

Research into Lumbee Claims of Tribal Affiliation

Since the late 1880s, the group currently calling itself the Lumbee Tribe of North Carolina has been seeking recognition as an Indian tribe from the Federal government, including a current effort for Congressional legislation. The issues of this potential recognition are fraught with foreseeable negative consequences due to the absence of evidence of any specific previous historic tribes in Lumbee history. The history and apparent lack of any previous historic tribes of the Lumbee require the specialized research components of the Office of Federal Acknowledgement to provide a comprehensive report on the Lumbee to Congress prior to the consideration of any new recognition legislation.

Early Claims of Tribal Progenitors and Theories

Tribal progenitors of the Lumbee have been theorized since the late 19th century. Still, evidence of any tribal affiliations of ancestral families of the present-day Lumbee has never been found to meet any reliable standard. Beginning in the 1880s, various non-Lumbee individuals have posited theories for the past tribal affiliations of the Lumbee group in and around Robeson County, North Carolina.

The “Lost” Colony of Roanoke Island

The first well-known theory of Lumbee tribal ancestry was Hamilton McMillan’s 1885 “Lost” British colony of Roanoke Island and the Croatoan Indians. In his book, McMillan shortened Croatoan to “Croatan.” Many Lumbee people and the State of North Carolina adopted this unsubstantiated affiliation until white people in Robeson County began using a shortened form of this name as a slur. McMillan also claimed Lumbee people were lineal descendants of the Roanoke Colony based on his assertion that 41 Roanoke colony surnames were present in

Lumbee families.¹ However, genealogical evidence of such descent does not exist. In reviewing the surnames of the Roanoke colonists, McMillan's assertions that 41 of the colonists' surnames existed in 19th century Lumbee families was completely erroneous. The sole surname in common is Brooke/Brooks and perhaps Berrye/Berry, although neither are uncommon English surnames. By the late 17th century, colonists with these surnames had established families in North Carolina and Virginia.² There is no genealogical connection of lineal descent between Lumbee progenitors and the Roanoke colonists or their Indian allies of the Outer Banks.

In 1891, another North Carolinian, Steven Weeks, published a more formal version of McMillan's theory. Although Weeks used better citations when going over the known history of English exploration, the circumstances of the Roanoke Island colony, and early historical maps showing various supposed locations of the Croatoan or Dasamonguepeuk sites, there are no citations for his theories concerning what may have happened to the colonists after the Roanoke Island settlement was found to be abandoned. Weeks theorized that the Hatteras Indians, who he found were likely the tribe referred to earlier as "Croatoans,"³ "may have come into communication with kindred tribes on the Chowan and Roanoke rivers, to which they *seem* to have gone at a later period." (emphasis added)⁴ Weeks then indicated that his supposition was "one end of the chain of evidence in this history of survivals"⁵ without evidence, documents

¹ McMillan, Hamilton. *Sir Walter Raleigh's Lost Colony*. Wilson, North Carolina, *Advance Presses*, 1888. pp. 22-24. See: [Sir Walter Raleigh's Lost Colony - Google Books](#).

² See: [A List of Participants in the Roanoke Voyages - Fort Raleigh National Historic Site \(U.S. National Park Service\)](#).

³ *Ibid.* The meaning and spellings of "Croatoan" and "Croatan" were used flexibly from 1587 through the 19th century. "Croatoan," although used in the 17th century as a name for the people who lived at Croatoan village, was rectified during the 18th century, when the people of that area told colonists they were the Hatteras. "Croatan" was another attribution to the people of Croatoan village.

⁴ Weeks, Stephen B. *The Lost Colony of Roanoke: Its Fate and Survival*. New York, New York, *Knickerbocker Press*, 1891, p. 25. See: [00013444.pdf \(ecu.edu\)](#).

⁵ *Ibid.*

indicating a chain of evidence, or a supportable history of survivals of the Roanoke colony or their Indian allies.

He then continued his “chain of evidence” theme:

The other end of the chain is to be found in a tribe of Indians now living in Robeson county [sic] and the adjacent sections of North Carolina, and recognized officially by the State in 1885 as Croatan Indians. These Indians are believed to be the lineal descendants of the colonists left by John White on Roanoke Island in 1587. The migrations of the Croatan tribe from former homes farther to the east can be traced by their traditions...⁶

The fallacy presented here is the lack of evidence of the amalgamation of the Roanoke Island colonists and the Croatoan or Hatteras Indians following the colony's abandonment. There is also a lack of correlating sources of any migration of a group or portion of a tribe from the Outer Banks through northeastern North Carolina and then southwest into Robeson County and surrounding areas prior to the mid-18th century.

Early historical sources have fed into this “Lost Colony” theory, based on jumps made by European observers from general comments made by various, unnamed indigenous individuals. In 1654, Francis Yeardley, a Virginian born about 1622 and the son of an early colonial governor, wrote to a former treasurer of the Virginia Company in England regarding his travels among some of the indigenous peoples of what is now northeast North Carolina. He wrote of his associations with a “king” of a tribe “Rhowanoke,” and his subsequent meeting with along with this king with the “king” of the Tuscarora (Tuskarorawes). He stated a Spaniard was living among the Tuscarora at the time with “about thirty in family, seven of whom are negroes” who

⁶ Ibid.

had been with the tribe for about seven years, approximately since 1647.”⁷ Yeardley appeared to have met the Rhowanoke king through a fur trader who had met this king on Roanoke Island “and shewed them the ruins of Sir Walter Raleigh’s [sic] fort, from whence I received a sure token [unspecified] of their being there.”⁸ Yeardley further related a story which was repeated by another Carolina traveler almost 60 years later: that the Rowanoke king brought his “only” son to Yeardley to be educated and brought up in Christianity in the Virginia colony. Yeardley did not record any mention that the Roanokes or the Tuscaroras related information that there was any European ancestry among them, although the Tuscaroras had a Spaniard living with them at the time.

Over 50 years later in 1709, John Lawson wrote of the Indian interpreter who joined him on his travels, Enoe-Will, the “chief Man” of “the Shoccories, mixt with the Enoe-Indians,”⁹ who similarly asked that his only son Jack be taught by Lawson to “talk in that Book and make Paper speak,” an episode which mirrors Yeardley’s encounter with the unnamed “Rhowanoke king” in 1654.¹⁰

Lawson also remarked on relations between English traders and Native women, stating:

The English traders are seldom¹¹ without an Indian Female for his Bed-fellow, alledging [sic] these Reasons as sufficient to allow of such a Familiarity. First, They being remote from any white People, that it

⁷ *Narratives of Early Carolina, 1650-1708. Edited by Alexander S. Salley ...* New York, Ch. Scribner’s Sons, 1911, pp. 25-27. See: [Narratives of early Carolina, 1650-1708 : Salley, A. S. \(Alexander Samuel\), 1871-1961, editor : Free Download, Borrow, and Streaming : Internet Archive.](#)

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 26.

⁹ Lawson, John. *A New Voyage to Carolina*. London, 1709 p. 56. See: [A new voyage to Carolina; : containing the exact description and natural history of that country: together with the present state thereof. And a journal of a thousand miles, travel'd thro' several nations of Indians. Giving a particular account of their customs, manners, &c.](#)

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 59.

¹¹ As customary spelling of the late 17th and early 18th centuries, a letter f was used in place of the current use of the letter s.

preserves their Friendship with the Heathens, they esteeming a white Man's Child much above one of their own getting...¹²

If these customs of sending Indian boys to receive English education and Indian women bearing English traders' children were unremarkable in the first decade of the 18th century among the Indians of North Carolina, there were apparently many families who raised these mixed-blood children in their communities from the mid-17th into the 18th centuries. These mixed-blood children would know their fathers were English and "spoke from a book." The tradition of European descent among northeastern North Carolina tribes would be better explained by these strategies of establishing kinship with European colonists through children and the education of young Indian men rather than a more fanciful attribution to an amalgamation with early colonists whose fate remains unknown.

Attempting to bridge a 300-year silence between a historical tribe and a group several hundred miles away without clear knowledge of which specific tribe(s) or indigenous languages, clans, families, or cultural traditions connected with the earlier tribe(s) does not demonstrate descent. Weeks had described the Lumbee group as "lineal descendants" from the Roanoke Island colonists and the Croatan/Hatteras. This lineal descent claim was then and remains today a claim that cannot be substantiated unless a genealogy showing such descent can be documented.

¹² Lawson, John. *A New Voyage to Carolina*. London, 1709 p. 29. See: [A new voyage to Carolina; : containing the exact description and natural history of that country: together with the present state thereof. And a journal of a thousand miles, travel'd thro' several nations of Indians. Giving a particular account of their customs, manners, &c.](#)

Appropriation of Cherokee Identity

In 1911-1912, due to the use of “Croatan” as a slur, the legislature of North Carolina revised the name of the Lumbee group to the “Indians of Robeson County.” However, by 1913, another name change was legislated by North Carolina on request of the group to become the “Cherokee Indians of Robeson County,” and Congress was asked to do the same.¹³ This was unfortunate, as the Lumbee group has no historical, genealogical, or cultural ties to any actual Cherokee tribe. The claim of Cherokee descent was drawn from legends surrounding the return of Col. John Barnwell’s expedition force from the 1712-1713 Tuscarora War. Legends have grown up around this militia force that on the return from fighting, some Cherokees elected to remain in Robeson (then Bladen) County.¹⁴ Without any genealogical evidence, this legend cannot be supported, and Barnwell’s force was made up of other tribes, predominantly Yamassee and Essaw, as Barnwell was the British trader in their territory. While there may have been some individual Cherokee men in either Barnwell’s or the later Col. Moore’s force, these individual men, from a society that reckoned societal memberships and responsibilities through the maternal line, could not have conferred a Cherokee identity to children or a family in Robeson County. Any children of such men would be the primary responsibility of their maternal relatives, not their father. While this legend persists within the community, Lumbee sources have admitted that the “Cherokee” appellation was more for the convenience of presenting a recognizable tribal name to state and federal authorities, rather than an actual tribal affiliation.¹⁵

¹³ This was a change from the short-lived name of “Indians of Robeson County.” The Lumbee understood that a specific tribal appellation was important; however, the appropriation of an unsupportable designation underscores the lack of any previous historical tribes from which they were descended.

¹⁴ Dial, Adolph L., and David K. Eliades. *The Only Land I Know*. Syracuse University Press, 1 Feb. 1996, pp 14-16.

¹⁵ Lowery, Malinda Maynor. *The Lumbee Indians: An American Struggle*. Chapel Hill, The University of North Carolina Press, 2018, p. 132.; Dial and Eliades, p. 16.

Emergence of a 'Siouan' Identity

By 1932, the Lumbee had organized a “Cherokee Business Committee” which continued to lobby for recognition under the name of “Cherokee Indians of Robeson County” despite the absence of evidence connecting the Lumbee to any Cherokee identity, as well as over the strenuous objections of the Eastern Band of Cherokee.¹⁶ The emerging Indian policies under the Office of Indian Affairs (OIA) focused on providing Indian tribes mechanisms for more independent self-government, and the “Cherokee Business Committee” was eager to be included. The 1932 recognition bill was similar to the 1915 and 1924 recognition bills in that it would declare a historic tribal affiliation without any investigation.¹⁷ The Senate Committee on Indian Affairs, however, submitted the bill to Commissioner of Indian Affairs Charles Rhodes with a request for a report. The Rhodes report, quoting as it did from a 1907 article by James Mooney and not addressing any historic tribal affiliation, ensured the bill would not be advanced and began causing political consternation within the Lumbee community. By 1933, after the death of the 1932 bill, the OIA, after a meeting with Lumbee representatives, selected John Swanton to research and report on any previous historical tribes of the Lumbee.¹⁸

Swanton used geographic locations to construct his determination that “placed particular Indian groups at certain locations during the colonial period.”¹⁹ Based on this entirely indirect and faulty reasoning involving only geography without evidence of family locations, Swanton declared in his report that the Lumbee were descended from the Cheraw and Keyauwee.²⁰ This

¹⁶ Lowery, Malinda Maynor. *Lumbee Indians in the Jim Crow South*. Univ of North Carolina Press, 2010, pp. 96-97.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 98-99.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 107.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁰ *Ibid.*

report and conclusion were the basis for the development of the appellation of “Siouan,” as the Cheraw and Keyauwee spoke Siouan languages. This report helped drive an emerging political split among the Lumbee, between those who preferred the appellation of “Cherokee” and those who were in favor of the Cheraw or “Siouan” name based on Swanton’s report.²¹

The faction in favor of the new Cheraw/Keyauwee attribution formed a “Cheraw Business Committee” to promote the assertion by Swanton of a Cheraw tribal antecedent and distinguish themselves from the “Cherokee” political faction. This Cheraw name was suddenly changed following correspondence by the Secretary of the Interior Ickes to the Senate Committee on Indian Affairs asking that the name be changed again to the “Siouan Indians of Lumber River.”²²

In response to Secretary Ickes’ new proposed, imposed name, the Cheraw faction of Lumbee then formed the “General Council of Siouan Indians.” Not only did Ickes’ correspondence impose yet another name change from outsiders for the Lumbee, but the Secretary also noted the lack of any treaty obligations to the group. Ickes may have thought this new name would embrace multiple tribal identities of the Lumbee, but instead, this name complicated the issue of previous historical tribes by using a linguistic group rather than any specific historical tribe.

The political split between the “Cherokee” faction and the “Siouan” faction continued until the present-day designation of Lumbee was adopted in 1953. There does not exist any historical tribal or cultural basis for this name, taken from the Lumber River, previously known as Drowning Creek. There have been claims since the late 19th century that Drowning Creek was

²¹ Ibid., pp. 108-109.

²² Ibid., p. 109.

called the “Lumbee” river long ago, but there is no documentation of Drowning Creek’s aboriginal name prior to the early land grants where Drowning Creek was the only name used.

Cheraw Connection Theories

As previously noted, John Swanton’s theory of possible Cheraw descent as part of the Lumbee group has extraordinarily little evidence to substantiate it. Documents that have been cited as documenting Cheraw presence in the Robeson County Drowning Creek area during the 18th century are two 1739 complaints of Welsh settlers in South Carolina, and another complaint in 1754 concerning a general description of “50 families” that were not described as Indian.

In March 1739, a dispute was brought to the South Carolina Council by the Welsh settlers of lands purchased from the Saraw (Cheraw) and Pee Dee Indians, who were still using the lands as their usual hunting grounds.²³ The Welsh settlers complained that a “Robert” and 14 other head men signed two land conveyances covering the lands of their settlement.²⁴ Certainly, if this conveyance exists anywhere, even as a transcript with the signers’ names, this would begin to document the people living there. Such a document was not provided in the 1987 Lumbee Petition #65 to the Office of Federal Acknowledgment (OFA). In addition, the Petition cites a 1771 news account of the capture of fugitives at “Charraw.”²⁵ The article locates the capture “near Drowning-Creek, in the Charraw Settlement.” This is the first mention of any Cheraw living in a settlement near Drowning Creek, rather than on the Pee Dee River or in the Charraw village associated with the Catawba.²⁶ If this 1771 settlement is the “Cheraw core” asserted by

²³ Lumbee Petition, Vol. 1, p. 15. The location is still well to the northwest of the Drowning Creek area.

²⁴ Ibid. The names of the reserved old fields owners, Laroche and Thomas Grooms, are listed.

²⁵ South-Carolina Gazette, *Winsler Driggers*. Charleston, South Carolina. October 3, 1771. See: [Oct 03, 1771, page 2 - The South-Carolina Gazette at Newspapers.com](#).

²⁶ See: [Feb 06, 2011, page A1 - The Herald at Newspapers.com](#). The villages further west in South Carolina are the historically better known. The Catawba town site of Charraw was excavated along with five other townsites in

the Petition as the primary historical tribe, this argument and all associated evidence should have been expanded to document this claim of descent. More likely, however, the “Charraw Settlement” was referring to the colonists’ town of Charraw, South Carolina, west-southwest of Robeson County, North Carolina. Nothing in the article indicates the posse looking for the fugitives crossed the North Carolina border to capture them, or that they were brought back to South Carolina in order to be executed under South Carolina jurisdiction.

There also appears to have been confusion between the presence of the Cheraw and Pee Dee Indians and a separate “mix’d crew” of families in the Drowning Creek area during the 18th century. In 1739, Welsh settlers on the Pee Dee River complained to the South Carolina Council in March that Peedee and Cheraw Indians were “running amongst their settlements under the pretense of hunting.”²⁷ In July, 1739, the Welsh settlers made a second complaint to the Council, this time of “outlaws and fugitives, most of whom are mullato [sic] or of a mixed blood, living adjacent to them are a pest and a nuisance.”²⁸ Contrary to the Petition’s assertions, it is not logical to draw the conclusion that these complaints refer to the same group. The March complaint clearly states it was Pee Dee and Cheraw Indians who the Welsh were having difficulties with, and that these Indians were “running through” their settlements while on hunting trips. The July complaint just four months later, however, refers to a much more ambiguous group, and the quote in the Petition does not make clear the specific complaint or composition of this group, except that they were seen as “outlaws and fugitives.”²⁹ The lack of

western South Carolina during 2010-2011. The town of Cheraw is located west-northwest of Robeson County on the Pee Dee River. The mention of another Cheraw settlement in the Drowning Creek area is consistent with indications the Cheraw may have split up before or after some families going to Catawba. However, if the 1771 settlement is on Drowning Creek, additional research to more firmly document this is necessary for evidence of a previous historic tribe.

²⁷ Lumbee Petition, Vol. III, p. 3.

²⁸ Ibid., pp. 3-4.

²⁹ Ibid.

specific identification of the second group, so soon after the first complaint specifically refers to the Pee Dee and Cheraw, does not lead to the conclusion that the Welsh were complaining about the same group. The complaint about the Peedee and Cheraw never described them as “outlaws and fugitives.” Indeed, as the former occupants of the Welsh settler lands, the Cheraw and Pee Dee may have considered the lands still open to traditional hunting. The specific complaints about the “outlaws and fugitives” are ambiguous, as was their identity, and were limited to the Welsh settlers’ statement that “living adjacent to them are a pest and a nuisance.” In 1754, another group, never identified as Indians, appeared to be similar in description to the 1739 group, although this “mix’d crew” was located well south of the Indians noted in 1739 “on Drowning Creek on the head of the Little Pedee.”³⁰ Dr. Robert K. Thomas, in his “A Report on Research of Lumbee Origins,” came to the same conclusion, finding that the group referred to were not Indian or mixed-blood Indians:

I think his (Wesley White) citation of 1754 does not refer to Indians or to even people of mixed racial background. In 1754, there were, in fact, Scots settlers living on Drowning Creek...They were in 1750 settled on Drowning Creek which was the border between Anson and Bladen Counties, now the border between Hoke and Scotland Counties. There are family traditions that many Scots in these early days were squatters on the land...I think that if they had been mixed racially they would have been referred to simply as Mulattoes...I would think “mixed crew” would mean perhaps mixed in language spoken, in nationality, in geographical origins...It is very possible that a group of Scots on Drowning Creek, some speaking English, some speaking Gaelic, perhaps of varied educational backgrounds, might seem like a “mixed crew” to a standard Englishman from further south on the North Carolina coast.³¹

Additionally, the 1754 “mix’d crew” was said to have been comprised of 50 families.

This was larger than the first enumeration of the individuals claimed as Indian ancestors in

³⁰ Ibid., p. 4.

³¹ Robert K. Thomas, *A Report on Research of Lumbee Origins*. c. 1977, pp. 11-12.

Petition #65 on the 1790 Federal census. In 1790, the number of Robeson households of “All other Free” people was 47, numbering 245 individuals. An additional 32 “All other Free” people were present in white households.³² If the “mix’d crew” had been a developing tribal community in 1754, the expected population increase over the next 30+ years would be much greater. The assertion in the Petition that correlates to Section 83.7(A) of the 1978 regulations that “the first recorded contact with the Lumbee was in 1753 when 50 families were recorded as living as [sic] Drowning Creek” is inaccurate and unsupportable without further investigation of the composition of that community.³³ The core progenitor families of the Lumbee cited in the Petition and more recent works on the Lumbee were known and have records which place them in the early 1700s to the north and northeast of Robeson County.³⁴ These core progenitor families do not begin in historic Bladen County, but move from the north and northeast into the Drowning Creek area by the mid-18th century. The core families, Lowrie/Lowry/Lowrey, Oxendine, Locklear, Ivey, Chavers/Chavours/Chavis, etc. are never identified as Cheraw, or indeed, in the available documentation, as Indian during the 18th century. The use of the 1739 “outlaws and fugitives” and the 1754 “mix’d crew” as antecedents for the Lumbee, aside from lack of Indian identification, does not make sense from multiple historical aspects. From the mid-18th century onwards, these core progenitors and their descendants can be seen in the historic record as are many other families in the area. They paid taxes, petitioned the

³² U.S. Federal Census, 1790, North Carolina, Robeson, Not Stated. See: [Ancestry.com - 1790 United States Federal Census](#).

³³ Lumbee Petition, Vol. II, p. 4. This community was also located well south of Robeson County, at the confluence of the Little Pee Dee and Drowning Creek.

³⁴ For instance, John Oxendine, Sr. (b. abt. 1693) was indentured until the age of 31 in Northumberland County, Virginia and brought an action in court to win his freedom. He and his wife Sarah began their family and had their first five children baptized in Northumberland County before moving to Bladen County before 1750. See: [Ancestry.com - Virginia, Colonial Abstracts, 1632-1810](#) Thomas Kearsey (b. abt 1705) was born in southeastern Virginia and had moved to Bertie County by 1730 where his daughter Sally (Sarah) was born. Sally married James Lowrie who had land deeds in Bladen County prior to 1750.

government, testified about land deeds and sales, probated estates, and were described in some land records as “planters,” despite paying county taxes as free people of color and paying additionally for the women of their households. They were not part of any autonomous, indigenous community, but were participating in the wider colonial community as colonists subject to British rule.

1987 Lumbee Petition

Similar to Swanton’s theory, the 1987 Lumbee Petition asserted a “core Cheraw” identity; however, the scant evidence provided for this identity was made with documents that do not show what the Petition’s authors claimed they showed. For example, the Petition cited a 1725 map of North Carolina by John Herbert as showing “the earliest documentary evidence of Indian communities in the area of Drowning Creek.”³⁵ This map was not drawn to any realistic scale, and the Cheraw (Seraw) PeeDee locations are nowhere near Drowning Creek, which was not even shown on the map. These two 1725 villages are clearly located on the PeeDee River in South Carolina.³⁶ Malinda Lowery claimed, in *The Lumbee Indians*, that this 1725 map contains a marked village without a name; however, there are no unnamed villages on this map.³⁷ A contemporary map produced by the North Carolina Department of Cultural Resources denotes historical North Carolina tribes during the Tuscarora War era (1710-1713).³⁸ This map shows the Cheraw and Keyauwee residing well to the northwest of Drowning Creek and present-day Robeson County, contrary to the assertions of the Petition and other Lumbee sources. Based on

³⁵ 1987 Lumbee Petition, Vol. 1, p. 12.

³⁶ 1725 00 00 Herbert, John. Map of the Carolinas. See: [New map of his majesty's flourishing province of South Carolina - Digital Library of Georgia \(usg.edu\)](#). This village on the Pee Dee was approximately 200 miles northwest of historic Robeson County Lumbee settlements. “Saraw” is an earlier spelling of Cheraw.

³⁷ Lowery, *The Lumbee Indians*, p.34.

³⁸ See: [The Tuscarora War in North Carolina](#).

the 1739 land dispute, a Cheraw village was located in South Carolina, to the west of Cheraw lands sold to Welsh settlers. However, this village was still not in the area of Robeson County or Drowning Creek and associated swamps. No Lumbee families are documented as Cheraw or originating from any “Cheraw settlement.” Any “core” or “progenitor” families should have been named and evidence presented for determining Cheraw affiliation. The 1987 Petition is silent on these important points.

Another claim of Cheraw descent is made without evidence in *The Lumbee Indians: An American Struggle*. Lowery wrote that the progenitors, brothers Major and John Locklier, were born in Halifax County, in northeastern North Carolina and married “probably with Indian women who may have been affiliated with the Cheraw or another group that had made their homes there.”³⁹ The citation provided for this encompassing statement is not informative and cannot be reviewed, as it consists of correspondence which was not described or quoted.⁴⁰ The known historic locations of the Cheraw have been described, and they are all in southwestern or northwestern North Carolina and north central and western South Carolina. No Cheraw settlements in the northeast of North Carolina were noted on Herbert’s 1725 map. The claim that Major and John Locklier’s wives were Cheraw has no evidence to support it.⁴¹ The attribution of any previous affiliation with either the Cheraw or the Keyauwee from northeast North Carolina is insupportable based on evidence of Cheraw movements, locations and history.

Further, Cheraw history and genealogy do not support having been a “core” of the development of the Lumbee. Prior to the 1730s, the Cheraw moved around central-western South Carolina

³⁹ Lowery, *The Lumbee Indians*, p. 36.

⁴⁰ The footnote for this information is “Merrell to Rose, 18 October 1989.” No description of the contents of the correspondence is given.

⁴¹ See: Dial and Eliades, pp. 5-6.

and western/northwestern North Carolina, appearing on one map as having a village or town near the Virginia border in the general area of present-day Rockingham County. By the 1740s, the Cheraw had established a village in Catawba territory and as a result, merged with the Catawba. The Catawbas maintained their tribal relations and community autonomy into the 19th century, and, having a reservation in western South Carolina, did not participate in the wider colonial culture. While progenitors of the Lumbee have been Christian since their earliest historical records, the Catawba did not baptize their children until the 1880s, when genealogical records became more available. A review of Catawba surnames reveals the complete absence of any surnames in common with the Lumbee.⁴² Catawba people did not begin adopting English-style surnames until about 1730, and even by the 1780s, only 56% of Catawba men had actual surnames.⁴³ Despite contemporary claims, no evidence of intermarriage between Catawba/Cheraw and Lumbee individuals has been found. Additionally, the Catawba population had, from the late 1700s through the early 20th century, a severe imbalance of men-to-women ratio. Watson states that in 1840, there were 36 Catawba women to 12 men.⁴⁴ Had Catawba women been leaving their community or Lumbee men joining the community, that would be reflected in the censuses of the 19th century, in addition to expanding the surnames included in Catawba. There is no evidence that this happened, and the 1987 Lumbee Petition and more recent scholarship do not name or describe the purported “Cheraw core” of Lumbee progenitors. Any Cheraw identification as a “core” or historical antecedent requires additional and clear evidence.

⁴² Watson, Ian M. *Catawba Indian Genealogy*. State University of New York Press, 1995, Family sketches listed in Contents and pp. 15-82.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, p. 87.

⁴⁴ Watson, p. 85.

The identification of an individual's ethnicities in colonial North Carolina is difficult to uncover. Once Indian communities were no longer a military threat to colonists, the tribal designations were not regarded as relevant, especially following the final sales of 17th century reservations. There are some documents which do indicate Lumbee progenitors' ethnicity to some degree. For example, on a 1754 Muster roll for the Granville County Militia under Col. William Eaton, progenitor William Chavers and his sons William Jr. and Gilbert were listed. William Sr. was identified as Negro, and his sons as mulatto.⁴⁵ William Sr. (b. abt. 1710) resided in Granville County most of his life, and owned significant amounts of land in both Granville and neighboring Edgecombe County.⁴⁶ This family had been free for at least a generation, as William Sr.'s father owned land and his estate was probated in Granville County, identifying his wife and children as his heirs of his property.⁴⁷ Until further information regarding William Sr.'s wife is found, however, the designation of his sons as "mulatto" can only be stated to consist of black and something else. In another example, a list of individuals of the "Mob Railously Assembled" is extant in the records of the North Carolina General Assembly. On October 15, 1773, a list was sent to the North Carolina General Assembly concerning "the Mob Railously Assembled together in Bladen County."⁴⁸ The cover letter for this list calls the individuals "free Negroes and Mulattos" and does not mention any Indians or tribes. This document differs from the 1739 South Carolina complaint by Welsh settlers of a "mix'd crew" in that the 1773 North Carolina complaint lists the names of individuals "who infest this that County (Bladen) and annoy its Inhabitants."⁴⁹ This list contained potential Lumbee progenitors who may not have

⁴⁵ See: [Documenting the American South: Colonial and State Records of North Carolina](#).

⁴⁶ See: [Ancestry.com - North Carolina, U.S., Land Grant Files, 1693-1960](#).

⁴⁷ See: [Ancestry.com - North Carolina, U.S., Wills and Probate Records, 1665-1998](#).

⁴⁸ See: [Session of December, 1773: Lower House Papers; Petitions rejected, tabled, or not acted on - North Carolina Digital Collections](#).

⁴⁹ Ibid. Image page 19.

owned land in Bladen County, but were certainly related to family members who did own land.

A transcribed list of these individuals characterized by the cover letter as “free Negroes and Mulattos” follows:

- 1 Captain James Ivey
- 2 Joseph Ivey
- 3 Epharaim Sweat
- 4 William Chavoure Clark
Commonly called Boson Chevors
- 5 Richd. Groom
- 6 Bengman(?) Dees
- 7 William Sweat
- 8 George Sweat
- 9 Benjamin Sweat
- 10 William Groom Senr.
- 11 William Groom Junr.
- 12 Gidion Grant
- 13 Thos. Groom
- 14 James Pace
- 15 Isaac Vaun
- 16 (page torn) Stableton
- 17 Edward Locklear
- 18 Tiely(?) Locklear

Also listed were “Harbourers of the Rogues:” Major Locklear, Reeker (Rachel?) Groom, and Ester Cairsey (Kearsey).⁵⁰ In her book, *The Lumbee Indians*, Malinda Lowry conflated this 1773 list with correspondence of British Indian Agent James Stuart in 1775.⁵¹ The Stuart

⁵⁰ Ester or Estee Cairsey/Cearsey/Kearsey was likely the mother of Sally/Sarah Kearsey (b. abt. 1735), the wife of James Lowrie (b. abt. 1735). Ester may have resided at Indian Town in Bertie County, but her parentage or tribal affiliations, if any, are unknown.

⁵¹ Lowry, p. 42-43.

correspondence specifically referenced the Cherokee and Catawba, not any community in Bladen County. Stuart did note the apprehensions of the colonists that “the Negroes were immediately to be set free by Government and that Arms were to be given them to fall upon their Masters.”⁵²

As the 1773 “Mob Railously Assembled” list was tabled by the lower House of the North Carolina General Assembly, it is doubtful Stuart was aware of that list, and in any case, as Indian Agent, his duties and authority did not encompass any Indians east of Catawba territory.

This 1773 list had additional information, a petition, on a second page— although the petition does not appear to have survived. Without the entire list and petition to shed light on the events which led to the “mob railously assembled,” any speculation about the incident or incidents is useless for lack of evidence. Despite this lacking evidence, the Petition stated, “No other documents have been found that can shed light on this list; nonetheless, it is fair to **assume** that it refers to some confrontation between the inhabitants and the colonial government, probably over land.”(emphasis added)⁵³ The transmission letter indicates the list was sent by the magistrate of Bladen County for action by the colonial government, not a direct incident against the colonial government. As 13 of the 18 men named on this list were of families with known land holdings in Bladen County from at least the 1750s, a more likely assumption was this incident may have been over taxation, which at the time was falling more heavily on people of color than it had prior to 1780. In any case, this list is useful only to identify these individuals as having ethnicities other than white.

⁵² See: [Documenting the American South: Colonial and State Records of North Carolina](#).

⁵³ Lumbee Petition, Vol. 1, p. 16. (Emphasis added.)

Lumbee Historical Assertions, 2017-2025

As noted throughout this report, the Lumbee have never been able to demonstrate a connection to any previous historical tribe. Descent from the Roanoke colony and Croatoan people is unsubstantiated, as early intermarriage or associations are a more likely explanation of early European ancestry in indigenous communities. Descent from or connection to Cherokee tribes is improbable to the point of impossible. Connections or descent from Cheraw people cannot be substantiated.

In her 2018 book, Malinda Lowery posits that “Lumbee ancestors belonged to many of the dozens of nations that lived in a 44,000-square-mile territory.”⁵⁴ Far from clarifying any evidence of descent from previous historic tribes, this statement and the accompanying list of “Indians who moved to the present-day homeland” are simply a 16-tribe list of who’s who of historical tribes of northeast North Carolina and southeast Virginia.⁵⁵ Lowery’s list consists of “Yeopim, Potoskite, Nansemond, Nanticoke, Pamunkey, Gingaskin, Winyaw, Saponi, Weyanoke, Tuscarora, Tutelo, Wateree, Pee Dee, Coree, Neusiok, Cape Fear, and other Indigenous communities” not identified.⁵⁶ Yet once again, these identified tribes are not connected with the known progenitor individuals of the Lumbee. Prior to January 22, 2025, the official Lumbee website posted the same list as Lowery’s 2018 list. The 2017 archived webpage for Lumbee “History and Culture” stated Lumbee’s previous historical tribes were “survivors of tribal nations from the Algonquian, Iroquoian, and Siouan language families, including the Hatteras, the Tuscarora, and the Cheraw.”⁵⁷ No evidence was provided for those assertions. Presently, the

⁵⁴ Lowery, 2018, p. 18.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ See: [History and Culture | lumbee-tribe-of-nc.](#)

Lumbee website page “Origins and Migrations” references a map from *Lumbee Indians in the Jim Crow South* and states that the Lumbee “belong to three language families: * Eastern Siouan *Algonquian *Iroquoian.”⁵⁸ No evidence is provided for any previous historical tribes or languages proto-Lumbee ancestors may have used. A linguistic group does not confer cultural affiliation, nor does it specify descent from an antecedent tribe.

Federal Recognition Standards

The issue of previous historical tribes is not something to be shrugged off when it comes to the Federal recognition of Indian tribes. A general attribution of “Indian” or a claim to “Indian” ancestry does not meet the standard for recognition of an Indian tribe by either Congress or the OFA. The OFA regulation criterion of §83.11 (e) *Descent* requires that:

The petitioner’s membership consists of individuals who descend from a historical Indian tribe (or from historical Indian tribes that combined and functioned as a single autonomous political entity).

The documents being used by the Lumbee do not rise to the level of authoritative sources, nor when combined, do they become a reasonable chain of evidence. There is no evidence to indicate that the known progenitors of Lumbee amalgamated with Cheraw people in the areas of historic settlement in Robeson County.

The fast-changing and memory-holing web pages of the theoretical origins on the official Lumbee website indicate the group knows this issue is critical, and they have no chain of evidence for such descent from any Indian tribe. Genealogical research has provided much information about the progenitors’ settlement in the area of present-day Robeson, Cumberland,

⁵⁸ Lowery, 2010, p. 6.; See: [1b5843_444a9c2bf112479eb85987c0f8823fb4.pdf](#) [accessed 1/23/25].

and Anson counties, yet the parentage and ethnicities of those progenitors remain obscured. American Indian tribes do not have a government-to-government relationship with the U.S. Federal government because they are “Indian.” The tribes have this political relationship based on their status of autonomous sovereign entities prior to colonization. The Lumbee have never been autonomous during the historic period: they have, like other colonists and then American citizens, paid taxes, been counted on censuses, bought and sold land, made wills and probated their estates, and solemnized marriages with North Carolina marriage bonds or registrations. During the 19th century, non-Lumbees in North Carolina have acknowledged that the Lumbee, by whichever name was currently in use, were citizens of North Carolina and therefore of the United States. There is simply no evidence in current historical or genealogical research to connect Lumbee to any specific historical tribe or tribes. This lack of previous historic tribe(s) indicates that even if there is Indian ancestry in Lumbee, they would be Indian descendants and not an Indian tribe.