these committees can work towards the drafting of the constitution and the education of the people on the issues. I agree with Mr. R.A. Hunt's assessment, that LRDA should act as the administration branch of the tribe and a committee made of people from the above groups act as tribal government. Most of the people at LRDA have a wealth of knowledge on government policies. The government already is knowledgeable on the existence of LRDA and has worked with the LRDA organization. Years of work would be lost if LRDA was disbanded. There just needs to be more community involvement.

Hunt to Receive African American Ministers at Executive Mansion

Gov. Jim Hunt will meet with African American Ministers at the Governor's Mansion in Raleigh on Friday, January 21 at 2 p.m. to hear their views on the crime plan Hunt outlined last week on a statewide television.

Responding to an sharp increase in crime, Hunt has called a special session of the General Assembly to begin February 8 to deal specifically with crime. In a press conference Thursday, January 13, Hunt unveiled a 36 point crime-fighting plan he will urge the Legislature to enact.

The plan includes a first ever statewide middle school program, called Save Our Students, or SOS, to give children in grade 6 to 8 challenging, enriching activities between the hours of 3 and 6 p.m. The plan also includes provisions to keep dangerous criminals behind bars longer, and to make the criminal justice system work better. Hunt will present the plan to several hundred ministers, and invite questions and comments.

Community awareness and involvement would help control what some of the people think is out of control. It is hard to listen to people complain and then you ask them when is the last time they went to a community and or LRDA board meeting and their response is oh I don't mess with those people down there. Well I have been involved with the Native American issues since I could be involved. I started going to tribal meetings when I was in high school not just yesterday. I attended meetings in Cumberland and Robeson County throughout my life; therefore I feel somewhat knowledgeable yet I could not begin to know it all. I'm 38 years young and have attended POW WOW's all across NC and now the USA. I have seen and treated people as patients in my medical practice from many different tribes and the difference of opinions intertribal are not unique to Lumbee-Cheraw country. We must learn from the troubles of other tribes and try to not make the same mistakes. A lot of tribes across the U.S. have had trouble with some of the same issues that face the Lumbee-Cheraw. LRDA has monitored these items and can provide valuable insight into these pitfalls. I also feel that we need people to educate the community as Ms. Hunt and Ms. Locklear are doing. I just feel that the parts of the whole need to work together for the betterment of the Native Americans of the communities involved. Mr. Hunt is right we all need to write the senators. I have and will continue. So there is one thing you can do instead of complaining

about this and that. FEDERAL RECOGNITION IS STILL THE MAIN GOAL and the constitution can be finished a little later. I'm proud to say that I get the word out as Mr. Hunt would say. I'm always educating the different tribes I meet about the Lumbees and our Native N.C. To my surprise most are willing to listen and learn and I have made a lot of friends working as a medical provider for the different tribes of the western regions.

The three arguments that Mr. Hunt listed are some of the ones I have heard also. 1. Lumbees will take money away from other tribes due to size. 2. Gaming. 3. Lumbees are not really Indian, due to we have no language and a lot of the old culture was lost etc. Well I'm here to tell you that it is only circumstance that the European problem took hold earlier in the east. Unfortunately I see it happening out west as well. But my heart is uplifted when I see the rebirth that is taking place back home in N.C. and out west. The rebirth that people are not ashamed to be Native American and are not ashamed to practice their culture, language or even name their children in some of the old names.

Yeigo it'j doolee/ (let's all try harder) to work towards the good of the whole tribe. Thank you for your time and I appreciate the opportunity to speak from the heart, some of my opinions.

Respect for the elders Robert (Bobby) Michael Chavis, Phoenix Arizona.

Your Bible And You

By Daniel Davis



In many cultures we have seen the idea of some kind of substitution or sacrifice to please the Gods and insure their favor. Whether it is throwing virgins over a cliff or placing innocent babies on the red hot hands of a huge idol, mankind seems to feel that some kind of sacrifice is required. Generally the emphasis is always based on the presumed purity of the sacrifice. Never is the sacrifice made of crotchety old men or sour old women. Always the young, the beautiful, the innocent. Every culture wants to give of their best to their God or Gods, hoping to gain their favor or appease their anger.

What a difference we find in the one true, living God: No angry God who waits to see if we can somehow win favor. Not this God! He loves even those who turn their back on Him. He waits not for the perfect sacrifice be found than the spotless Lamb of God?

We were unable to bridge the gap between ourselves and God. We, sons of Adam, were under the same laws as the rest of creation (Genesis 1:11-12, 1:24). Evil could only bring forth evil. It is impossible to bring good out of evil as it is to find a woman giving birth to a piglet. Like things produce like things - an unchangeable law of nature.

No wonder God became the Lamb to be sacrificed. He knew it was of no use to expect sinful man to come up with some worthy sacrifice. He knew that only He had the ability to make the first step. In that first step the Lamb of God was slain and it's life blood flowed out for you and I.

What kind of response should you and I have? What kind of response will you give in the face of such a demonstration of love?

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