

Along the Robeson Trail

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

(Note: This segment was co-authored by Dr. Linda E. Oxendine. Along with last week's segment and the following few segments, it was published as a chapter in *Native American Studies in Higher Education: Models of Collaboration between Universities and Indigenous Nations*, edited by Duane Champagne and Jay Stausser.)

Last week we began a series which looks at the history of American Indian Studies at the University of North Carolina at Pembroke. This is part two of the series.

In order to understand the history of the American Indian Studies Department at the University of North Carolina at Pembroke, it is important to know a little about the history of the local Indian population, the Lumbee.

The modern Lumbee are an amalgamation of various Eastern Siouan people (including Lumbee, Cheraw, Waccamaw and Saponi), with apparently smaller additional contributions from Iroquoian (Tuscarora) and Coastal Algonkian (Hatteras) sources (Dial and Eliades 1975; Pierce et al 1987). The archaeological record in the vicinity of Pembroke indicates that native American people have consistently lived along the banks of the Lumbee River from Paleo-Indian times (ca. 12,000 - 8,000 BC) through Archaic times (ca. 8,000 - 2,000 BC) and throughout Woodland times (ca. 2,000 BC - 1750 AD; Knick 1988, 1992, 1993). Native people were living here when the first permanent white settlers arrived in the mid-1700s, and some of the descendants of those Native people can now trace their genealogy back to that same

period. Their history lives on in the oral, kinship and other cultural traditions handed down from their elders. Approximately 40,000 Lumbee people live in Robeson County today.

The beginning of the University itself goes back to the 1880s. Two men of the area -- Hamilton McMillan, a white politician from nearby Red Springs, and W. L. Moore, a local Indian minister -- shared a vision about the education of Indians residing in Robeson County. These men became key players in the establishment of the Croatan Indian Normal School which has evolved into the University of North Carolina at Pembroke.

McMillan believed that the Indians of Robeson County were the descendants of a merger of Coastal Algonkian Indians of Croatoan Island with the survivors of John White's (late sixteenth century) Lost Colony at Roanoke Island. Also a state legislator, McMillan introduced legislation in 1885 which would legally designate the Indians of Robeson County as Croatan (a word McMillan apparently derived from the place-name Croatoan).

At the same time the bill sought to establish a separate school system for the Indians. An Indian School Committee was created with the power to hire teachers of their own choosing for the schools. However, while the Indian community seemed appreciative of this effort there is no evidence that any schools were started as an immediate result of the new law.

There had been no public schools open to local Indians since 1835. Thus in the 1880s the illiteracy rate was extremely high. Few Lumbee people were

qualified to teach in the Indian schools. With this realization, Moore and a number of Lumbee leaders concluded that what was needed in order for their people to make educational progress was a central institution offering studies from the elementary to the teacher training (or normal school) level -- an institution which could train Indian people to serve as teachers for their own children in their own communities. With the assistance of McMillan in the state legislature, a bill was passed in 1887 establishing what McMillan labeled as the Croatan Indian Normal School.

This 1887 act put the school under the direction of an all-Indian board of trustees. It provided that students had to be Indians from Robeson County and at least fifteen years old. Students also had to agree to teach Indian people for a given period. The legislature appropriated \$500 for the school, but the money could only be used to pay teachers. No funds were allocated for the purchase of land or the construction of a building. In fact, the act stipulated that unless the Indians provided a building, the law would be repealed in the next session of the North Carolina General Assembly. Thus it was left to the Lumbee people to provide both the land and building for their school.

Next week we will continue looking at the history of American Indian Studies at UNC Pembroke.

For more information, call or visit the Native American Resource Center in historic Old Main Building, on the campus of The University of North Carolina at Pembroke (910-521-6282; Internet address www.uncp.edu/nativemuseum).

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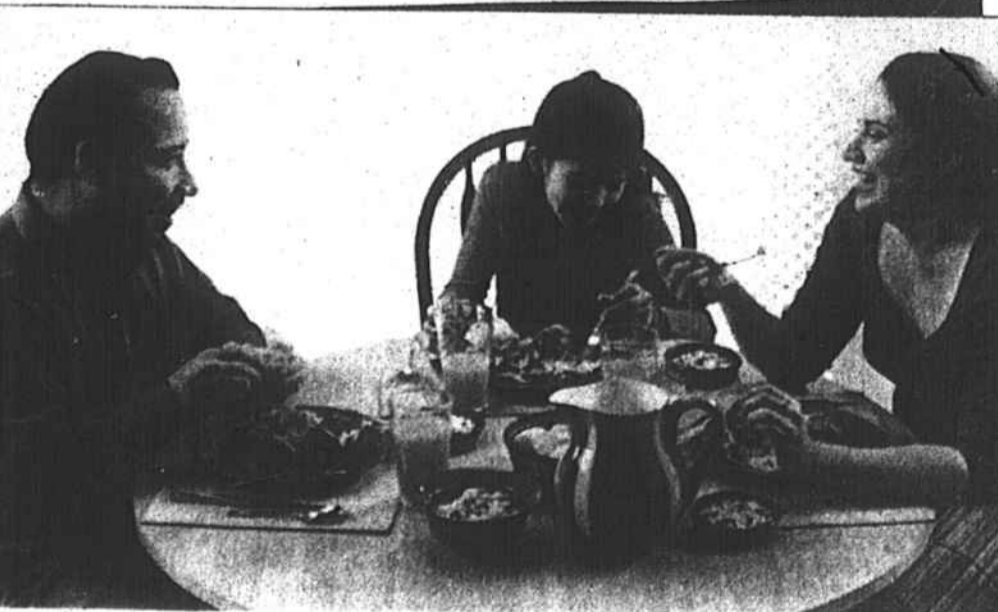
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