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CONTENTS

American Indian Survival in South Carolina by Theda Purdue	215
"This Is It, Isn't It, Brother Stone?" The Move of Bob Jones University from Cleveland, Tennessee, to Greenville, 1946-1947 by John Matzko	235
Book Reviews	257
Recently Processed Manuscripts	283
Memorials	287

AMERICAN INDIAN SURVIVAL IN SOUTH CAROLINA

Theda Perdue*

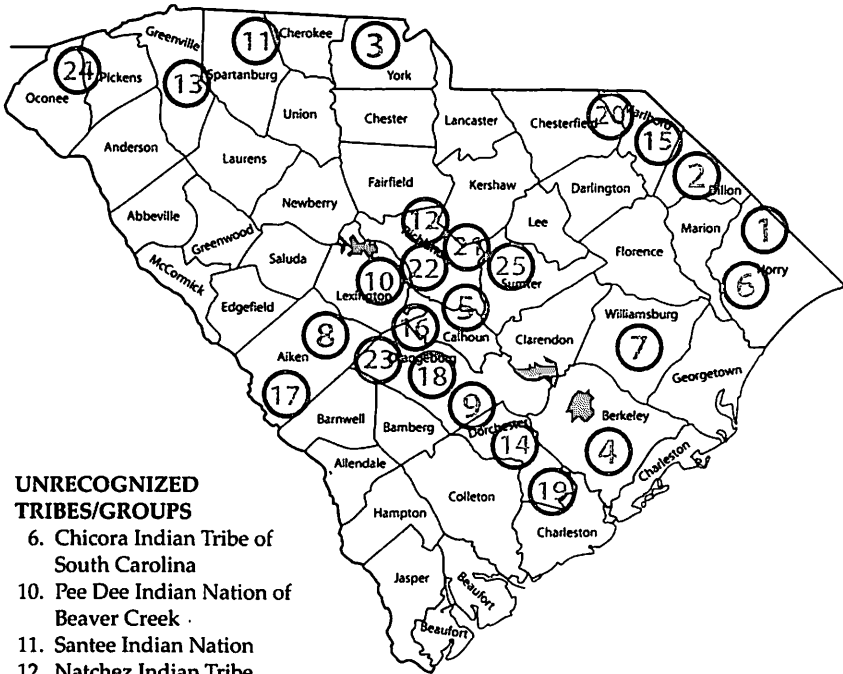
ACCORDING TO THE 2000 U.S. CENSUS, NEARLY FOURTEEN thousand American Indians and Alaska Natives lived in South Carolina. If we add to this number the over twenty-seven thousand mixed-race people who declared Native American ancestry, we arrive at a total of approximately forty-one thousand South Carolinians who identified as Indian.¹ In addition to the Catawba Indian Nation, which the United States recognizes and provides services to, the state of South Carolina, through its Commission for Minority Affairs, has officially recognized four tribes, five organized groups of people from different tribes, and one special-interest organization, the American Indian Chamber of Commerce. Furthermore, there are at least fourteen unrecognized tribes or groups whose members claim Indian descent and identify themselves ethnically as Indians.² This is quite remarkable, when we consider the demographic history of Indians in the state. Even before the settlement of Charleston in 1670, the Indian population was probably less than the current figure. Early explorations and attempts at settlement had introduced European disease that killed Indians in horrendous numbers. Epidemics disproportionately claimed the lives of the very young and the very old. As a result, Indian people lost their future—the children and all the children that those people would have borne—and their past—the elderly, who were especially important to pre-literate societies in which people carried their archives, pharmacopoeia, jurisprudence, religious texts, and literary canon around in their heads. The population did not stabilize as Indian people gained immunity to many of the diseases that

* Theda Perdue is Atlanta Distinguished Term Professor of Southern Culture at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. A version of this paper was presented at "Our Past Before Us: The Search for the South Carolina Upcountry," a conference jointly sponsored by Clemson University and Furman University, on March 9, 2007. The author acknowledges the financial support of the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars and the John Simon Guggenheim Foundation.

¹ U.S. Census Bureau, "Profile of General Demographic Characteristics: 2000, Geographic Area: South Carolina," Table DP-1, 2000, http://factfinder.census.gov/servlet/QTTable?_bm=y&-geo_id=04000US45-qr_name=DEC_2000_SF1_U_DP1&-ds_name=DEC_2000_SF1_U (accessed February 13, 2007).

² Barbara Morningstar Paul, comp., *Native American Tribes and Groups in South Carolina*, http://www.state.sc.us/cma/pdfs/maps_w_tribes.pdf (accessed February 13, 2007).

Native American Tribes and Groups in South Carolina



UNRECOGNIZED TRIBES/GROUPS

6. Chicora Indian Tribe of South Carolina
10. Pee Dee Indian Nation of Beaver Creek
11. Santee Indian Nation
12. Natchez Indian Tribe
14. Edisto Tribe
16. Croatan Indian Tribe of South Carolina
17. Horse Creek American Indian Heritage Association
18. Fields Indian Family-Pine Hill Indian Community
20. Marlboro County/Chesterfield County Pee Dee Tribe
21. The American Indian Center of South Carolina
22. Midlands Intertribal Empowerment Group
23. Carolina Indian Heritage Association
24. Cherokee Bear Clan of South Carolina
25. Sumter Band of Cheraw Indians

STATE RECOGNIZED TRIBES

1. Waccamaw Indian People
2. Pee Dee Indian Nation of Upper South Carolina
8. Beaver Creek Indians
9. Santee Indian Organization
15. Pee Dee Indian Tribe of South Carolina

FEDERALLY RECOGNIZED TRIBES

3. Catawba Indian Nation

RECOGNIZED GROUPS

4. Wassamasaw Tribe of Varnertown Indians
5. Eastern Cherokee, Southern Iroquois and United Tribes of South Carolina
7. Chaloklwa Chickasaw Indian People of South Carolina
13. Piedmont American Indian Association; Lower Eastern Cherokee

RECOGNIZED SPECIAL INTEREST ORGANIZATIONS

19. American Indian Chamber of Commerce of South Carolina

were killing them, because the English colonists arrived and quickly moved from an economy based on trading with Indians to one that demanded the seizure of their lands and the enslavement of their people. The population plummeted further. In 1685 approximately ten thousand Indians lived in the South Carolina lowcountry and piedmont. Perhaps another five-to-six thousand lived in the Cherokee towns located within the boundaries of modern South Carolina. By 1790 only about three hundred Indian people lived in the piedmont and lowcountry, and several hundred Cherokees remained in the upcountry.³ Although Indians from a variety of tribes have moved to South Carolina in the last century, the largest groups represented in the 2000 census are those that descend from colonial-era South Carolina Indian peoples. How did they survive, not merely as individuals who can point to an Indian in the family tree, but as communities of people who lay claim to an Indian identity? Three strategies for survival—resistance to racial reclassification, tribal landholding, and assimilation—provide an answer.

These strategies grew out of different historical circumstances and produced today's culturally diverse and politically disparate Indian peoples. Despite the different outcomes, most Indian people in South Carolina attempted to employ each of these strategies when an opportunity presented itself. All Indians avoided racial classification as "colored," yet they usually did not seek to pass for white. In the era of segregation, they struggled to establish schools and churches to serve Indian people. Sometimes they succeeded; sometimes circumstances beyond their control brought failure. Indian communities also saw the advantage of owning land. John Dimery and others of Indian descent, for example, bought land near each other in Horry County in the nineteenth century and formed a community that is recognized today as the Waccamaw Indian

³ Population figures are from Peter H. Wood, Gregory A Waselkov, and M. Thomas Hatley, *Powhatan's Mantle: Indians in the Colonial Southeast* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1989), 38, and email correspondence to the author from Paul T. Kelton of the University of Kansas, February 13, 2007, and Brett H. Riggs of the University of North Carolina, February 16, 2007. Cherokees are normally counted by towns or by the entire tribe, not by those living within the boundaries of a state. The figure given for 1685 is my attempt to reconcile estimates provided by Kelton (6,000 to 8,400) and Riggs (4,000 to 5,500).

Opposite page: Adapted from Barbara Morningstar Paul, *Native American Tribes and Groups in South Carolina* (Columbia, S.C., 2006), by Shanna M. McGarry.

People.⁴ Dimery and his neighbors, however, owned their land individually, not communally, and therefore, they expressed their identity through their church and school, not tribal land. Only the Catawbas managed to hold onto common land. That tract and the circumstances under which they retained it made possible a range of options not available to other Indian people in the state. The third strategy, assimilation, is also one that Indians throughout South Carolina employed, and many non-Natives currently count Indians among their ancestors. As we shall see, assimilation and intermarriage did not eliminate Native identity, but enhanced the likelihood of Indian survival. Specific examples of how Indians employed these strategies demonstrate how distinct communities endured.⁵

The first strategy, resisting racial reclassification, is the one employed by the Indians who lived in the piney woods of the lowcountry northwest of Charleston. These people fall into two broad groups. The Edisto people are dispersed in several communities known in the twentieth century as Osbourne, which has now disappeared, and Four Holes and Creeltown, which still exist. The Santee people live at White Oak, near Holly Hill, and in communities scattered from Summerville and Lincolnville to Moncks Corner; Indian people at Varnertown also are related to them.⁶ The Edisto and Santee people who form these modern communities are probably descendants of Coosa, Etiwan, Edisto, Cape Fear, Peedee, Natchez, and other tribes that were decimated by European diseases, slave raiding, and wars. In the eighteenth century, colonists sometimes referred to many of them as "settlement Indians," because they lived on the outskirts of Charleston and the lowcountry plantations and subsisted however they could—hunting and fishing, farming, wage labor, and even less honorable pursuits. By the American Revolution, most of them spoke English and lived like Anglo-Americans. The population was widely dispersed, and lowcountry Indians lived on land no one else wanted. These people managed to maintain social bonds, although all vestiges of tribal organization seem to have disappeared. The population was very small; therefore, cousins often

⁴ Forest Hazel, "The Dimery Settlement: Indian Descendants in the South Carolina Low Country," *Independent Republic Quarterly* 29 (1995): 32-36; <http://www.hchsonline.org/places/dimery.html> (accessed August 21, 2007).

⁵ I do not mean to suggest that these are the only Indians in South Carolina. The map compiled by Barbara Morningstar Paul, cited above and pictured on page 216, locates others. The experiences of the Waccamaw and Pee Dee people, in fact, are quite similar to those of the lowcountry Indian people.

⁶ Wesley DuRant Taukchiray and Alice Bee Kasakoff, "Contemporary Native Americans in South Carolina," in *Indians of the Southeastern United States in the Late 20th Century*, ed. J. Anthony Paredes (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1992), 91-97.

married each other, concentrating the gene pool and strengthening the familial ties to each other. Indians also frequently married whites and, far more rarely, free people of color, but the next generation usually married back into one of the Indian communities, which, by marrying among themselves, became interrelated. As they struggled to survive, most of these Indian people lost any connection to the tribes from which they descended, even forgetting the tribes' names. Ignorant of their genealogies and history, their white neighbors called them by perjorative terms.⁷ Anthropologists referred to them as "detrribalized." They themselves knew only that they were Indian.⁸

Except for their names on federal censuses and the occasional affidavit attesting to their race, we know relatively little about the Indian communities in the lowcountry until the late nineteenth century, when several factors converged to shed additional light on them. An increase in both population and deeded land began to concentrate the Indian population in more defined communities, and those communities began to create an institutional life that gave form and definition to them in the historical record. They also came to the attention of educational reformers who promoted universal schooling. And finally, South Carolina began to enact segregation laws that formalized race relations and drew the color line rather rigidly between black and white, leaving no place for Indians.

Into this situation stepped Rev. L. F. Guerry of St. Paul's Episcopal Church in Summerville. In 1883 he began to preach in a private home to a few of the Indian people who lived on the outskirts of Summerville. Soon he opened a school for them in a log cabin he built on the rectory grounds. His parishioners were outraged, and Guerry tendered his resignation, but the vestry board refused to accept it. Despite continued grumbling by the St. Paul's congregation, Guerry moved ahead with the organization of St. Barnabas Mission and built a chapel on a lot donated by a woman identified as African American with Native ancestry. By 1896 the school associ-

⁷ A literary expression of the racist and inaccurate views that many early twentieth-century whites held is DuBose Heyward, *Brass Ankle: A Play in Three Acts* (New York: Farrar and Rinehart, 1931). Brewton Berry, in an otherwise readable book, persisted in using the term "brass ankle," which Indian people find extraordinarily offensive. Berry, *Almost White* (New York: MacMillan, 1963).

⁸ The best source on the Indian people of the lowcountry, especially their genealogy and family histories, is the Papers of Wes White [Taukchiray], Center for the Study of Man, National Anthropological Archives, Smithsonian Institution, Suitland, Md. In particular, see his "The Indians along the Edisto River in South Carolina near Osborn, Ridgeville, and Cottageville from our Earliest Definite Record of Them Up to the Present Day," 1974-1975. This account relies heavily on Taukchiray's fieldwork.



An Indian family near Summerville, December 1938. Courtesy of the Library of Congress.

ated with the mission enrolled approximately fifty students, and the parish soon opened an infirmary to serve these people.⁹

The early documentation on the mission does not identify the members as Indians—they are referred to as “poor whites”—but parishioners clearly saw them as different from themselves in ways other than class. A mission tract described them as “God’s children wandering in the wilderness as sheep without a shepherd, within sight and reach of a people who boasted of their advanced civilization.” They lived “widely scattered” and were “exceedingly unresponsive, undemonstrative, and difficult to approach.” The children had “funny ways” and “queer superstitions.” These characterizations mirror typical stereotypes of Indian people at the time, and the

⁹ William A. Gamwell to Rev. L. F. Guerry, February 19, 1884, Vestry Minutes, March 8 and April 23, 1884, Records of St. Paul’s Episcopal Church, Summerville, S.C., South Carolina Historical Society, Charleston, S.C.; D. H. Dehon to Rev. F. W. Ambler, March 3, 1914, *ibid.*; *St. Barnabas Mission in St. Paul’s Parish, Summerville, S.C.* (Summerville: St. Paul’s Parish, 1896); Albert Sidney Thomas, *A Historical Account of the Protestant Episcopal Church in South Carolina, 1820-1957* (Columbia, S.C.: R. L. Bryan Company), 420-422.

white teacher attempted to include Indians in the curriculum. One of two references to the subject matter mastered by students in the school reveals that the children performed "The Song of Hiawatha" for visitors. In the late nineteenth century, William Wadsworth Longfellow's poem, first published in 1855, was experiencing a renaissance, with public performances that often included Indians. Indian students at federal boarding schools, including Carlisle and Hampton, studied "Hiawatha," and they presented "Scenes from Hiawatha" at Carnegie Hall and other venues. St. Barnabas children did not go on tour, but they reportedly did perform with "pride in the matter."¹⁰

A second reference to Indians in the curriculum was King Philip's War (1675–1676), an extraordinarily bloody conflict in New England between the Wampanoags and the English over colonial encroachments on Indian land and the appalling treatment afforded Native people by the government at Plymouth. Yet at the turn of the twentieth century, historians more likely attributed King Philip's War to Indian savagery. Some Wampanoags, however, had converted to Christianity, and they sided with the English. One of these Wampanoag allies of the English actually killed King Philip in 1676, ending the war.¹¹ Having heard the lesson, a small boy at the mission asked his teacher:

"Was Philip shot by one of his *own people*?" The tone expressed incredulity, almost horror.

"Yes, John, an Indian who sided with the English."

"I wouldn't go agin my people," he said slowly, as he went to his seat with the air and manner of one who had witnessed a terrible deed.¹²

Poverty took a terrible toll on the education of the Indian children. They often missed school to work in the fields or to do other chores while their parents went to the fields. The teacher at St. Barnabas heard excuses such as "I had to feed the mule, and tote in wood," "Minnie and Brilly are dropping corn," and "Florence and Martha are planting rice."¹³ Like those whose children attended the St. Barnabas Mission, lowcountry Indian people were mostly poor, landless wage laborers or sharecroppers. A few managed to buy small tracts, but the land was often heavily wooded and not well suited for farming. While they planted corn, beans, and rice for their own consump-

¹⁰ Martha B. Marshall, *Stories from the Mission Field: In the Pinelands of South Carolina* (Hartford, Conn.: Church Missions Publishing Company, 1900), 4; Alan Trachtenberg, *Shades of Hiawatha: Staging Indians, Making America* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2004), 92-97.

¹¹ Jill Lepore, *The Name of War: King Philip's War and the Origins of American Identity* (New York: Knopf, 1998).

¹² Marshall, *Stories from the Mission Field*, 11, 15.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 5, 7.

tion on a few acres, most engaged in logging and other forest industries to make ends meet. In the early twentieth century, Indian people at Creeltown extracted tar by slowly burning dead pine trees and stumps in a pit and collecting the sap as it ran out, and J. W. Mucklevaney and Sons, an Indian-owned logging company, operated at Four Holes in the 1920s and 1930s. Even the most privileged among these Indians, however, did not live well. The Davidson family ran the store in Four Holes for two decades (1954–1974), but even with their access to a cash economy, they did not have running water in their house until 1954, a bathroom until 1957, or hot water until 1968.¹⁴

The St. Barnabas Mission, which disbanded in 1930, was the product of white philanthropy directed at the poor. Although it extended the educational opportunities for impoverished children, it also reflected the limits that segregation placed on Indians. At the time St. Barnabas was founded in the late nineteenth century, South Carolina provided schools only for blacks and whites, and Indians refused to attend African American schools. The reasons are complicated. South Carolina funded African American schools at one-twelfth the rate per pupil as white schools, so the facilities and resources were far inferior to those provided for white children.¹⁵ When Indian parents demanded that their children attend white schools, they were in part insisting that they have better educational opportunities. This, of course, is not the whole story. Indian people had lived among whites and married whites since the colonial period. Not surprisingly, they had adopted many of the racial attitudes of whites, including those that regarded African Americans as inferior and justified segregation. But perhaps most significantly, Native people feared the loss of their own ethnic identity if they acquiesced to a racial reclassification imposed on them by whites. If they agreed to attend African American schools, non-Indians might consider them to be African American, and their identity as Indians would be lost forever.

Native people responded to the pressure from whites that they attend “colored” schools by creating their own institutions. As Indian communities coalesced in the lowcountry, they established separate churches, and those churches sometimes became the venues for schools. As early as the 1920s, the Old Muck (Mucklevaney) Church in Four Holes held school in its sanctuary. Resources were extremely limited, and children got only the most rudimentary education. At Creeltown, school met at the Little Rock Church of God for only a few weeks in July, when an Indian man came over

¹⁴ White [Taukchiray], “The Indians along the Edisto River,” 44, 66, 82; <http://www.state.sc.us/forest/scindust.htm> (accessed February 9, 2007).

¹⁵ Louis R. Harlan, *Separate and Unequal: Public School Campaigns and Racism in the Southern Seaboard States, 1901-1915* (New York: Atheneum, 1969), 14-15.

from Osbourne to teach it. By the onset of the Great Depression, the community could not even sustain this school. After it had been closed for several years, a committee of five members of the Little Rock Church went to Walterboro to petition for a school, and the county board agreed to pay a teacher. Finally, in the 1940s the Indians raised enough money to buy an acre to go with one that a local white lawyer donated, and the county built a schoolhouse, in which over thirty students attended seven grades taught by two teachers.¹⁶ Other lowcountry communities also got state-funded schools in the 1930s and 1940s. Most survived until the 1960s when desegregation closed them, although the Creeltown community, which had fought so hard to get an Indian school, preserved the building as a community center.¹⁷ The last lowcountry Indian school closed at Four Holes in 1970. By then it was so under-funded and standards were so low that parents, in conjunction with student activists from the University of South Carolina, had established a competing "Freedom School" in 1969.¹⁸ The controversy over the school sparked the political organization of the Edisto tribe and an interest in making common cause with other Indians through membership in the Council of Eastern Native Americans, or CENA, an organization that addressed the common problems of Indian communities that did not have federal recognition.¹⁹

The closing of Indian schools provoked considerable anxiety among Native people. Churches and schools had become central to the preservation of an Indian identity during the era of segregation, and many feared what the loss of one of these institutions would mean. As it has turned out, Native people became more aggressive in demanding formal state recognition of their Indian identity, something they achieved only in 2004 when the state established a process for the recognition of tribes, groups, and special-interest organizations within the South Carolina Commission for Minority Affairs. The state defines a tribe as "an assembly of Indian people" who have "a separate ethic and cultural heritage, . . . have existed as a separate community" for the past one hundred years, and "are related to each other by blood." A "group" does not have "a separate ethnic and cultural heritage today, as they once did," and are not all related by blood. A "special-interest organization" seeks to promote Indian culture and address the socio-economic problems of Indian people. Not all members of groups and special-interest organizations need to have Native ancestry, although many

¹⁶ White [Taukchiray], "Indians along the Edisto River," 50-51, 81.

¹⁷ William Moreau Goins, *South Carolina Indians Today: An Educational Resource Guide* (Columbia, S.C.: Phoenix Publishers, 1998), 11.

¹⁸ White [Taukchiray], "Indians along the Edisto River," 102-103.

¹⁹ Taukchiray and Kasakoff, "Native Americans in South Carolina," 84-85, 95.

do.²⁰ Recognition makes it easier for communities to undertake corporate projects like powwows, community centers, job training, and other programs. Among the state-recognized peoples today, two, the Santee Indian Organization and the Wassamasaw Tribe of Varnertown Indians, are in the lowcountry. Other Indian communities also exist there, but they have not yet achieved formal state recognition or have seen no compelling reason to seek it.²¹

These communities survive as Indians because they resisted racial reclassification. Although many members of the communities married whites and even "looked" white, they lived in Indian communities, went to Indian churches, traded at Indian stores, and drank at Indian bars. They did not "pass" as white. They also refused to permit whites to designate them "colored," a term that was synonymous with African American. Without tribal land, a formal tribal government, or much of anything that an anthropologist might define as an Indian culture, they persisted in being Indian.

The Catawbas exemplify the second strategy for survival. They have never had their ethnicity questioned, but they have struggled mightily to hold their land. Although they absorbed several remnant tribes during the colonial period, at the end of the American Revolution they had tribal land, their own language, and a rich cultural tradition.²² All this was threatened in 1840, however, when South Carolina decided to resettle the Catawbas near the Cherokees in the mountains of western North Carolina. In the Treaty of Nations Ford, the Catawbas, who had been provided a barrel of whiskey by state treaty commissioners, agreed to relinquish their 144,000-acre reservation and move, but the governor of North Carolina, who apparently had not been consulted, soon nixed the plan. Many Catawbas had already taken up residence with the Cherokees, but their hosts expected them to speak Cherokee and behave like Cherokees, something Catawbas were not willing to do. They began to drift back to South Carolina or elsewhere. Alarmed by their destitution, the Catawbas' state-appointed trustee purchased a tract of 630 acres near Rock Hill, which became their "Old Reservation."²³ This was their "home," but the land was too poor to

²⁰ Code of Regulations of South Carolina (effective September 22, 2006), Chapter 139: Commission for Minority Affairs, Article 1: State Recognition of Native American Entities, 102: Definitions, http://www.scstatehouse.net/cgi-bin/query.exe?first=DOC&querytext=minority%20affairs&category=Regs&conid=2673475&result_pos=0&keyval=257 (accessed March 12, 2007).

²¹ *The State* (Columbia, S.C.), February 18, 2005; Barbara Morningstar Paul and Theda Perdue, February 22, 2005, February 13, 2007.

²² For colonial Catawba history, see James H. Merrell, *The Indians' New World: Catawbas and Their Neighbors from European Contact through the Era of Removal* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1989).

²³ A copy of the treaty is in Central Classified Files, 1907-1939, General Service, Record Group 75: Records of the Bureau of Indian Affairs, National Archives and

support them, so many had to sharecrop on plantations, cut wood for sale in Rock Hill, or make pottery for which there was a ready market. Although the reservation could not support them, it was a place of refuge and a cultural center where Catawba was the language people spoke and where parents taught children ancient stories and skills. The reservation gave them a base from which they could make their own decisions—that is, exercise sovereignty.²⁴ Sovereignty is the right of a people to their own government. Native people had that right when Europeans arrived, and they retained that right unless they specifically surrendered it. When Catawbas lived outside of their reservation, they became subject to the laws—the sovereignty—of the state, but within their own boundaries, they made decisions for themselves.²⁵

One of the decisions that the Catawbas made proved extraordinarily unpopular in the surrounding community: almost all of them joined the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints, the Mormons, in the late nineteenth century. In 1883 Mormon missionaries began to preach among the Catawbas. The summary of missionary Joseph Willey's experiences among the Catawbas conveys both the successes and dangers of the mission:

September 26, 1883, I stood over Elder C. E. Robinson when he breathed his last. September 28th we put the corpse on the train home (got bit by a dog) had one meeting broke up by two Baptist preachers. Had one gun pointed at me. Laid out [hid in the woods] fifteen nights. Went thirty hours without food. Walked 3,600 miles. Held one hundred and thirteen meetings. Organized one Sunday School, ordained one priest. Baptized 34, baptized and assisted in baptizing 59. Baptized the first Catawba Lamanite [Indian] that ever give [sic] obedience to the Gospel in this dispensation. Baptized one preacher, blessed 10 children. Received 2 notices to leave the state.²⁶

Local whites whipped, shot at, threatened, and harassed the missionaries, but the saints persevered. As for the Catawbas, the Mormon message

Records Administration, Washington, D.C. (hereinafter cited as Central Classified Files); Chester Howe to Francis E. Leupp, December 28, 1905, Central Classified Files; Douglas Summers Brown, *The Catawba Indians: People of the River* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1966), 316-320; *Correspondence Relative to the Catawba Indians, Embracing Gov. Seabrook's Letter to the Special Agent and Commissioners Appointed by Him* (Columbia, S.C.: I. C. Morgan, State Printer, 1849), 3-5.

²⁴ For post-1840 Catawbas, see Charles Hudson, *The Catawba Nation* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1970).

²⁵ The basic work on Indian law and sovereignty is Felix S. Cohen, *Handbook of American Indian Law: With Reference Tables and Index* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1952).

²⁶ Judy Canty Martin, transcriber, "Missionary Journals: Journal or Diary's [sic] of Two LDS Missionaries to the Catawba Indians (Joseph Willey and Catawba

proved especially appealing. Increasingly anxious about their own racial purity, white South Carolinians were trying to lump Indians and African Americans into the same racial category—"colored"—while Mormons clearly distinguished between Indians, or Lamanites, and African Americans and taught that conversion would turn Indians white. The Book of Mormon presents Indians as descendents of the House of Israel, that is, God's chosen people, and places a special responsibility on saints to minister to them. In a period in which everyone else seemed to wish the Catawbas would disappear, the saints singled them out and elevated their status. In the 1960s, one Catawba recalled proudly, "They [the Mormons] came among the Indians first."²⁷

Mormons addressed the educational and material as well as spiritual needs of Catawbas. In 1885 a missionary drafted a petition to the state for a school, obtained enough signatures to open it, and hired a Catawba who could read and write to teach for four months for thirty dollars. The state made meager contributions to the school, and there was a brief attempt by Presbyterians to enter the Catawba mission field, but no one was as steadfast as the Mormons. From 1908 until 1943, when the Bureau of Indian Affairs assumed responsibility for Catawba education, the Mormons furnished the tribe with teachers.²⁸

Mormon missionaries also paid attention to the physical needs of their flock. The decision of most Catawbas to become Mormon is not surprising to anyone who reads the diary of Joseph Willey. He hunted and fished with the Catawbas, an enterprise that was more likely economic than sport. He helped men in the congregation put a large flatboat into the Catawba River for the ferry business that one of the Catawba leaders operated. Because the Catawbas did not have enough land to support their members, Willey accompanied a church member to negotiate a tenant agreement that provided land for six "saints." When the Catawbas moved onto this land, Willey joined them in the fields to hoe and pick cotton.²⁹

By becoming Mormons, the Catawbas set themselves apart from other South Carolinians. Perhaps they saw some parallels between their Catawba culture and that of the saints, as well.³⁰ Not only did Mormons, like Catawbas, encounter hostility from local whites, but they also followed practices that

Pinkney Head)," 48, South Caroliniana Library, University of South Carolina, Columbia.

²⁷ Hudson, *The Catawba Nation*, 117.

²⁸ Jerry D. Lee, "A Study of the Influence of the Mormon Church on the Catawba Indians of South Carolina, 1882-1975" (M.A. thesis, Brigham Young University, 1976), 62-63.

²⁹ Martin, "Missionary Journals," 8, 12, 34, 35, 37, 41, 46.

³⁰ See Frank G. Speck, *Catawba Texts* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1934), 40.



On the steps of the Mormon Church, Catawba Reservation, August 1933. Pictured at center (with black belt) is Louisa Canty Blue (1897–1963), wife of Samuel Taylor Blue, who became chief of the Catawbas in 1931 and served in that capacity at various times until his death in 1959. Chief Blue was reportedly the sole surviving speaker of the Catawba language on the reservation after 1954. Courtesy of the University of Pennsylvania Museum (image #28758), Philadelphia.

resonated with the Catawbas. In his diary, Willey carefully recorded his dreams; Catawbas likewise recognized the importance of dreams as a source of knowledge and guidance.³¹ Willey attended the sick, treating them physically and praying over them. His ability to heal Catawbas was, he wrote, "a great testimony," because Catawbas connected medicine and spiritual power. Catawba doctors blew through a reed straw into a pot containing medicinal tea in order to "charge it with personal power" of the healer. The patient then drank the tea, or the doctor sprayed it over him or her through the reed. The doctor and others then sang and danced, which were Catawba forms of prayer.³² Most important of all, though, was probably the emphasis that the Mormons put on community, especially since the Catawbas felt that their own was under siege.

The Treaty of Nations Ford in 1840 made South Carolina responsible for the Catawbas, but the state failed miserably. As a federal official from the Office of Indian Affairs phrased it, "The state carried out the terms of the treaty pretty much as it pleased." In the early twentieth century, Catawbas began to question the tactics used to divest them of their holdings and consider legal proceedings. They appealed to the U.S. Office of Indian Affairs, engaged an attorney, and threatened to sue the state of South Carolina for the recovery of the lands they had lost. The Treaty of Nations Ford, they contended, had been negotiated in violation of the U.S. Constitution and a 1790 law that mandated federal involvement in Indian land cessions. The governor, no doubt quaking in his boots, conceded that the treaty was "never fairly carried out" and set up a commission to look into the Catawba complaints. The Catawbas doubted that the state would do anything. The commission, and subsequent commissions, recommended the purchase of land for the Catawbas, but the legislature failed to act.³³

The Catawbas were desperate. Their reservation could not support them, and most jobs, including those in textile mills, were closed to them. In 1934 Chief Samuel Blue wrote President Franklin Roosevelt, "Our little band of Catawba Indians are in starving condition and I am appealing to you for some help."³⁴ The United States responded by sending investigators. The Indian New Deal, passed in 1934, sought to promote Indian culture and preserve tribal communities, and a series of federal investigators found

³¹ Martin, "Missionary Journals," 23, 38, 47.

³² *Ibid.*, 8, 9, 13, 18, 20, 22, 43; Speck, *Catawba Texts*, 49-50.

³³ Chester Howe to Francis E. Leupp, December 28, 1905, Central Classified Files; D'Arcy McNickle, Memorandum to the Commissioner, [1937], *ibid.*; Charles L. Davis to Commissioner, January 5, 1911, *ibid.*; Frank Kyselka to Commissioner, March 25, 1910, *ibid.*

³⁴ Chief Sam Blue to President Roosevelt, February 2, 1934, Central Classified Files.



"Group of Catawba Indian Scholars," March 1908. David Adam Harris (1872–1930), at right, with his second wife, teacher Margaret Della George Harris, and her pupils in front of the school on the "Old Reservation." Harris was chief of the Catawbas from 1906 to 1917. Courtesy of the South Caroliniana Library, University of South Carolina, Columbia.

the 250 Catawbas living on the reservation in desperate straits. All agreed that the Catawbas' land was too rocky and poor to farm or support livestock. To make their point, investigators reported that the Catawbas' eighteen cows "looked as though they would not give more than enough milk to go in coffee" and "one of the two mules [the Catawbas owned] is lame and has to be plowed by two men so one can help him up when he falls."³⁵ Finally, in 1943 the Catawbas, the Office of Indian Affairs, and the state of South Carolina reached an agreement by which the Catawbas came under the administration of the Office of Indian Affairs, and the 3,482.8 acres purchased for them became a federal reservation (known as the "New Reserva-

³⁵ D'Arcy McNickle, Memorandum to the Commissioner, [1937], Central Classified Files; F. T. Ritchie and Glenn S. Buie, "Report on the Catawba Indian Nation," January 1935, *ibid.*

tion" to distinguish it from the "Old Reservation," which remained under the authority of the state).³⁶

The reservation did not last long. Some Catawbas chafed under the restrictions placed on federal-trust land. In particular, because they did not hold title to the tracts on which they lived, individuals could not borrow money to build houses on reservation land or improve the ones they already had. Therefore, the tribe voted in 1959 to allot the New Reservation to individuals and dissolve their relationship with the United States. Congress passed the necessary legislation, and federal recognition of the Catawbas ceased. Catawbas received either individual title to land or compensation, but they still jointly held the Old Reservation, the 630 acres acquired in the 1840s.³⁷

In just a little over a decade, the Catawbas came to regret their decision on termination. In 1973 a group of Catawbas met and elected Gilbert Blue as chief. Catawbas began moving back to the Old Reservation, and between 1969 and 1975, the reservation population quadrupled. In 1980 the Catawbas filed suit in federal district court to recover their land. Originally dismissed because of termination and the state's statute of limitations, the Fourth Circuit Court of Appeals reinstated the case. The U.S. Supreme Court ruled that the statute of limitations did apply, but referred the question of the validity of the case back to the appeals court, which recognized the legitimacy of some portions of the Catawbas' case. This ruling threw into question the legitimacy of the 61,767 land titles in upper South Carolina, and legal proceedings threatened to drag on for years. Consequently, the Catawba Nation, the state of South Carolina, and the federal government reached an agreement that Congress enacted into law in 1993. The Catawbas received a cash settlement of \$50 million payable over five years. The funds came from the federal, state, and county governments as well as private concerns such as title-insurance companies. The value of services from state and federal agencies swelled the cash value of the award to between \$80 and \$90 million. The law established trust funds for land purchases, economic development, social services, education, and per-capita payments.³⁸ On the eve of the settlement, Chief Gilbert Blue expressed his hope for the tribe: "We will have our restoration to federal recognition, and there will be many programs and opportunities forthcoming to the Catawba people—mainly

³⁶ Title to Real Estate, The State of South Carolina to the United States of America in Trust for the Catawba Indians, October 6, 1945, York County, S.C., Book T, Page 219.

³⁷ *Charlotte Observer*, July 9, 1959.

³⁸ Lynn Loftis, "The Catawbas' Final Battle: A Bittersweet Victory," *American Indian Law Review* 19 (1994): 183-215; Catawba Indian Tribe of South Carolina Land Claim Settlement Act of 1993, Public Law 103-116, 107 Stat. 1118.

higher education, better health care and all the other programs we can use to make us a better people and better members of our community."³⁹

The Catawbas paid a substantial price for this settlement: in a serious compromise of their sovereignty, the act excluded them from the provisions of the Indian Gaming Regulatory Act, which legitimates casinos on Indian reservations, and their members must pay state tax on incomes from the reservation. Catawbas are now challenging South Carolina's attempt to prohibit video poker on their reservation, which the state claims is consistent with legislation that was part of the settlement. In January 2007, the Catawbas won in the circuit court, but the state Supreme Court overturned the decision two months later.⁴⁰ The tenacity with which the Catawbas are waging this legal battle is as much about sovereignty as it is about the economic relief that gaming can bring the tribe.

As the struggle continues, Catawbas have been buying land, constructing housing, and putting their Indian community back together again. The reservation has been central to the Catawbas' survival strategy because it permitted them—indeed, required them—to exercise sovereignty. Catawbas owned their reservation in common, so they had to maintain a political system for making joint decisions about its use. They had to keep track of who belonged to the body politic and how tribal members would interact with each other and with outsiders on tribal land. Sovereignty, rooted in their reservation, gave them the courage to worship as they chose, even if it offended their non-Indian neighbors. On their reservation, they preserved those aspects of their culture that were meaningful to them, such as the manufacture of pottery. Sovereignty gave them the right to make decisions that they sometimes came to regret—the loss of language in the 1950s, their vote in favor of termination and allotment, and most recently, the limits on sovereignty that the 1993 settlement imposed by apparently limiting gaming opportunities—but it also has united them. Holding land in common was an expression of the core value of community, one that Catawbas maintain today even as members vigorously debate their future.

A third strategy for survival is more ambiguous than the first two, because it is a strategy of assimilation. A significant part of assimilation is marriage with non-Indians, a practice pursued by lowcountry Indians, Catawbas, and other Native peoples who preserved their distinct communities. Despite a law passed in 1879 that prohibited marriages between whites and people of color, including Indians, such marriages had already

³⁹ Interview with Chief Gilbert Blue, September 4, 1992, Samuel Proctor Oral History Program, University of Florida, [http://www.uflib.ufl.edu/UFDC/UFDC.aspx?g=spohp&m=d&i=4515&p=3\]&td=settlement](http://www.uflib.ufl.edu/UFDC/UFDC.aspx?g=spohp&m=d&i=4515&p=3]&td=settlement) (accessed December 2, 2006), 2.

⁴⁰ *The State*, January 16 and March 20, 2007.

taken place in large numbers. When Frans Boaz conducted anthropometric and demographic research among Native peoples between 1888 and 1903, he included fifty-four Catawbans in his study. Of these, forty-three had white ancestry.⁴¹ If racially mixed couples continued to reside in or maintain ties with Indian communities, their children almost always considered themselves to be Indians, as did the community in which they lived. Therefore, exogamous marriage expanded the pool of possible marriage partners and quickly increased the population. This is how the small Indian communities in nineteenth-century South Carolina expanded dramatically in size—they assimilated non-Indians and the children they had with Indians.

Assimilation also happened in the opposite direction—that is, children of marriages between Indians and non-Indians who were not brought up in Native communities became culturally and politically assimilated into non-Indian society. Countless Indian people in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries gave up citizenship in their tribes, no longer lived on tribally owned land, adopted Anglo-American culture, married non-Indians, and embraced a non-Indian identity. Their children and subsequent generations grew up as white or black, not Indian. They often maintained a tradition of Indian descent, although it usually remained a family secret discussed only in hushed tones until recently, when they have emerged from the closet. In 1996 a poll revealed that 40 percent of southerners lay claim to Native ancestry, and the percentage of South Carolinians specifically is not likely to vary greatly from that regional average.⁴²

Many South Carolinians have traditions and evidence that they descend from the Cherokees in particular. The Cherokee Nation was sovereign with a formal government that conducted diplomatic relations with the United States. Cherokee territory extended into the boundaries of the state until 1816, when the Cherokee Nation sold its South Carolina land to the state for five thousand dollars under a treaty negotiated with the United States.⁴³ This cession meant that the Cherokee Nation no longer governed land within the boundary of South Carolina, but there was nothing in the treaty that forced individual Cherokees to leave the state. Some remained and became citizens of South Carolina. They obtained title to their homesteads only if they bought them from the state, because the treaty did not

⁴¹ Franz Boas, "The Varieties of the American Race in North America," Manuscript 1308, National Anthropological Archives, transcription by R. L. Jantz. For information on the data set, see R. L. Jantz, "Franz Boas and Native American Biological Variability," *Human Biology* 67 (1995): 345-354.

⁴² John Shelton Reed, "The Cherokee Princess in the Family Tree," *Southern Cultures* 3 (1997): 111-113.

⁴³ "Treaty with the Cherokee, 1816," Charles J. Kappler, ed., *Indian Affairs: Laws and Treaties*, vol. 2, *Treaties* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1904), 124-125.

reserve tracts for individuals.⁴⁴ In the next decade, the Cherokee Nation established its capital at New Echota in what is today northern Georgia, and in the 1830s, under the terms of a fraudulent treaty, the United States forced the nation west on the Trail of Tears.⁴⁵ Many Cherokees, however, did not go west. Most of those in North Carolina purchased land, and when they were threatened with its loss after the Civil War, the United States stepped in to clear the titles and take it in trust. The result is a federally recognized Cherokee tribe just to the north of South Carolina, the Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians, which has a reservation over which it exercises sovereignty.⁴⁶

Not all Cherokees who remained in the east were entitled to enroll in the Eastern Band. Instead, like those who stayed after the Cherokee Nation ceded the land on which they lived, they became citizens of their states of residence. They often married non-Indians, and during the era of segregation, they sometimes found their racial identity questioned. Small concentrations of people with Cherokee ancestry probably existed in South Carolina, but they had no formal recognition until the state acknowledged them very recently. Most Cherokee descendants, however, became absorbed into the general population. That does not mean that they forgot their Native ancestry. Indeed, on the 2000 census, nearly eight thousand South Carolinians identified themselves as Cherokee, either alone or in combination with another race or tribe. Some of these are enrolled in the three federally recognized Cherokee tribes—the Eastern Band in western North Carolina, the Cherokee Nation, or the United Keetoowah Band in Oklahoma—or they belong to the state-recognized groups: the Lower Eastern Cherokee and the Eastern Cherokee, Southern Iroquois, and United Tribes of South Carolina. But being Cherokee is an identity that most have embraced while living beyond the legal bounds of any tribe.

Assimilated people of Indian descent often have little social or cultural experience as Indians, and some suggest that they are “Wannabees”—they merely “wannabe” Indians.⁴⁷ Certainly attempts by some people in this category to exploit an Indian identity solely for personal gain are both reprehensible and doomed, since tangible benefits stem from membership in a tribe, not from Indian ancestry. Furthermore, most Native people who have tribal experiences find it offensive when strangers attempt to establish

⁴⁴ Goins, *South Carolina Indians Today*, 26.

⁴⁵ See William G. McLoughlin, *Cherokee Renascence in the New Republic* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1986), and Theda Perdue and Michael D. Green, *The Cherokee Nation and the Trail of Tears* (New York: Penguin/Viking, 2007).

⁴⁶ See John R. Finger, *The Eastern Band of Cherokees, 1819-1900* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1984).

⁴⁷ Rayna Green, “A Tribe Called Wannabee: Playing Indian in America and Europe,” *Folklore* 9 (1988): 30-55.

a rapport by pointing out that they, too, have an Indian great grandmother (even if they do). On the other hand, the extent to which people freely acknowledge Indian ancestry may be an indicator of the racial climate. Human beings do not normally proclaim an ethnic identity contrary to their experiences if it is likely to deny them educational and economic opportunities. Despite continuing battles, particularly over the limits of sovereignty, the modern era is one of remarkable toleration where Indians are concerned. The millions of people nationwide who do not primarily identify as Indians, but had a distant ancestor who did, may be partly responsible for the growing acceptance of Indian people, Indian views, and even Indian sovereignty. After all, who would have believed fifteen years ago that there would be an Indian-owned Harrah's casino in western North Carolina and that the Eastern Band of Cherokees would be the largest employer west of Asheville? Traditions of Indian descent by people who historically have been classified as non-Indians may have helped ensure the survival of Santee and Edisto communities and Catawba sovereignty, as well.

Forgotten and ignored by non-Indians after the colonial period, Indian people have managed to carve out lives for themselves in the Palmetto State, not by following a single formula, but by developing different strategies for survival. The Indian people of the lowcountry created segregated institutions in order to preserve their ethnicity; the Catawbas insisted on their right to exercise sovereignty on their reservation; and the descendants of assimilated Indians clung to distant memories of Native ancestors. The modern people that this history has shaped are also very diverse. They range from the federally recognized Catawbas, to state-recognized tribes and groups, to individuals with Native ancestry. Their current circumstances reflect their distinct histories and defy any attempt to create a single narrative of South Carolina Indian history or a simplistic characterization of Native people in the state. Instead, the diversity of the Indian experience in South Carolina calls for the abandonment of stereotypes and the recognition of the richness of their legacy.