Historical Studies in Education / Revue d'histoire de l'éducation
ARTICLES / ARTICLES

Self-Determined Schools: Lumbee Education History in a Tri-racial System in Robeson County, North Carolina

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ABSTRACT
In 1885, North Carolina recognized the Croatan Indians as a third race in addition to Whites and Blacks, granting them state apportionments and a self-governed public school system in Robeson County. This legislation also established a tri-racial school system in the state. Over time, the Croatans, renamed Lumbee, became the largest tribe in the southeastern US. Despite racialization and ongoing appeals for additional school funding, the Lumbee found strength in their self-determination. They supported their schools through educational rallies and contributions of land, supplies, time, and labour. The Lumbee ancestors were committed to creating and maintaining community schools, a legacy that remains central to Robeson County and North Carolina's history. This article traces the history of Lumbee-controlled schools from 1885 to 1940.

RÉSUMÉ
En 1885, la Caroline du Nord a reconnu les Indiens Croatans comme une troisième race, aux côtés des Blancs et des Noirs, leur accordant des fonds publics et un système d'écoles publiques autogérées dans le comté de Robeson. Cette loi a également instauré un système scolaire triracial dans l'État. Au fil du temps, les Croatans, rebaptisés Lumbees, sont devenus la plus grande tribu du Sud-est des États-Unis. Malgré la racialisation et les demandes constantes de financement supplémentaire pour leurs écoles, les Lumbees ont puisé leur force dans leur autonomie. Ils ont soutenu leurs écoles par des manifestations éducatives et par de multiples dons de terres, de fournitures, de temps et de main-d'œuvre. Les ancêtres des Lumbees étaient attachés à la création et au maintien d'écoles communautaires, un héritage qui demeure au cœur de l'histoire du comté de Robeson et de la Caroline du Nord. Cet article retrace l'histoire des écoles gérées par les Lumbees de 1885 à 1940.

Introduction

Sun and spirits were high in Maxton, a rural town in Robeson County, North Carolina, on a day in late March 1909. A. B. Harden, a Croatan teacher at Little Zion School in Maxton, gave his end-of-the-school-year address outside his one-room,

https://doi.org/10.32316/hse-rhe.2026.5405

wood-framed school. Mr. Harden held the attention of the crowd of students, parents, county school leaders, and community members during his thirty-minute address.[1] Attendees also enjoyed a concert, declamations, dialogues recited by students, and speeches by community members that spoke of the school's high standards of excellence.[2] This closing celebration of Little Zion for the academic year exemplifies how Lumbee[3] schools in Robeson County served as community hubs for neighbours, teachers, parents, and Indigenous children. Although teachers had yet to be voted on by the school board and A. B. Harden did not know if he would be reinstated at Little Zion, his first year had had a positive impact, and the community already embraced him, calling him "our teacher."[4]

This article examines the history of the Lumbee-controlled schools within the public school system in Robeson County, North Carolina, from 1885 to 1940, where Little Zion and other schools were built and served as points of pride for communities across the county. These year markers represent when the Lumbee were legally recognized as a third race in addition to White and Black people by state legislators in 1885 and the height of school consolidations when small one-room schools like Little Zion became consolidated into larger schools in 1940. This article contextualizes the self-determination of the Lumbee, who advocated for their own school system and brought teachers, parents, principals, students, and the community together to provide schools like Little Zion for their children. Although racialized and recognized in legislation as a "third race" in 1885, the Lumbee were chronically underfunded in their school system. Nonetheless, they built a legacy of Indigenous public education in Robeson County and North Carolina. The Lumbees' self-determination is demonstrated in their development and maintenance of a third county public school system alongside the racially segregated White and Black systems and within a North Carolina state system of schools that promoted the false promise of *separate with no discrimination*. This article shares the history of this self-determination as seen through the Lumbee's small community schools and the Lumbee Normal School.

The Lumbee People's self-determination in the development of their school and education history spans over 140 years; this article concentrates on 60 of those years. State legislation that led to the identification of a third race—the Croatan Indian—and the third school system that emerged in Robeson County will be explored. This historiography contextualizes the Lumbee educational system within a US settler colonial and racist Southern context in which self-determination to create public schools for a tri-racial (Black, "Indian," and White) community meant a constant struggle against chronic underfunding by state and county officials. Important to the article is identifying Lumbee schools, teachers, and administrators by name. While these names are often absent from government documents, state reports, newspapers, and maps, other records do provide this information. This act of naming is necessary to fill gaps in historical knowledge and to counteract the ongoing omission of Indigenous Peoples and their collective contributions to education and United States histories, which continue the historical attempts at Indigenous erasure. This naming seeks to make Indigenous communities visible and centred in educational historical research.

Lumbee and Robeson County History

Two notable Lumbee historians, Adolph L. Dial and Malinda Maynor Lowery, have written extensively on the Lumbee People. While this paper does not focus on the broader history of the Lumbee, Dial and Maynor Lowery supply a brief history of the Lumbee People. Upon escaping the violence of the Revolutionary War and displacement from what is now known as Northern North Carolina and Virgina, Lumbee ancestors found refuge on land not controlled by either North or South Carolina.[5] In the early 1700s, many of those with Lumbee surnames "Hunt, Chavis, Lowry, Locklear" and those of the founding families "Driggers, Bones, Jacobs, Quick, Sweet, Oxendine, and Cooper" began to take up residence along Drowning Creek.[6] Historical records did not often connect individuals and communities with a tribal name; in fact, Maynor Lowery asserted that the ancestors of the Lumbee concerned themselves more with family ties and not "colonial record keeping."[7] For the Lumbee, what truly matters is how they have always understood and named themselves. This self-identification, often based on kinship and shared experiences rather than external labels, has been crucial to Lumbee identity. Foundational to the Lumbee story—and the story being recounted here—is resiliency in the face of white supremacy and settler colonialism and understanding of how the Lumbee describe identity for themselves.

The journey to that identity-building began in the 1750s, when Lumbee ancestors travelled from the Roanoke, Virginia, area to escape war. They migrated to the swamplands along Drowning Creek where they cultivated the land before the county's establishment.[8] These swamps were not ideal, but provided an escape from European control where Lumbee ancestors could farm the land and build a sense of belonging through kinship along Drowning Creek.[9] This bliss would not last long, for by the late 1770s, English and Scottish settlers had moved into areas inhabited by Indigenous Peoples along Drowning Creek and the relationship between them was further degraded by the Revolutionary War, which divided alliances among the Lumbee and the settlers.[10] In the aftermath of these conflicts, the area began to take on more formal political boundaries. Robeson County was established in 1787, two years prior to North Carolina statehood, and the county seat of Lumberton was named in 1788 along Drowning Creek.[11] By early 1800, outsiders had named the Drowning Creek area where the Lumbees resided Scuffletown, and the Lumbee added communities such as Prospect, Union Chapel, Saddletree, Fair Grove, and Moss Neck within the larger Scuffletown area.[12] The Lumbee continued farming and building kinship along Drowning Creek, and North Carolinians, like others in the nation, continued debates about slavery and sanctioned legislation to sustain harm to the Black and Indigenous communities.[13]

Federal recognition of the Lumbee is an ongoing tension, and they have endured decades of legislation, discussions, and visits from the federal government. For example, when Charles F. Pierce, the federal supervisor of "Indian" schools, visited in 1910, he instructed Lumbee leaders to stand next to the Chief of the Eastern Band of Cherokee for the purpose of comparing the physical attributes of the men and

determining whether the Lumbee matched those of the Cherokee. Pierce concluded in his report, which relied on blood quantum — the percentage of Indigenous blood a person possessed — to support his claim that he did not believe the Lumbee to be "full bloods" and therefore not eligible to receive federal funding.[14] The Lumbee reached out again to the federal government in 1913, and agent O. M. McPherson visited to determine the "Indianness" of the Lumbee; he again reported that according to the parameters set by the federal government, the Lumbee would not be obtaining federal recognition.[15] In 1932, Lumbee representatives travelled to Washington, DC, to meet with lobbyist and secretary of the American Indian Defense Association, John Collier, who they believed could help move Lumbee federal legislation forward.[16] Collier leaned on the expertise of a Smithsonian Institute anthropologist, John Swanton, who — without visiting Robeson County — concluded the Lumbee should be called "Cheraw," which he later updated to "Siouan Indians of Lumber River."[17] Swanton's report caused senators to propose a new bill recognizing the Lumbee as the Siouan Indians of Robeson County, a name assigned without input from the Lumbee community. These events yielded another name change applied to the tribe and another denial of federal recognition, and continued the Lumbee Peoples' journey to achieve recognition in a federal system that values anthropometrics and blood quantum to measure "Indian" identity.[18] Meetings among state and federal representatives would continue throughout the 1930s.

Official acknowledgement from the US government finally came in 1956 with the passage of the Lumbee Act, which recognized that the Lumbee are "Indian" — yet the act did not grant federal recognition to the community. This lack of federal recognition is upheld because of the ever-present need for Indigenous identity in the US to be held up against a standard of whiteness "where blood quantum and appearance were accurate markers of identity."[19] This refusal of federal recognition sought to relegate the Lumbee Tribe to a status as an "inferior group among inferior Indians by excluding them from benefits and services normally accorded to recognized tribes."[20] Parameters on Lumbee Indigeneity have historically been placed by federal institutions and White individuals, including legislators and academics, yet the Lumbee People have continued to centre their lived history, knowledge, and Elders. This self-determination is captured in this history of the Lumbee-controlled schools.

Although not recognized by the federal government until 2026, in the late 1970s, the North Carolina Commission of Indian Affairs (NCCIA) was created and the Indians of Person County (changed by the tribal community to Sappony in 2003), Haliwa-Saponi, Coharie, Waccamaw-Siouan, Lumbee, Meherrin, Occaneechi Band of Saponi Nation, and the federally recognized Eastern Band of Cherokee represented the eight Indigenous Nations in North Carolina.[21] The Lumbee Nation, with over 50,000 enrolled citizens is now the largest tribe east of the Mississippi River. The home seat of the Lumbee Nation is in Pembroke, approximately twelve miles (twenty kilometres) from Lumberton, the county seat. Pembroke is a town of 12,689, with a 70 per cent Native American population[22] compared to Robeson County with a population of 116,530 and a Native population of 42 per cent.[23] While the tribal affiliations in Robeson County are not disaggregated, Lumbee people historically

reside in Pembroke and Robeson County, with a small population of Tuscarora and members from other tribes recognized in North Carolina in the area.[24]

Constructing the "Croatan Indian" Third Race

The Lumbee-controlled school system in Robeson County, North Carolina, was unique in that it operated within a segregated tri-racial (Black, Indigenous, and White) county- and state-funded educational structure. The value placed on individualism and domination are foundational to white supremacy, racialization,[25] and the construction of race and racial hierarchies, all of which are products of settler colonialization and prominent fixtures in the North Carolina state constitution and school development. Racialization, the process of categorizing and dividing people based on race, had a direct impact on the need for a third county and state school system in an already segregated context. North Carolina delegates met in 1835 to amend the 1778 state constitution to clarify that the only freemen allowed to vote were White men at least twenty-one years old.[26] The Lumbee at this time were labeled "free persons of colour," and therefore their voting rights were revoked and they could only attend Black schools.[27] These restrictions imposed in 1835 impacted the Lumbee's economic and political development in Robeson County and continued, reaching a nexus when White leaders coerced Lumbee men to work as labourers for the Confederacy alongside Black labourers during the Civil War.[28] The Lumbee considered this treatment to be "enforced assimilation"[29] with the Black community. The Lumbee response was compounded by divided allegiances to the Confederacy. There were Lumbee men who fought for the Confederacy and families that provided resources for it; some Lumbee men hid to escape forced enlistment into the Confederate Army and families housed Union soldiers who had escaped Confederacy imprisonment.[30] These experiences of racial discrimination, political disenfranchisement, and divided loyalties during the Civil War set the stage for the Lumbee peoples' later efforts to establish and control their own schools, as education became a key means of preserving their community identity and pursuing economic and political advancement.

The feelings of forced assimilation, the 1835 legislation, and actions prior to and during the Civil War began to fracture Lumbee and Black relations. One Lumbee noted that "'when the Whites classified us with the Negroes in 1835, it set back our relations with the Negroes 150 years,' because Indians had to fight not to be classed with Blacks."[31] This sentiment demonstrates how racial hierarchy had already begun to develop among the White, Lumbee, and Black communities and it is no surprise that Lumbee and Black children were not welcomed in white schools. Lumbee communities faced the realities of colonized and racialized agendas for public schooling as they were forced out of white schools, and the creation of racial hierarchies in the county guided their separation from the Black community. The Lumbee were not hidden from the negative effects of Black disenfranchisement in North Carolina and as a result did not like the expectation that their children would have to attend Black schools, leading to Lumbee advocation for a third segregated school system. The

Lumbee determined that schools of their own were the best way to shield themselves from racism and distance themselves from the Black community and they began to advocate for their own segregated schools.

Political Alignment with State Legislators

Given North Carolina's early statehood in 1789, which came after the founding of Robeson County in 1787, white private academies in Robeson County developed as early as 1793,[32] followed by the establishment of public schools and school districts by 1839, which were regulated by the first state public school law.[33] Districts in Robeson County represented small communities and a district school could have thirty or fewer students in grades 1 to 7. These districts operated within a larger, soon-to-be-segregated school system led by a county superintendent.[34] By 1860, prior to the Civil War, there were seventy-five school districts for 1,821 White children, which were financed by $1,330 in county school taxes.[35] Black schools, like many across the South, were created in response to the 1868 North Carolina Reconstruction Constitution which declared:

> We hold it to be self evident that all men are created equal; that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights; that among these are life, liberty, the enjoyment of the fruits of their own labor, and the pursuit of happiness.[36]
>
> The people have a right to the privileges of education, and it is the duty of the state to guard and maintain that right.[37]

As the Lumbee organized and advocated for their own segregated schools after the 1868 constitutional changes, they were on the radar of Hamilton McMillan, a state legislator from Red Springs (a township in Robeson County). McMillan contributed to the revisions of the new 1868 North Carolina constitution, mandated by the federal government. The 1868 state constitution confirmed that the Lumbee were "free persons of colour." It reiterated that they were restricted from attending white schools and confirmed that the Lumbee, along with other "aliens," did not have to pay taxes.[38] McMillan labeled the 1868 constitution "Candby," meaning "Black and Tan,"[39] a derogatory term he and his conservative Democratic political cohort nicknamed the new 1868 North Carolina constitution because they did not agree with the equitable changes made in it.

By the late 1870s, McMillan, also an amateur historian, had taken note of the political influence that the Lumbee received when voting rights were restored in 1868. He began recording his encounters with "Indians," who he regarded as "Croatan," and the largest settlement of "Indians" in the southeastern area that resided along the Lumber and reported that the first land grant issued to Lumbee was to brothers Henry Berry and James Lowrie (Lumbee leaders) in 1732 by King George II. Lowrie received an additional land grant in 1738.[40] McMillan's acquaintance with

the Lumbee was calculated, since he and the conservative Democrats of the time were interested in maintaining legislative control which was at risk due to Black and "Indian" votes that leaned Republican.[41] His research and political position influenced the future 1885 legislation that recognized the "Croatans" as a third race.

McMillan is regarded as a "hero" for his help bringing this legislation forward. However, his resolve towards the 1868 North Carolina Reconstruction Constitution makes this hero status questionable. McMillan understood the agency and leadership the Lumbee were building, and he wanted to exploit their political influence to support his and his fellow politicians' racist disenfranchisement laws towards Black North Carolinians, as discussed below.

From the "Croatans'" organizational and advocacy efforts, and the support from White politicians like McMillan, who sought out their political support,[42] they received a racial status change in 1885. The history of the Lumbee-controlled schools is intricately linked with this legal racial status in 1885 when the Lumbee were constitutionally identified as a "third race," and specifically recognized by the state of North Carolina as the "Croatan Indian" race.[43] The 1885 Croatan legislation began: "Whereas, the Indians now living in Robeson County claim to be descendants of a friendly tribe who once resided in eastern North Carolina on the Roanoke River, known as the Croatan Indians."[44] The third "Croatan Indian" segregated school system was predicated on this third race status, which granted the Lumbee access to state funds for their schools. Section two of the 1885 legislation declared that "Indian" schools could select their teachers, while section four stated "Indian" schools would only be provided in Robeson County and granted Lumbee students access to any "Indian" school in the county if a district "Indian" school was unavailable.[45] Like contemporary school districts in North Carolina, students are meant to attend school in their assigned district, but since there were so few Lumbee schools early on, the state legislation allowed students to travel outside of their small district if need be to attend a segregated "Indian" school elsewhere in the county. The 1885 constitutional legislation provided the Lumbee state apportionments and a self-governed public school system in Robeson County, North Carolina. As a result of the 1885 legislation, seven one-room schools were built, and the county allocated $503 for the operation of these seven Croatan schools.[46]

Lumbee Churches as Early School Sites

While the Lumbee did not have their own segregated schools until 1885, churches held classes before this time. Prior to the Civil War, few churches existed in Robeson County, yet by 1862 there were at least three churches—Saddletree, New Hope, and Union—with "Indian" members, with as many as ninety "Indian" members at Union alone.[47] As churches developed, Black, Indigenous, and white communities hired their pastors, and in various places, "Indian" and white groups went to church together, what Reverend D. F. Lowry (teacher, interim principal and trustee of the teacher training discussed below) called "cooperative churchgoing."[48] Methodist and Baptist denominations have the longest history among the Lumbee. These Christian churches

served as spaces for kinship connections among the Lumbee, with schools becoming an extension of these kinship ties. The Burnt Swamp Baptist Association had thirty-two small one-room subscription schools that resided at Baptist churches in Robeson County and bordering counties prior to 1885.[49] These subscription schools were community-operated, and for a small fee, offered Lumbee a school option when they could not attend white schools and would not attend Black schools in Robeson County.[50]

The history of churches in Robeson County illustrates Christianity's pervasive influence, not only in Lumbee history, but also in the development and administration of Lumbee schools. The first principal and one of the founding trustees of the teacher-training Normal School, along with many of the male teachers, held dual careers as Christian pastors.[51] These dual roles demonstrated the interlocking nature of the church and public schooling for the Lumbee and undoubtedly influenced the school environment. Smith and Smith later asserted in their history of Lumbee Methodists, "Pembroke First Church became home church to Methodist and other professionals working at The Normal School.… Everyone went to church in those days, if one wanted to stay employed."[52]

Croatan School Development Post-1885 Legislation

Building on the foundation laid by church-based education, the Croatan community began to establish a more extensive network of schools following the 1885 legislation that named them a third race. At that time, Robeson County had fifteen townships: Alfordsville, Back Swamp, Blue-Spring, Britts, Burnt Swamp, Howellsville, Lumber Bridge, Lumberton, Shoeheel, Smiths, Saint Pauls, Sterling, Thompson, White House, and Wishart.[53] Robeson County, like other counties in North Carolina, operated school districts within townships and with the passage of the 1885 legislation, seven Croatan schools were developed and twelve Indian school districts created.[54] However, with fewer schools in the townships, there were Croatan students who still did not have access to schools due to long travel times to district Croatan schools. During the following school year, 1886–87, townships and school districts did not have to coincide, leaving a huge discrepancy between Black, "Indian," and white schools in Robeson County. While Croatan schools were added in this school year, bringing the Croatan school total to twelve, which matched the twelve districts created the year prior, the Croatans still lagged compared to the sixty-five Black and ninety-five White districts.[55] Financial discrepancies were also evident; in 1886, the Croatan schools were given $643 from county apportionments,[56] yet the entire school budget the year prior (1885) had been $18,395 for 105 schools.[57] If county allocations had been distributed equally among schools, the Croatans would have received nearly three times this amount.

Late Nineteenth- and Early Twentieth-Century School Development

The North Carolina Public School Law of 1897 mandated that boards of education divide school districts to correspond with the number of townships in the county.[58] This law had a significant impact on Croatans in Robeson County, resulting in the

establishment of twenty Croatan schools by 1900.[59] The number of townships had also increased from fifteen in 1884 to eighteen by 1900 (Shoeheel merged into the new Maxton township, and Raft Swamp, Red Springs, and Saddletree were added).[60] Despite these changes, Robeson County still had more school districts than townships for both White and Black public schools in 1900, with a reported 149 districts (83 White districts and 66 Black districts).[61]

The Croatan schools were beginning to align with the number of townships. In 1922, seven townships were added (Gaddy's, Fairmont, Marietta, Orrum, Shannon, Rennert, and Sterlings), bringing the total to twenty-five, compared to eighteen townships in 1900 and fifteen townships in 1884. By 1922, the number of "Indian" schools had increased to twenty-five, but there was still a large discrepancy compared to sixty-nine White schools and fifty-four Black schools within these twenty-five townships.[62] While the Croatan schools and townships matched at twenty-five for both, which the 1897 state legislation required, there were still townships without Croatan schools. The twenty-five "Indian" schools were only present in twelve Robeson County townships (Table 1). Thirty-seven years after the Lumbee gained access to state funding and twenty-five years after the 1897 law mandating that each township have a school, there were thirteen townships without Croatan schools: Parkton, Lumber Bridge, St. Pauls, Shannon, Red Springs, Maxton, Raft Swamp, Lumberton (county seat), Back Swamp, Gaddy's, Orrum, Marietta, and Sterlings.

Table 1. List of Indian Schools (1922)

School Name	Township Location	School Name	Township Location
Allenton	Wisharts	**Jno. Dial**	Thompson (South of Pembroke)
Bethel Hill	Saddle Tree	**Magnolia**	Howellsville (NE Lumberton)
Blue	Wisharts	**Mahoney**	Thompson (Rowland border)
Burnt Swamp	Pembroke (Burnt Swamp border)	**New Hope**	Pembroke
Deep Branch	Thompson (South of Pembroke)	**Nichols**	Burnt Swamp
Dog Wood	Rowland	**Old Prospect**	Smiths
Fairmont	Fairmont	**Oxendine**	Rowland
Green Grove	Thompson	**Piney Grove Rennert**	Rennert
Harpers Ferry	Pembroke	**Rowland**	Rowland
Henderson	Thompson (Fairmont border)	**Union**	Burnt Swamp
Holmes	Britts (Popes Crossing)	**Chapel (Little) Zion**	Afordsville (near Maxton)
Hopewell	Thompson		
Indian Normal	Pembroke		

Source: *Woodberry Lennon, Map of Robeson County. Robeson County: North Carolina, 1922. University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, North Carolina Maps Digital Collection. https://dc.lib.unc.edu/cdm/ref/collection/ncmaps/id/1788.*

The 1922 map of Robeson County used in Table 1 was compiled from information obtained by township residents and county surveys, maps, and records. This 1922 map proved a noteworthy source for the present research as it gave one of the first comprehensive lists of Black, "Indian," and White Robeson County schools and churches.

While a comprehensive find, two schools were omitted on the map: Barker Ten Mile (Lumberton), which was built in 1884 and had an addition in 1928, and Ashpole Center in Pembroke, built in 1898 with a 1926 addition.[63] Although not included on the 1922 map, these two schools are listed years later in the 1937–1938 *North Carolina Education Directory*.[64] This 1922 map, although a valuable find, with the omission of these two Croatan schools and an incomplete list of Black churches, causes one to suspect that only White Robesonians were consulted in making it. This also serves as a reminder that much of educational history has focused exclusively on the experiences of White communities, a tendency found in Robeson County archives as well.

The slow process of building Lumbee community schools in Robeson County points to the county administrators' continued neglect of Indigenous children. The county administration was not funding Black and "Indian" schools as persistently as White schools, although both groups were paying taxes that contributed to school funding. In rural areas of North Carolina and across the rural South, philanthropic funding began in 1880s with the General Education Board, John F. Slater Fund, Anna T. Jeanes Foundation, and the Rosenwald Fund contributing to the continued building and maintenance of schools. The Rosenwald Fund is largely credited with building Black rural schools across the South yet often omitted from historical narratives is the Black communities' financial contributions to these Rosenwald schools. In North Carolina, the Black community contributed $590,566 to Black schools, compared to the $549,736 by the Rosenwald Fund.[65] The Black community chronically experienced double taxation, since their taxes were too often stolen to pay for White schools,[66] yet they stayed committed to their children's education through donations. The Lumbee would feel this double taxation as well, given they were contributing taxes, but money flowed to White schools more abundantly, leaving the Lumbee to supplement school development and maintenance with land, monetary, and labour donations, along with fundraisers like education rallies, box suppers, and school plays.[67]

The 1930s Consolidation Period

The Robeson County Indigenous school districts continued to shift, consolidate, and add larger schools through the 1930s. The Lumbee People were making progress on funding and quality of schooling for their community. During the 1932–33 school year, among thirty-two schools the student enrolment was 3,921, with fifteen high school and ninety-two elementary teachers.[68] With greater enrolment across the county, consolidation of smaller "Indian" schools in the 1930s was the priority. While this growth and attention was positive for the Indigenous population in Robeson County, the consolidations were also hard for parents, community members, and students who lost their smaller community schools and the autonomy of the local schools. Despite these fears and challenges voiced by the Lumbee people, officials began consolidating one- and two-room schools to accommodate larger schools in the 1930s. New Bethel School is one example where parents and community members protested these consolidations. New Bethel School committee members Curtis Oxendine and (illegible) Locklear involved a Fairmont attorney requesting that the Robeson County

Board of Education allow New Bethel students within a one-and-a-half-mile radius not to be forced to consolidate with Fairmont Indian school.[69] Keeping New Bethel open would continue to serve thirty-five to forty students, with an average of thirty attending the school; this would also help reduce bus overcrowding. Unfortunately the school board did not find keeping New Bethel open for such a small student group efficient and the school was consolidated.[70] The Robeson County Board of Education was more concerned with overall enrolment increases than the needs of the students attending smaller schools and the communities' input.[71]

Magnolia School was one of the first of the larger schools constructed in 1934 to accommodate students from smaller schools.[72] For many students (and their parents), this was the first time they attended school in a brick building and, for some, the first time with indoor plumbing in their schools. The following year, in 1935, Union Chapel was built,[73] and along with Magnolia continue to operate within the Public Schools of Robeson County system. By 1939, there were twenty-six "Indian" schools (Table 2) including five brick school buildings; only six of the original one-teacher schools remained, and four schools had ten or more teachers among six districts, and an enrolment of 5,201.[74] The six remaining one-room teacher schools were the last of the small "Indian" community schools due to consolidation. To meet the growing enrolment needs, larger schools continued to be built and expanded, such as the new blueprints commissioned by the Board of Education in fall 1938 to build a new high school in Pembroke and a building extension at Magnolia due to overcrowding.[75] During this time the academic year for Indigenous children in Robeson County had extended from mid to late March to May.[76] With the larger schools built to accommodate the growing enrolment, Lumbee people's history and communities were fragmented as the smaller schools closed.

Lumbee Schools Make Local News

With the growth of Lumbee schools in the early 1900s, announcements in the local newspaper, the *Robesonian*, marked school openings and closings at the beginning and end of the school year. These announcements also reveal some of the first reactions to schools by the local Lumbee who wrote them. The Little Zion school event on March 26, 1909, discussed at the beginning of this article provides a glance at one of the first end-of-year closing events shared in the county newspaper. Although school closings were listed in the local paper as early as 1909,[77] the earliest school opening found is for the Normal School (discussed below) in the fall of 1911 and 1912.[78] Yet multiple Lumbee school openings were announced by the 1938–39 and 1939–40 school years and provided student enrolment.[79] At the opening of Green Grove School in 1938, fifty-five high school students and 247 elementary students were in attendance. Some students were still doing farm work; therefore, once all students returned, school officials expected enrolment to exceed the 402 students enrolled the previous year.[80] Green Grove staff listed for the 1938–39 school year included Principal C. S. Lowry and teachers Woodwear Hunt, Miss Dorothy Oxendine, John Brooks, Adna Lowry, Albert Hammonds, Miss Lillian Paul, Edison Ransom, Vivian C. Lowey, and Miss Evelyn Bell.[81]

Table 2. List of "Indian" Schools and Principals (1937–38)

School Name & Location	Principal's Name	School Name & Location	Principal's Name
Ashpole Center (Pembroke)	James A. Sampson	**Pembroke HS** (Pembroke)	G. G. Maughnon
Barker Ten Mile (Lumberton)	Theodore Maynor	**Pembroke** (Pembroke)	Kermit Lowry
Bethel Hill (Raynham)	Theodore McC. Lowry	**Philadelphus** (Pembroke)	Claude Oxendine
Burnt Swamp (Pembroke)	J. W. Smith	**Piney Grove** (Elrod)	Calvin Lowry
Fairmont* (Fairmont)	Bradford Lowry	**Piney Grove** (Pembroke)	W. G. Revels
Green Grove* (Raynham)	Carlee S. Lowry	**Prospect*** (Pembroke)	Clifton Oxendine
Harpers Ferry (Pembroke)	Thomas Oxendine	**Red Springs** (Pembroke)	Leola Locklear
Hollywood (Pembroke)	Ancil Sanderson	**Rennert** (Rennert)	Willie D. Bowen
Hopewell (Rowland)	Auzout Lowry	**Smyrna** (Lumberton)	Sterling P. Lowry
Little Zion (Rowland)	W. Q. A. Lowry	**Turnout** (Pembroke)	Andrew Carl Lowry
Magnolia** (Lumberton)	Frank Epps	**Union Chapel*** (Fairmont)	Delton Lowry
New Bethel (Fairmont)	Callie Mae Jacobs	**White Hill** (Pembroke)	Ruthie Jane Oxendine
Oxendine (Pembroke)	James E. Chavis		

Sources: *North Carolina Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction,* Education Directory *(1936–37). Department of Public Instruction. State Archives of North Carolina Digital Collection.* https://digital.ncdcr.gov/digital/collection/p249901coll22/id/259272. Education Directory: Public Schools of North Carolina *(1937–38).*

**Schools listed as high schools in the 1936–37 directory; however, these schools had high school courses along with primary/graded grades. Pembroke High was the only stand-alone high school.*

***Listed in the 1936–37 directory but omitted in the 1937–38 directory.*

The school opening and closing announcements demonstrate how involved the community was in celebrating the Lumbee schools. A Fairmont High opening day invitation was extended to "patrons and friends," and the principal, Bradford Lowry, stressed the need for students to begin school as early as possible so they would not fall behind.[82] Lowry urged families to register their children on the school opening day even if students still needed to be pulled out later to work.[83] The Fairmont High faculty listed were Miss Mary Theo Warraix and Miss Isabelle Morgan (first grade), Miss Pearl Hammond (second grade), Miss Ludahlia Wilkins (third grade), A. G. Dial (fourth and fifth grade), C. L. Maynor (sixth grade), and faculty for the high school division included Miss Francis Shoffner (English and home economics), Ernest Sampson (history and French), Miss Mildred Lassiter (English and biology), and Bradford Lowry (principal, as well as mathematics and physics).[84] The Fairmont High article was followed up with a declaration that a "noticeable increase in attendance on the first day over that of last year" had taken place and that with the co-operation of the parents, students, patrons, and faculty, the school was "looking forward to having the most successful year of work in its history."[85] The *Robesonian* announcements also provide some of the few public archival documents written by Lumbee People related to Lumbee schools during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

“Croatan” Normal School

The commitment to education and agency held by the Lumbee community is found in the history shared above, but also in the development and maintenance of the Croatan Normal School (CNS). Indigenous education history in Robeson County has focused much attention on the CNS, which opened in the spring of 1888. While this history exists, this brief history here necessitates describing where the teachers were trained, and places them in context with the small schools already discussed. Following the 1885 legislation that legalized the “Croatan Indian” as a third race and provided a third segregated school system, North Carolina legislation was passed to develop a Croatan Normal School for training teachers in 1887.[86] The Normal School needed leaders to facilitate building construction, appoint teachers, and manage operations, and when the call was made, W. L. Moore, James “Big Jim” Oxendine, Preston Locklear, and James Dial Sr. answered the call.[87] These four were the first CNS trustees, and they were given authority to appoint three additional trustees, which included J. J. (John J.) Oxendine (brother to James Oxendine), Olin Oxendine (father to James Oxendine and first cousin to Moore’s wife), and Isaac Brayboy.[88] The seven trustees were Croatan, except for Moore, who served as the Normal School’s first principal.[89] North Carolina provided $500 for the construction of the CNS and the 1887 legislation stipulated that the trustees’ group and Croatan community had to complete the normal school building within two years, or the legislation would be repealed.[90] To meet the deadline imposed by the state, Croatans and White community members provided labour and additional supplies for the building.[91] These donations by the White community speak to the interrelations that had developed among the two communities, representing both friendship but also acts aimed at continuing political alliances with the Croatan. The Croatan built political power through their own advocacy, and White legislators saw this as an advantage to forward their political agendas, including Black disenfranchisement laws that were on the horizon at the turn of the twentieth century.

The completed CNS two-storey school building cost $1,000, double the amount provided by the state, and included an acre of land purchased for eight dollars from Lumbee community member Reverend William Jacobs.[92] CNS opened in spring 1888 with fifteen students enrolled, and the 1887 law stipulated those enrolled had to be older than fifteen and commit to teaching for one year.[93] W. L. Moore, the first principal, had taught in neighbouring Columbus County, moved to Robeson County, where he taught for many years, and married a Lumbee woman, Mary Catherine Oxendine, the first Croatan woman to teach in Robeson County.[94] Moore donated $200 to help build the CNS and remained its principal for three years.[95] The normal school, like the Lumbee schools built in 1885, was in constant financial need. Principal Moore sought financial support from the federal government when he wrote to the Office of Indian Affairs (OIA) for assistance in 1890, but the OIA denied the request.[96] The Commissioner of Indian Affairs, T. J. Morgan, who denied Moore’s request, cited that the OIA could not help the Croatans because the federal government already lacked resources for the 36,000 “wards of the Government”

(Indigenous children) in its care.[97] Despite this failed request, the normal school moved forward with the support of the local community and continued to strengthen alliances with state officials.

Figure 1: *Robeson County American Indian Education Resource Center (formerly Pembroke High School).* Photo taken by the author June 2022.

Teachers were trained during summer sessions and the CNS operated as an elementary school within the "Croatan" school system until the early 1900s.[98] With growing enrolments and no high school curriculum available to the Lumbee in Robeson County, the high school grades were established by 1908.[99] The first high school graduate, John A. B. Lowry, received his diploma in 1912, followed by the first two woman graduates, Winnie Lee Bell and Ruth Sampson, in 1914.[100] The fourth high school diploma, earned by Lucy Manda Oxendine, was not awarded until 1922,[101] and two years later the CNS high school was accredited by the state.[102] At the time of the accreditation in 1924, the normal school was still the only high school (grades 7 to 11) for all "Indian" children in Robeson County.[103] Nearly forty years after the Normal School legislation was passed in 1887, the first degree-granting, two-year teacher's training program began and offered specialized degrees (diplomas) in primary education and grammar grade (grades 1 to 7) education.[104] The enrolment of the normal school had also grown from the initial fifteen students enrolled in 1888 to 196 students by 1926.[105] The normal school dropped all elementary grades by 1928; only the high school and teacher training courses were taught, and the first ten Normal School graduates received their two-year diplomas this year.[106] By 1935, the

normal school provided two years of college work in addition to the two-year normal school curriculum. In 1936, the first full-time librarian was employed, and the first combined college and normal school diploma was awarded in 1938.[107] The CNS continued to be the epicentre of public education and teacher preparation among the Lumbee people. Pembroke High School (Figure 1), the first standalone Robeson County public "Indian" high school, was built in 1939, off-site and separate from the normal school campus.[108]

The Pembroke High School building is now home to the Robeson County American Indian Education Resource Center.[109] State legislation changed the name of the CNS to Pembroke State College for Indians in 1941, opened enrolment to all "Indians" in 1945, and once integrated in 1949[110] the name was shortened to Pembroke State College (PSC).[111] PSC was renamed Pembroke State University in 1969. Three years later, it became one of thirteen (now seventeen) institutions in the University of North Carolina public university system, and by 1996 became the University of North Carolina at Pembroke (UNCP).[112] UNCP is now home to over 7,500 students[113] with over 150 undergraduate major and graduate programs offered.[114] UNCP confirms the dedication and self-determination of the early Lumbee community's commitment to education and public schooling in Robeson County and North Carolina.

Conclusion

The Lumbee People are proud of the achievements of the CNS, with a legacy that stands firm in what has grown to become the University of North Carolina at Pembroke (UNCP). Across the UNCP campus there are numerous reminders of normal school trustees and early educators (Moore and Sampson Halls, and the D. F. Lowry Building). The Lumbee teachers and community focussed on building their own schools and provided their people with an educational space that was not previously afforded. The early Lumbee educators are etched in time, although their contributions and developments beyond the CNS have largely gone untold and are sparse in the archives. Unfortunately, the scholarship of the Lumbee schools from 1885–1940 is severely limited. The largest source of archives for this period remained with the Robeson County Board of Education; however, a devasting flood after Hurricane Michael in October 2016 damaged all records. This loss has created a void in the late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century history of education scholarship. As a result, there is a sense of personal and collective grief associated with unanswered questions and lost stories from the Lumbee schools that were written yet lost in the water-damaged Board of Education building, which has remained untouched for nearly ten years. Beyond the research shared here, I am committed to continuing to mine local, regional, state, and federal archives to continue unearthing this history of the Lumbee schools.

This history of the Lumbee schools demonstrates Lumbee self-determination in the development of a third school system in Robeson County, North Carolina, from before 1885 until 1940. With the commitment of teachers, parents, principals,

students, and the community working together, Lumbee schools provided nurturing spaces for teachers and children to grow into their Indigenous and learner identities in an environment that fostered love and acceptance. The schools provided respite and served as community hubs for neighbours, teachers, parents, and children. Everyone played a role in supporting early Lumbee schools and worked alongside each other diligently to build and maintain a history of schooling for Indigenous children in Robeson County. Teachers provided quality schooling even when not supported holistically by state and county officials. Despite the racialization of the Lumbee, who, after being designated and legislated as a racial group in 1885, were chronically underfunded in their school system, they built a legacy of Indigenous public education in Robeson County and North Carolina through the maintenance of the normal and small community schools. Within a state system that constitutionally promoted the false promise of *separate with no discrimination*, the Lumbee held to their self-determination and took pride, and still do, in their involvement in the development and maintenance of a third county public school system.

The scene that opened this article—parents, teachers, students, and community members gathered outside the one-room, wood-framed Little Zion school in March 1909—embodies the importance of education for the Lumbee. The description of A. B. Harden as "our teacher" particularly illustrates the historical connection between these schools and the Lumbee people. This article historicizes how the Lumbee built an education legacy in Robeson County and North Carolina, taking seven Croatan schools with an enrolment of 1,006 in 1885 to twenty-five schools with 5,356 students enrolled by 1940, representing the unrelenting time and dedication Lumbee have historically placed on schools and the education of their people.

Notes

1 "Closing of the Croatan School at Little Zion," *Robesonian*, April 1, 1909, 4.
2 "Croatan School at Little Zion," 4.
3 The Lumbee named themselves for the first time in the 1950s after the Lumbee (now Lumber) River. Before the Lumbee name, White county and state politicians called the Lumbee a variety of names, including Croatan, the generic Indians of Robeson County, and Cherokee Indians of Robeson County, the latter placed on the Lumbee for over twenty years. When I discuss this history broadly, I use the name Lumbee to acknowledge the name the community chose. During the historical periods where the Lumbee name was different, I will use the name shared in documents, which by and large is Croatan or Croatan Indians.
4 "Croatan School at Little Zion," 4.
5 Adolph Dial and David Eliades, *The Only Land I Know: A History of the Lumbee Indians* (Syracuse University Press, 1996), 27–28; Malinda Maynor Lowery, *The Lumbee Indians: An American Struggle* (University of North Carolina Press, 2018), 32.
6 Maynor Lowery, *The Lumbee Indians*, 34–36.
7 Maynor Lowery, *The Lumbee Indians*, 36.
8 Maynor Lowery, *The Lumbee Indians*, 36–39.
9 Dial and Eliades, *The Only Land I Know*, 28–31; Maynor Lowery, *The Lumbee Indians*, 44–47.

10 Dial and Eliades, 33–35; Maynor Lowery, 47–53.
11 Jonathan Martin, "Robeson County (1787)," North Carolina History Project, John Locke Foundation. https://northcarolinahistory.org/encyclopedia/robeson-county-1787/.
12 Maynor Lowery, *The Lumbee Indians*, 55.
13 Maynor Lowery, *The Lumbee Indians*, 63–65; Dial and Eliades, *The Only Land I Know*, 39–41.
14 Anna Bailey, "It Is The Center to Which We Should Cling: Indian Schools in Robeson County, North Carolina, 1900–1920," in *The History of Discrimination in US Education: Marginality, Agency, and Power*, ed. Eileen H. Tamura (Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), 76–77.
15 Bailey, "Center to Which We Should Cling," 78–80.
16 Malinda Maynor Lowery, *Race, Identity, and the Making of a Nation: Lumbee Indians in the Jim Crow South* (University of North Carolina Press, 2010), 97.
17 Maynor Lowery, *Race, Identity, and the Making of a Nation,* 107–10.
18 Maynor Lowery, *Race, Identity, and the Making of a Nation*, 218.
19 Maynor Lowery; *Race, Identity, and the Making of a Nation*, 184.
20 Maynor Lowery; *Race, Identity, and the Making of a Nation*, 219.
21 North Carolina Department of Administration, North Carolina State Commission of Indian Affairs, Part 15, 143B-404. https://ncadmin.nc.gov/media/13723/download?attachment?attachment, 2.
22 US Census Reporter, "American Community Survey 5-year Estimates," Census Reporter, Profile Page for Pembroke Township, Robeson County, NC. https://censusreporter.org/profiles/06000US3715592472-pembroke-township-robeson-county-nc/.
23 US Census Bureau, "American Community Survey 5-year Estimates," Census Quick Facts for Robeson County, NC. https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/robesoncountynorthcarolina.
24 Maynor Lowery, *Race, Identity, and the Making of a Nation*, 5.
25 Michael Omi and Howard Winant explained race as a social construct that began as a need for classifying "human bodies for purposes of domination" that is rooted in the process of "racial formation," racial meanings where content and racial categories are informed by social, economic, and political forces. Michael Omi and Howard Winant, *Racial Formation in the United States from the 1960s to the 1980s* (Routledge, 1986), 61. The concept of racial formation was expanded by Omi and Winant in a later edition of their book to include "racialization," which they define as "the extension of racial meaning to a previously racially unclassified relationship, social practice, or group." Michael Omi and Howard Winant, *Racial Formation in the United States,* 3rd ed. (Routledge, 2015), 13.
26 Proceedings and debates of the Convention of North Carolina, called to amend the constitution of the state, which assembled at Raleigh, June 4, 1835 (J. Gales and Son, 1836), 66–67.
27 Proceedings and debates, 66–67.
28 Karen I. Blu, "We People: Understanding Lumbee Indian Identity in a Tri-racial Situation" (PhD diss., University of Chicago, 1972), 53.
29 Blu, "We People," 55.
30 Dial and Eliades, *The Only Land I Know,* 57–58; Maynor Lowery, *The Lumbee Indians*, 70–72.
31 Blu, "We People," 55.
32 The Robeson County Heritage Book Committee and County Heritage Inc., *Our Heritage: Robeson County, North Carolina, 1748–2002* (Walsworth Publishing Co., 2003), 83.

33 "Robeson Citizens Long Have Fought Ignorance Supported Academies, Colleges, Public Schools," *Robesonian*, February 26, 1951, 2-H.
34 *Our Heritage*, 83.
35 "Robeson Citizens," 2-H.
36 North Carolina General Assembly, *State Constitution of 1868*, Article 1, Sec.1, Vault Collection, State Archives of North Carolina [North Carolina Digital Collections]. digital.ncdcr.gov/Documents/Detail/state-constitution-of-1868/788179, 3.
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38 *State Constitution of 1868*, Article 2, Sec. 7, 14.
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47 Joseph Michael Smith and Lula Jane Smith, *The Lumbee Methodists: Getting to Know Them—A Folk History* (Commission of Archives and History, North Carolina Methodist Conference, 1990), 13.
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51 Dial and Eliades, *The Only Land I Know*, 109–10*;* Thompson, "Indian Schools of Robeson County," 14.
52 Smith and Smith, *The Lumbee Methodists*, 108.
53 John McDuffie, Map of Robeson County, NC, 1884, North Carolina Department of Cultural Resources, North Carolina Maps Digital Collection. https://dc.lib.unc.edu/cdm/ref/collection/ncmaps/id/253.
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80 "Green Grove School Has Large Opening," *Robesonian*, September 21, 1938, 3.
81 "Green Grove School," *Robesonian,* 3.
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85 "Fairmont Indian Starts Off Well," *Robesonian*, September 21, 1938, 2.
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Indians," 43.

87 Cherokee Indian Normal School Catalogue, 1935–1936 (Pembroke, Cherokee Indian Normal School), June 1936, vol. 1, no. 2, North Carolina Digital Heritage Center, University of North Carolina Pembroke Collection. https://archive.org/details/catalogueofcroat1906croa/catalogueofcroat1906croa, 9; in 1913, White state legislators changed the name of the Normal School to "Cherokee Indian Normal School" and the tribal name to "Cherokee Indians of Robeson County."

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92 Dial and Eliades, *The Only Land I Know*, 91; Eliades, Locklear, and Oxendine, *Hail to UNCP!*, 26; Oxendine, "Pembroke State College," 25; Thompson, "Education of the Lumbee Indians," 44. Croatan land ownership has been documented in multiple sources and a 1924 land deed to the CNS on behalf of "Edward Hunt, John Hunt and others" affirms this; Division of Negro Education Department of Public Instruction, E. M. Johnson, Commissioner of the Hunt Lands to Indian Normal School at Pembroke, State Archives of North Carolina, digital collection. https://digital.ncdcr.gov/Documents/Detail/deed-e.m.-johnson-commissioner-of-the-hunt-lands-to-indian-normal-school-at-pembroke/1180687.

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104 Division of Negro Education, Pembroke Cherokee Native Americans Normal, scan 48; Oxendine, "Pembroke State College," 28.

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106 Oxendine, "Pembroke State College," 29*;* Division of Negro Education, "Pembroke Cherokee Native Americans Normal," scan 48.

107 Oxendine, "Pembroke State College," 29–30.

108 Dial and Eliades, *The Only Land I Know,* 96; Oxendine, "Pembroke State College," 30;

Thompson, "Education of the Lumbee Indians," 53–54.

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110 White students began attending in 1949, but the first Black student (Larry Barnes) enrolled in 1967 and became the second Black student to graduate in 1971. Eliades, Locklear, and Oxendine, *Hail to UNCP!,* 138.

111 Laws and Resolutions of the State of North Carolina: Public Laws of the State of North Carolina, Session 1941. H. B. 829. Chapter 323 (1941). https://digital.ncdcr.gov/Documents/Detail/public-laws-and-resolutions-passed-by-the-general-assembly-at-its-session-of-...1941/1952795?item=2058861; Eliades, Locklear, and Oxendine, *Hail to UNCP*, 120.

112 Eliades, Locklear, and Oxendine, *Hail to UNCP!,* 143–45 and 218–21.

113 Statistics on Native American enrolment in the past have been searchable on the UNCP website, but due to anti-DEI sentiments and mandates, these statistics are no longer accessible or provided. DATA USA shared that in 2023 "American Indian and Alaska Natives" accounted for 12.6 per cent of UNCP enrolment. https://datausa.io/profile/university/university-of-north-carolina-at-pembroke.

114 University of North Carolina at Pembroke, "Quick Facts." https://www.uncp.edu/about/quick-facts.