

# Along the Robeson Trail

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

One of the things which most distinguishes Lumbee people from other folks living in this region is language. Their particular dialect of English has been the source of both study and speculation for many years, at least since the 1890s when Stephen Weeks argued that their dialect illustrated a connection to John White's Lost Colony. More recent publications have sought not so much to trace the origins of the dialect as to appreciate its distinctiveness (i.e., the particularly humorous booklet compiled by Michael and Kathy Wilkins entitled *Do You Speak Lumbee?*).

We just received another recent work which continues the discussion: *A Dialect Dictionary of Lumbee English* by Hayes Alan Locklear, Natalie Schilling-Estes, Walt Wolfram and Clare Dannenberg (June 1996 edition, NCL Language and Life Project, NC State University). In it the authors are quick to point out that even though Lumbee English has an unusual set of pronunciations and usages, it "...shares the vast majority of its dialect features with other Southern English dialects, particularly Appalachian. In many ways, it is the distinct set of features rather than unique features that distinguishes this dialect from other dialects of English (emphasis added).

"Perhaps the most noticeable of all differences that separate Lumbee

English from other dialects we hear in Robeson County is the vocabulary. Some of the interesting words Lumbees use are unique to their dialect, while others are found elsewhere in North Carolina or perhaps some other region of the country even though they may not be found in some of the surrounding dialects of Robeson County. In addition to 'unusual' words like *monnuck* (which means 'amess'), *ellick* ('a cup of coffee') and *yurker* ('a mischievous child'), the language of the Lumbees is also filled with more well-known words that are part of the general American Southern dialect. Thus, we can say that words like *fixin' to*, *tote*, and *cut on/off (the light)* are Lumbee dialect words, even though they're also dialect words for Southern African Americans and Southern Whites from all over the South..."

Then the authors provide an alphabetized list of words belonging, though not necessarily exclusively, to the Lumbee English dialect. Some of these words are easy (for a non-Lumbee) to interpret: for example, the verb *heist* (as in the sentence "She heisted the window because it was too warm in the room."), or *lightbread* ("Mama got us some lightbread at the store."). Other words seem to result from the human tendency to bond two or more words into a new, single word: for example, the adverb *liketa* (as in "I liketa froze to death."), or the

tendency to shorten or contract words in conversation (i.e., *I'm*, used for "I have" as in the sentence "I'm got four young'uns.").

Some other words seem more remote from ordinary English, having indeterminate origins. A good example of this is *headnes* (used as an adjective meaning "worst" as in the sentence "She had the headnes' mess in her house."). Another is the adjective *jubous*, as in "I heard that noise outside, and I started feeling jubous" [strange, eerie].

It is important to realize that differences in dialect do not mean that one dialect is *better* than another. The rose and the lily are different, but each has its own beauty. Development of dialects is merely what happens to language when groups of people are isolated for a time from other groups who speak the same language. In modern times with enhanced communications between and among the various groups and dialects, the differences usually begin to fade out. As Lumbee young people increasingly go to school with people from diverse backgrounds, many of the distinctive words and pronunciations used by Lumbee elders fifty years ago may disappear.

For more information, visit the Native American Resource Center in Old Main Building, on the campus of The University of North Carolina at Pembroke.

## Innovative learning program concludes at Oxendine School

**PEMBROKE** --An innovative learning program for elementary school children was completed at Oxendine Elementary School in Wakulla.

The "Families Learning Together" project was jointly conducted by the University of North Carolina at Pembroke's Dr. Robert Reising and Oxendine Elementary School's Jennifer Freeman.

Reising, a professor of Communicative Arts, said the project objectives were to improve the literacy skills and attitudes of 20 fourth grade students and their parents. "The project will produce published materials that can model possibilities for combining school literacy and adult literacy in other settings. It will also identify what is possible with school literacy is merged with adult literacy."

According to Reising, many parents in historically disadvantaged communities believe that they cannot assist their children educationally. "Families Learning Together" is designed to

assist both groups and thus improve the school's effectiveness with the children.

At Oxendine Elementary School, the parents and their children met every other week for 90 minutes for ten sessions. According to Reising, "What emerged was a model of Family Literacy of uncommon promise. It is expected that the model will be replicated in other schools in which students and adults can both benefit from literacy instruction."

The project was funded by the North Carolina English Teachers Association, Oxendine Elementary School and UNCP, were recipients of the first grant for research and intervention ever provided by NCETA.

The team working on the project, including Mr. Thomas Oxendine, school principal, and Ms. Polly Cunningham, Literacy Volunteer from Robeson Church and Community Center will present their findings and reactions at the 1996 Annual State Conference of NCETA.

## Rape Crisis Center for Yard Sale

The Rape Crisis Center of Robeson County will be holding a Yard Sale on August 10, 1996 from 9:30 am - 3:00 pm.

Items for sale include small office supplies and equipment such as adding machine and typewriter with word processor, variety of chairs for home or office use, desks and computer centers.

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