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Lumbee Indians Make Pilgrimage to Georgia Burial Grounds

Editor's Note: This article is one in a series about the Robeson County Indians who migrated to the Claxton, Georgia area in the late 1800's.

by Barbara Braveboy-Locklear (Copyrighted 1996)

For more than 20 years Robeson County Indians have been drawn to the place.

They go to retrieve fragments of their heritage.

They go in tribute to their dead who lie there.

They go and eat fruitcake made from a famous recipe and baked in a neighboring town.

They don't go until cold weather sends rattlesnakes into hiding.

They made their fourth pilgrimage nine weeks ago.

Thirty-eight Lumbee "Croatan" Indians from three states converged on Wiregrass Plantation near the Georgia community of Adabelle to pay homage to their ancestors buried in the Croatan Indian Memorial Cemetery. For Lucy A. Locklear, 76, it is a return to her birthplace. The daughter of Jasper and Luvenia Emanuel Locklear, she was born September 14, 1919 on the Wiregrass Plantation. Her parents returned to Robeson County when she was an infant.

Arriving at a hotel in Statesboro at 10:30 p.m. on November 10, the group checks in for a night's rest. The following day, a Saturday, after donning work clothes and eating a hearty buffet breakfast, they embark on a 16-mile chartered bus drive to cemetery situated on a hill framed by

scraggly pines. In tow are representatives of the news media, including Tasha Oxendine, a fellow Lumbee, who will cover the event for TV Channel 13 in Florence, SC. Under rain-threatening skies chatter flows from workers, and resonant garden tools fill moist air. There in this desolate area memories are resurrected; stories exchanged.

In 1975, keeping a promise made to his paternal grandfather, Mr. Jasper Locklear, Horace Locklear drives the octogenarian to visit the grave of his beloved mother, Mrs. Manthy "Lady" Locklear who is buried in the Croatan Indian Cemetery. Also taking the trip are Horace's wife, Barbara, and their three young children, Mrs. Eva Harris Brayboy accompanies the Locklears on the trip made on a sultry August weekend.

After a half day's investigative search and travel over rural dirt roads, the group locates the cemetery. A trek through a soybean field leads them up a hill to the overgrown burial site where they discover six weathered white stone markers bearing the names of: Quince Alvie Oxendine, Mary Lee Jacobs, Janie Emanuel, Hattielean Bell, Etha Bell, and Manthy Locklear.

Winds: rain and summer sun have worn four wooden markers. Fires, started by farmers burning off the surrounding field, have charred the markers, obliterating anything that might reveal the dead's identity. Ground indentations indicate numerous unmarked graves in the cemetery.

The sacred Indian burial ground,

neglected for more than a half century has, for some, become a dumping ground for discarded household items. Rusted bed springs lay on a toppled headstone. Fallen tree branches undermine others. Wild brush make passage around graves difficult.

A while after arriving at the site sadness permeates the place and becomes a sadness shared by descendants this summer afternoon.

The dirt roads traveled that August afternoon on the Wiregrass Plantation are the same roads that Granddaddy Locklear traveled as a young husband, father and farmer in the early 1900's. For Mr. Locklear the absence of familiar landmarks in the community where, 50 years earlier, several of his children were born, schooled and churched, brings heartfelt disappointment. "Things sure can change over the years. They must have tore down the church and houses," Mr. Locklear laments enroute home to North Carolina the next day.

It was to be his first and only visit to his mother's grave since leaving the area in 1919. And it was his last...out to Georgia.

He died five years later in his native Robeson County, NC.

Being the sage he was, Granddaddy Locklear left stories about the dauntless Indians from Robeson County, North Carolina, who settled, lived and died in Claxton, Georgia sometime between the close of the Civil War and the 1920's.

-TO BE CONTINUED-

Local EMC provides assistance with heating

There is just no way to get around the fact that cold weather means high electric bills and December and January have provided both. Unfortunately, for some co-op members experiencing crises, they will not be able to pay their electric bills, and they will face having their electricity cut-off. Anyone who lost power during the January ice storm knows that being without heat all night is a very unpleasant experience.

While there is nothing anyone can do about ice storms, Lumbee River EMC's members are doing something to help less fortunate neighbors stay warm this winter. Through donations made to the "Help a Needy Friend" program, members have contributed more than \$15,000. These funds will be made available in February to co-op members experiencing crises. Applications for the funds will be taken at REMC offices from 9:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. on the following dates: Feb. 6, Raeford; Feb. 8, Lake Rim Office in Fayetteville; Feb. 11, Red Springs; Feb. 15, Lumberton; and Feb. 20, Laurinburg. For more information, members may call 738-7906.

Lumbee River is a member owned, non-profit electric cooperative serving 38,000 families and businesses in Robeson, Cumberland, Hoke and Scotland counties.

Millard Locklear Makes Associate Area Director

Mr. Millard Locklear of Pembroke was recently recognized by New Image International as Associate Director of Marketing at its national conference in Louisville, Kentucky January 11, 12 and 13. Over 3000 independent distributors from all over the United States attended this annual event.

"It was very encouraging to see so many people come together to enhance their skills and knowledge through the advanced training given during the convention," said Dale Calvert, Director of Marketing.

This appointment of Mr. Locklear recognizes his abilities and years of experience and integrity as an independent business person. Mr. Locklear has a proven success record with New Image.

New Image International is a rapidly growing leader in the billion dollar Network Marketing industry. The company specializes in health and weight loss products. Its flagship product "New Image Plus" is sold through a network of independent distributors throughout the United States.

Locklear is married to the former Sylvia Sanderson. He is the grandson of Lizzie Locklear of Pembroke.

Local Eye Doctor Attends Statewide Symposium



Local optometrist, Dr. Sandra Locklear, shown chatting with Dr. R.G. Martin of Southern Pines, recently attended Carolina Eye Associates Tenth Annual Ocular Disorders Symposium in the Moore Regional Hospital Conference Center in Pinehurst, North Carolina on Saturday, January 20th. Optometrists from North and South Carolina attended the lectures and slide shows which reviewed a wide variety of eye disorders and complications, and heard about the latest techniques in caring for these eye problems.

The Ophthalmology Update was presented by 12 surgical specialists of Carolina Eye Associates. Presentors included Dr. Robert Gale Marin, Dr. Michael Bartiss, Dr. Dan Messner, Dr. Neil Griffin and Dr. Greg Mincey of Pinehurst, Dr. Joe Gunn and Dr. Todd Brown of Charlotte, Dr. Charles Woods of Lumberton, Dr. Frank Christensen of Chapel Hill, Dr. Florence Bassi of Rocky Mount, Dr. Shawn Riley of Myrtle Beach and Dr. Paul Fellenbaum of Raleigh.

Carolina Eye Associates is one of the largest eye centers in the United States with 16 centers located across the Carolinas.

Celebrates 99th Birthday

Mrs. Vergie Hammonds Burnette of Lumberton, Robeson County, celebrated her 99th birthday at Ryan's Steak House, Lumberton, NC on January 20. Mrs. Burnette was born January 24, 1897. She is the mother of seven living children. They are: Mrs. Vashtie Mott of Anaheim, California; David S. Burnette of Maxton; Mrs. Josephine Lucente and Roosevelt Burnette, both of Lumberton; Varner Burnette of Pennsylvania; Mrs. Delois Revels of Lumberton; CSM Roscoe Burnette of Raeford, NC; eighteen grandchildren; 19 great-grandchildren; and two great-great grandchildren.

The honoree is a faithful member of ten Mile Center Baptist Church. The event was hosted by Mrs. Burnette's son, CSM Roscoe Burnette, and a delicious dinner which everyone enjoyed.

The invocation was given by Rev. John L. Locklear. Approximately 100 guests were in attendance. The honoree received many cards and beautiful flowers.

(Photo and text by Tech. Sgt. William P. Revels)



James C. Dial, left, and Rev. Welton Lowry, right, talk with Dottie Simmons, who along with her husband, Frank, owns Wiregrass Plantation.



Lucy A. Locklear, 76, stands at the grave of her paternal grandmother.



Rev. Welton Lowry speaks to group during worship service held during recent pilgrimage to Croatan Indian Memorial Cemetery near Claxton, GA.



Franklin Tecumseh Cox, 8, great-great-great grandson of Manthy Locklear, participates in recent cleanup of Croatan Indian Memorial Cemetery.

