Chapter I

A People of Traditions

When Scottish immigrants began to settle the upper reaches of North Carolina's Cape Fear Valley in the early 1730's, they were amazed to find a group of English-speaking people already living near the Lumbee River. Far from being the "savages" no doubt expected by the Scots, these Indians lived in simple houses, farmed in the European manner, and generally practiced many of the arts of European life. The Scots had found the ancestors of the Lumbee Indians. How the Lumbees came to live in such a geographically inaccessible area, in the manner they did, has long been the subject of historical speculation.

Clinging fiercely to their Indian origins, the Lumbees nonetheless have no remnants of their Indian language which might provide clues to their relationships with other Native Americans. Only traditions and folktales remain as evidence, tales which link this unique group with the lost survivors of the Roanoke Colony as well as with the Eastern band of the Sioux Indians, the powerful and highly assimilated Cherokee, and the Tuscarora Indians. Each tradition has its supporters; each has its detractors. But each is worth examining for the clues it offers about the origins of the remarkable Lumbee Indians.

In 1584, Sir Walter Raleigh obtained a charter from Queen Elizabeth I giving him the right to possess lands in the New World not already under Christian control. Raleigh promptly sent explorers to determine the nature of the lands within his grant, and
to find a site suitable for a colony. The explorers examined the coastal region of North Carolina, which they named Virginia in honor of the unmarried queen, and returned with a glowing account of Roanoke Island and the surrounding area. As a result, a colonizing effort was made on Roanoke Island in 1585-1586; this attempt was abortive. Beset by internal dissension, supply shortages, and Indian hostilities, the colonists returned to England. Ironically, within a month after their departure, three ships reached the Roanoke area with needed supplies and additional colonists. Finding all settlers gone, fifteen courageous men were now left on Roanoke Island to maintain England’s claim to the region.

THE LUMBEE INDIANS AND THE LOST COLONY

Although Raleigh was disappointed over the failure of his initial colonizing effort, he was nevertheless determined to establish a permanent English “nation” in America, and so, in 1587, he sent a second colony of 117 men, women, and children to the New World, under Governor John White. This group was instructed not to settle on Roanoke Island, largely because of those Indians in the area who were angered by earlier mistreatment, and had become suspicious of the Englishmen’s intentions. It should be noted, however, that most Indians in the vicinity remained well-disposed toward settlers. White was told to stop at the island and see if the fifteen men left there in 1586 were still alive. While none of the fifteen could be found, the visit proved to be of momentous importance. For unknown reasons and contrary to its instructions, the White expedition remained at Roanoke Island, thus precipitating a fascinating sequence of historic events.

The John White Colony reached the New World in mid-summer, too late to plant and harvest a crop. The settlers quickly realized they had inadequate supplies to carry them through the coming winter and they urged Governor White to return to England for new supplies. Although reluctant to leave, White finally consented, and sailed for home in late August, 1587. Upon reaching England, John White found the mother country to be at war with Spain. The war was essentially an outgrowth of economic and religious rivalries: King Philip II of Spain, frustrated in his many attempts to bring England under Spanish control, was now so determined to destroy his Protestant rival that he ordered the construction of the “invincible Armada,” a fleet of 130 ships which imperiled the freedom and independence of England. Although the English, through a combination of fast ships, boldness, discipline, and good fortune, defeated the Armada in the summer of 1588, Spain remained a formidable seapower. Thus, White could not safely embark for America until 1590, reaching Roanoke Island in August of that year. The Governor had been gone for three years. When he finally landed on the island and sought the settlers, there were none to be found. The colony had disappeared, becoming known to history as “The Lost Colony.” Somewhat surprisingly, most historians share the judgment of a noted North Carolina scholar, Samuel A’Court Ashe, who wrote: “When the colonists receded from White’s view, as he left the shores of Virginia, they passed from the domain of history, and all we know is that misfortune and distress overtook them; and that they miserably perished, their sad fate being one of those deplorable sacrifices that have always attended the accomplishment of great human purposes.” It is incredible that historians so naively accept this assumption that the colonists died of starvation, disease, and Indian hostilities, and blithely disregard evidence to the contrary.

Governor John White, based on his written account, was not unduly concerned over his failure to find the settlers. He noted that the possibility of the colony moving inland for fifty miles had been discussed prior to his departure for England. It had been agreed that if such a move were made, the settlers would so indicate with a marking. It was also agreed that if they were in danger when they left, they would signify this with a cross. While locating no inhabitants on Roanoke Island, White did find, carved on a tree, the letters “C.R.O.” and on a gatepost the word “CROATOAN.” Significantly, there was no cross indicating distress. Moreover, most of the goods left behind were possessions of the Governor, or goods which would have been burdensome on a long journey. In addition, most articles had been buried as if the settlers hoped to return and recover them at some future date.
John White wrote, concerning his discoveries: “... I greatly joyed that I had safely found a certain token of their being at Croatoan, which is the place where Manteo was born, and the savages of the island our friend.” Though White sought the missing settlers, bad weather and the desire of the sailing master to move on to the West Indies resulted in a perfunctory search and revealed nothing. The important point is that White was confident the settlers were alive and that they had gone to live with the Hatteras Tribe of the trustworthy Manteo, whose friendship dated back to the discovery of Roanoke Island in 1584. The fact that the colonists were not seen again does not prove they perished, or ceased to have a role in history.

The fate of the John White Colony continued to be of concern to Walter Raleigh and other Englishmen for years to come. Raleigh urged every ship sailing to the vicinity of North Carolina to seek news concerning the lost colonists, though none ever returned with useful information. Then, with the successful establishment of a colony at Jamestown in 1607, two Englishmen of that colony attempted to discover what had become of the missing settlers. Captain John Smith records in his True Relation, written in 1608, that information obtained from Indians in the Jamestown vicinity told about men in the Chowan-Roanoke River area of North Carolina who dressed like Englishmen. William Strachey, secretary of Virginia Colony wrote, supposedly in 1613, A Historie of Travaile into Virginia Britannia; he cites reports of Indians that White's colonists did indeed move inland where they constructed two-story stone houses and lived with the Indians for twenty years. This peaceful existence ended with the coming of the Jamestown settlement. The further incursion of Englishmen excited and angered the “priests” who were advisors of the great chief Powhatan and who, according to Strachey, convinced that powerful leader to order the slaughter of the survivors of the missing colony. Strachey reports that some escaped, but none ever had communication with Jamestown.

There are several problems with accepting Strachey's account. To begin with, it is not at all certain, and indeed doubtful, that Powhatan controlled the area where the surviving colonists were to be found.

Moreover, it strains logic to accept that a small band of whites, intermixed with Indians, could have been the objects of such hatred as Strachey describes. Logic indicates that the Indians would have turned on the Jamestown settlers, rather than upon those far removed in North Carolina. In addition, Indian societies were extraordinarily tolerant toward people who willingly joined with them, and there's little reason to believe that this wasn't the case concerning the colonists from Roanoke Island.

ENGLISH-SPEAKING INDIANS

In the mid-seventeenth century, two more adventurous individuals braved the hazards of travel into little-known regions and reported their findings. The first was the Reverend Morgan Jones, who claimed to have marched to North Carolina from Port Royal, South Carolina, in 1660, and to have been captured and then befriended by Indians who spoke English. His descriptions indicate the possibility of his having been in the area of Robeson County, the central location of the Lumbees. Though Jones makes no mention of the “Lost Colony,” nor of his captors having a European culture, the fact of his having found natives who spoke English certainly indicates outside influence. Unfortunately, the reliability of Jones' letter is questionable in that it was not written until 1686 and the only extant copy is a newspaper record of the letter, published in the Gentlemen's Gazette in 1840.

The second adventurer who traveled through parts of North Carolina in the seventeenth century was John Lederer, a German who began his expedition in Virginia on May 20, 1670, and ended it back in that colony on July 18, 1670. If the information contained in Lederer's account is accurate, it appears that he entered the state at a north-central location (Warren County, N. C.), traveled eastward toward the Roanoke River area, proceeded southwestward through the vicinity of Robeson County, and then crossed into South Carolina. The route of his march has been ascertained both by geographical features he noted and by Indian tribes with which he came into contact. He claimed to have visited, among major tribes, the Chowanoc, Tuscarora,
Cheraw, and Santee Indians; the first two were in North Carolina and the latter two in South Carolina. The great difficulty with Lederer’s information is that two months for such a journey through largely wilderness conditions seems too brief a span of time. It is quite possible that some of Lederer’s material is factual, and other information hearsay. At any rate, the most important statement he made concerning the possible fate of the “Lost Colony” came when he was in the border area of the Carolinas. Lederer wrote of his visit: “Here I made a day’s stay to inform myself further in these countries; and understood both from the Usheries (Santee) and some Sara (Cheraw) Indians that come to trade with them, that two days’ journey and a half from hence to the southwest, a powerful nation of bearded men were seated, which I suppose to be the Spaniards, because the Indians never have any, it being a universal custom among them to prevent their growth by plucking the young hair out by the roots.” While it is possible that the bearded men were Spaniards, or that they were Englishmen from a Barbadian colony on the lower Cape Fear River, it is also possible that they were English survivors of the “Lost Colony” intermixed with Indians and removed inland from the coast.

In 1709, John Lawson, surveyor-general of North Carolina and a long-time friend of the Indians in the colony, published his History of Carolina. This work recounted Lawson’s journey from Charleston, South Carolina, northward to the Neuse River area of North Carolina. Lawson was an observant and perceptive traveler, and his record of what he did and saw constitutes one of the best sources modern historians have on the geography and peoples of the areas of the Carolinas as yet not settled by Europeans. Indeed, Lawson’s account is so reliable that he has been labeled the “first North Carolina historian.”

Lawson’s journal indicates that he traveled up the Santee and Wateree Rivers, across the foothills of the Carolinas to the headwaters of the tributaries of the Neuse, and then down those rivers to the coast. He apparently passed through the country of the Catawbas, the Tuscaroras, and the Corees. Interestingly, Lawson notes that as he approached the coast of North Carolina he was given two chickens by friendly Indians—a clear indication of contact with Europeans because the eastern Indians of North America had no domestic fowl prior to the coming of the whites. During his travels, Lawson gained the services of an Indian guide named Enoe-Will, a man “always ready to serve the English, not out of gain, but real affection.” Based on accounts of his youth, related by Enoe-Will, Lawson deduced that he was a Coree Indian. One night after making camp, Lawson pulled out a copy of an illustrated Bible which the guide asked to see. Lawson granted the guide’s request, and then asked Will if he did not wish to become a Christian; the Indian sharply declined. However, he stated his willingness to have Lawson take his son and educate him in the ways of the whites. Lawson’s comments make it clear that Enoe-Will was familiar with the ability of the English to “talk in a book” and to “make paper speak” (read and write). It is conjectured that the Coree Indians perhaps came into contact with Englishmen, possibly survivors of the “Lost Colony,” prior to or during Enoe-Will’s boyhood.

Further evidence of early English influence among some of the coastal Indians of North Carolina is given by Lawson in a part of his book entitled “A Description of North-Carolina.” In this part, Lawson wrote of Raleigh’s missing colony; he said:

A farther Confirmation of this we have from the Hatteras Indians, who either then lived on Roanoak-Island, or much frequented it. These tell us, that several of their Ancestors were white People, and could talk in a Book, as we do; the Truth of which is confirm’d by gray Eyes being found frequently amongst these Indians, and no others. They value themselves extremely for their Affinity to the English, and are ready to do them all friendly Offices. It is probable, that this Settlement miscarry’d for want of timely Supplies from England; or thro’ the Treachery of the Natives, for we may reasonably suppose that the English were forced to cohabit with them, for Relief and Conversation; and that in process of Time, they conform’d themselves to the Manners of their Indian Relations.

The sum total of these statements is that at least some of the missing Raleigh colonists survived, and intermingled with friendly
Indians. There is no other conclusion that can withstand close scrutiny. What became of the survivors cannot be ascertained from the comments of these early observers, but fortunately there is other evidence.

“LOST COLONY” SURVIVORS

In 1888, Hamilton MacMillan, one of the best white friends the Indians of Robeson County ever had, an able state legislator and local historian, published a pamphlet entitled “Sir Walter Raleigh’s Lost Colony: A Historical Sketch of the Attempts of Sir Walter Raleigh to Establish a Colony in Virginia, with the Traditions of an Indian Tribe in North Carolina, Indicating the Fate of the Colony of Englishmen Left on Roanoke Island in 1587.” In this work MacMillan vigorously defended the tradition that at least some of the Raleigh colonists survived and joined with Manteo’s tribe migrating ultimately to Robeson County. MacMillan so strongly believed this, that, the year prior to publishing his pamphlet he succeeded in getting the North Carolina General Assembly to designate the Indians of Robeson County as the Croatan Indians, erroneously believing this to be the name of the tribe with which the colonists took refuge.\(^\text{1}\)

MacMillan’s position was supported by a prominent lawyer and businessman in Robeson named Angus Wilton McLean, who became a governor of North Carolina in the 1920’s. Although McLean believed strongly that there was Cherokee blood among people in the area, he definitely accepted the Lumbee tradition of “Lost Colony” descent. McLean wrote, in a letter to the Commissioner of Indian Affairs in 1914; “My opinion is, from a very exhaustive examination... that these Indians are not only descendants of Sir Walter Raleigh’s lost colony... but that they are also mixed with the Cherokee Indians.” This future governor went on to say that the Lumbees “from time immemorial” have contended that they were “of Cherokee descent and they further have a tradition among them that their ancestors, or some of them, came from ‘Roanoke and Virginia.’ Roanoke and Virginia, of course, originally comprised all of eastern North Carolina, including Roanoke Island, the settlement of Sir Walter Raleigh’s lost colony.” The relationship of the Cherokee and Lumbee people will be examined shortly, but the important point is that McLean, a learned and competent man, was convinced and had long heard that the Lumbees could trace their families back to the missing Raleigh Colony.

Stephen B. Weeks, a professional historian with a national reputation, was also a strong proponent of the “Lost Colony” thesis. In 1891, Weeks published, in the Papers of the American Historical Association, an article entitled “The Lost Colony of Roanoke: Its fate and survival.” After examining the evidence, oral and written, Professor Weeks concluded: “The Croatans (Lumbees) of to-day claim descent from the lost colony. Their habits, disposition, and mental characteristics show traces of Indian and European ancestry. Their language is the English of three hundred years ago, and their names are in many cases the same as those borne by the original colonists. No other theory of their origin has been advanced, and it is confidently believed that the one here proposed is logically and historically the best, supported as it is both by external and internal evidence. If this theory is rejected, then the critic must explain in some other way the origin of a people which, after the lapse of three hundred years, show the characteristics, speak the language, and possess the family names of the second English colony planted in the western world.”

In 1914, the United States Senate adopted a resolution authorizing the Secretary of the Interior “to cause an investigation to be made of the condition and tribal rights of the Indians of Robeson and Adjoining counties of North Carolina...” To carry out this investigation, Special Indian Agent O. M. McPherson was sent to Robeson County. Through numerous interviews, examination of pertinent literature, and historical research, McPherson produced an extensive and thorough report both on the history and existing condition of the Lumbees. In the course of his investigation, McPherson confronted the question of the relationship of the Lumbees to Raleigh’s Lost Colony. The agent wrote:

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1. As noted earlier in the text, Croatan was a place occupied by Hatteras Indians and MacMillan should have sought recognition for the people as descendants of that historic tribe.
"There is a tradition among these people at the present time that their ancestors were the lost colony, amalgamated with some tribe of Indians. This tradition is supported by their looks, their complexion, color of skin, hair and eyes, by their manners, customs and habits, and by the fact that while they are, in part, of undeniable Indian origin, they have no Indian names and no Indian language." When his investigation was complete, McPherson was convinced of the validity of the Lumbee claim of descent from the "Lost Colony."

But what is the specific evidence on which these prominent men and scholars rest their case? Generally, they were all convinced that the colonists were not really lost—that they simply moved to the mainland to live with friendly Indians, thus tying their future to that of their native brothers. In other words, they accepted the testimony of John White, John Smith, William Strachey and others. The failure of early adventurers to make direct contact with the survivors did not distress them, because they realized that Croatoan, to which the settlers indicated they removed, was not a clearly defined location; some accounts and maps indicate that it was an island to the south of Roanoke, while other sources indicate that it was a part of the mainland. In fact, no one knew exactly where the settlers went. It is quite possible that the word "Croatoan" meant more than one particular place. "Croatoan" might have been the designation for a hunting area to the Hatteras people, a designation the white settlers would not necessarily have understood. Consequently, finding Croatoan might not have been as simple as even John White had supposed.

THE RECORDS OF HISTORY

All these scholars were impressed by the names found among the Lumbees, clearly similar to some of those listed on the John White log. There were one hundred and seventeen settlers still on Roanoke Island when the governor sailed back to England for additional supplies in 1587. Among those settlers there were ninety-five different surnames. As counted by Hamilton MacMillan, forty-one of these surnames (more than forty-three per-
One is reminded that these speech characteristics were present when the first whites came into contact with the Lumbees in the early eighteenth century and that they persisted to a considerable extent until the 1950's. More important, no one has yet offered an alternative explanation as to how these people learned to speak that type of English and made it their natural language, if they were not influenced by settlers from Raleigh's missing colony.

Still, all the evidence offered to this point does not satisfy the skeptics. Samuel Ashe, a writer determined to preserve the purity and romance of the "Lost Colony," even in defiance of logic, and evidence to the contrary, wrote concerning the Lumbees: "Because names borne by some of the colonists have been found among a mixed race in Robeson County, now called Croatans (Lumbees), an inference has been drawn that there was some connection between them. It is highly improbable that English names would have been preserved among a tribe of savages beyond the second generation, there being no communication except with other savages." In other words, most scholars invariably argue that if the Raleigh colonists went to live with Manteo and his people, they would, in due course, have adopted the Indian's culture, rather than the reverse occurring. This is particularly interesting, because virtually no one seems to have considered the demography of the situation. Many Indian villages consisted of as few as ten to fifteen families, and this was quite possibly the case with Manteo's village. If so, and this is more logical than assuming that there were hundreds of Hatteras people living at Croatan then it is indeed conceivable that the English culture predominated and the Indians were assimilated by the whites. Even the skeptics are unable to explain how the Lumbees came to have their distinctively English culture. Moreover, even Ashe, noted for his white supremacist attitudes in the late nineteenth century, admitted that "...many persons believed them to be the descendants of the Lost Colony; and the Legislature has officially designated them an 'Croatans;' and has treated them as Indians."

It is also important to note that there are traditions among the Lumbees that their ancestors moved from their former coastal homes to the Black River area of North Carolina in the vicinity of present-day Sampson County. The time of their removal from the Black River region to the banks of the Lumbee River is uncertain, but all the traditions of the people point to a time prior to the Tuscarora War, and it seems likely that they were settled in Robeson County as early as 1650. All of this, though based on oral history, again seems logical, for Indians were a mobile people and certainly the whites who had joined them would have wanted to avoid conflict with any hostile people. The fact of their difference would have made this mixed group wary of other peoples, particularly if the white culture prevailed, as seems likely. Understandably, they would have moved into a largely unsettled area and continued to seek a location which would guarantee them the most isolation. Robeson County would have been viewed as the "promised land" for a people seeking to escape contact, because this county was virtually surrounded by swamps for centuries, with only a few trails cut through it. It was one of the last areas settled by whites, and one of the least desirable locations from the standpoint of most Indians. A people who sought isolation would certainly find it in Robeson, and they did. In short, geography seems to be the real explanation as to why the Lumbees retained the English language and mode of living, their legacy from the "Lost Colony."

While proof of Lumbee descent from the Lost Colony, in the form of birth records and other documents is most unlikely to be found, the circumstantial evidence, when joined with logic, unquestionably supports the Lumbee tradition that there was a real and lasting connection with the Raleigh Settlement. The survival of colonists' names, the uniqueness of the Lumbee dialect in the past, the oral traditions, the demography of sixteenth century North Carolina, the mobility of the Indian people, human adaptability and the isolation of Robeson County, all prove the "Lost Colony" theory. When one combines these factors with the determination of men to survive regardless of the century in which they live, and the fact that no one can satisfactorily explain the English culture of the Lumbees—a culture obviously adopted over a long period of time, for all traces of Indian culture could not have been...
obliterated in one or even two generations—no other conclusion is reasonable.