



Lumbee Tribe of North Carolina

The Lowrie War



The relative shelter and safety afforded by the swamps surrounding the Lumbee River lasted for a season. In the years leading up to the War between the States, Lumbee ancestors set about the business of survival, even while European settlement pressed ever closer from both the north and the south. A combination of events during these years set the stage for the Lowrie war.



The Lowrie House

INDIAN REMOVAL & LOSS OF LAND

In 1830, the Removal Act was passed in attempt to remove all Indians west to lands designated as Indian Territory. While Lumbee ancestors had historically held their lands in common, by the time of Removal, many were “landowners” in the English sense, possessing ‘fee-simple’ titles or land grants.¹ As individual landholders, these Native peoples did not fit into the white man’s concept of ‘Indian’ and ultimately escaped the forced removal west. Nonetheless, it was a precarious position to maintain, and our oral traditions tell us that some of our people were indeed swept up in the machine of removal.

During this same time, European settlers in the Robeson County area found other ways to deprive the Indians of their land. One particular method of stealing land is known as ‘tied-mule’ incidents. In this scenario, “a white farmer would tie his own cows upon the Indian’s pasture and put his livestock in the Indian’s pen and then bring the authorities to the farm proclaiming that the Indian stole his livestock.”² The Indian, knowing that he would not receive a fair hearing if taken to court, would then either give up a portion of his land or agree to provide free labor to avoid criminal charges. This is just one method in which Indians lost their lands to white settlers in the time leading up to the War Between the States.

LOSS OF RIGHTS

Up until 1835, the Indians in Robeson County, as the area was now known, could vote and had some semblance of rights as citizens. The racial tensions of the 1800’s were coming to a climax and the Indian people could no longer avoid the deteriorating political and social climate in which they found themselves as non-whites. By 1835, the North Carolina constitution was amended and the language used essentially took away those voting rights and others, including the right to bear arms.

CONSCRIPTION

During the war, the Confederate Home Guard seized many young Indian males and carried them away to build and fortify Fort Fisher to protect the port of Wilmington. An epidemic of yellow-fever raged in Wilmington. Many Indians died in the disastrous conditions attending Fort Fisher. The young men began hiding in the swamps around the river to avoid the forced labor of conscription. Initially, the Indians were willing to freely serve in the Confederate Army as soldiers, and some did so. However, they strongly objected to conscription which only served to demonstrate the fact that Indians had indeed lost their civil rights as free men.³



Above: *Farewell* by Ellis Sampson
The Museum of the Southeast American Indian - Permanent Collection - UNCP
A depiction of Henry Berry Lowrie and his wife, Rhoda

The privations of the last decades came to a head with the increasing conscriptions of the Indian people and subsequent violence. When the Confederate Home Guard murdered the father and brother of Henry Berry Lowrie, the Lowrie War began in earnest. Henry Berry Lowrie, along with his kinfolk and a few friends, including George Applewhite, a free Black man and Zachariah McLaughlin, a White youth, quickly became known as ‘The Lowrie Gang’. Over the next seven years, the Lowrie gang exacted a vigilante justice against the Home Guard of Robeson

County and those who actively oppressed the Indian people. Though the Lowrie gang were regarded as outlaws and renegades by those on the wrong end of their guns, the Indian people for whom they fought hail them to this day as Heroes.



The notoriety of the Lowrie Gang spread all over the country, as demonstrated by this article in Harper’s Weekly, March 30, 1872, “The North Carolina Bandits”.

Below: *Window of Deceit* by Gene Locklear
Art Gallery at the Indian Education Resource Center ~ Pembroke, NC
This scene depicts the Home Guard hiding amongst the trees as they attempt to capture the Lowrie gang who are traversing the river by canoe.

