



Lumbee Tribe of North Carolina

Naming the People



The Lowrie War was a turning point for the Indian people. It strengthened and solidified the bonds that connected the Lumbee ancestors. These bonds of kinship and place both deepened and reached new heights when the Indians closed ranks and presented a united front against the Confederate Home Guard.

In 1868, the NC Constitution restored voting rights and the right to bear arms to Indians, but a new battle was on the horizon. In a post-war political climate polarized by race, the ancestors of the Lumbee would fight their new battle and learn to navigate the politics of those in power.

At this time, outsiders knew the Lumbee ancestors simply as 'Indians'. Earlier, in the intervening years between their migrations and permanent settlement on the Lumbee River, it was not always wise to boast in tribally specific identities. The People that coalesced on the banks of the river were from a variety of historic tribes, and in those desperate times, survival often meant suppressing tribal identity, language and culture and focusing on commonality.

The Indians knew who they were; and that was enough. However, it was not enough for others. When separate schools were established for Black and White children in 1875, no provision was made for Indians. The ensuing struggles to ascertain education for their children while maintaining their identity as Indian people starkly highlighted the Indians' need for political autonomy. A formal name became necessary to achieve this autonomy and to negotiate with local, state and federal governments.¹

1885 - CROATAN

In 1885, a local Democratic senator and lawyer, Hamilton McMillan, sponsored state legislation to recognize the Indians under a specific name. McMillan conducted his own research, which included the oral traditions of the People, and applied the name 'Croatan' to the Indians. This name was a bit of a misnomer, at the least. McMillan even notes in his subsequent book, *The Lost Colony*, that "when the Act of the North Carolina General Assembly was read to them, recognizing them as Croatans, an intelligent Indian remarked that he had always heard that they were called Hatteras Indians".² Even so, McMillan's legislation accomplished two critical tasks: it secured a distinct, legal identity for the Indians; and it secured separate Indian schools in which they might educate their children. The recognition bill also went a long way toward securing the Indian vote for McMillan and the Democratic party, a vote that had previously went to the Republicans.³

1911 - INDIANS OF ROBESON COUNTY

By 1911, the name 'Croatan' had become a derogatory term. Often shortened to 'Cro', it was a name spat at the Indians to convey derision and reproach in a racially segregated society. The name was changed in 1911 to the neutral 'Indians of Robeson County'; however, satisfaction was not found in this name, and it was changed two years later.⁴

1913 - CHEROKEE INDIANS OF ROBESON COUNTY

In 1913, state legislation was introduced to change the name to 'Cherokee Indians of Robeson County'. Again, a White Democrat, Angus McLean, came to the conclusion that the Indians were primarily of Cherokee ancestry.⁵ This name did not connote or comprise the true identity of the Robeson County Indians, and while they tried to change it, the name lasted for many years.

1953 - LUMBEE

Finally, in 1953, the Indians chose a name for themselves: Lumbee. The name suited the People and the State government recognized them as such. The name brought to mind the land and more specifically, the river, that all Lumbee people call Home. The name respected the history of the People who came together from many nations to survive and become One Nation. Three years later, the United States Federal government would also recognize the Indians as LUMBEE.

Ancestors of the Lumbee⁶



Aaren Spencer Locklear



Lonnie Gaston Revels



Lattie Jones McMillan