

**Articulatory Relationships:
The Waccamaw Struggle Against Assimilation**

by

**Patricia B. Lerch, Ph.D.
University of North Carolina at Wilmington**

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Anthropologists, historians, and sociologists have consistently pointed out that North American Indians have refused to vanish from the American scene. That refusal, translated into political terms, has been a conscious attempt by North American Indian communities to demand recognition as Indians and to use that recognition as a basis for their economic development. Lurie (1971:418) calls this political activity an "articulatory movement." *Articulate*, meaning to join with or to give expression to a cultural identity as a minority, is opposed to *assimilate*, meaning to be absorbed into the system, to disappear as a cultural minority. The painful choice, as Lurie (1971:419) points out, is between survival as an Indian community, perhaps in poverty, and survival as an individual who has assimilated into the dominant society and thus has "made it." The primary goal of an articulatory relationship is improving an Indian standard of living while maintaining intact an Indian identity. Indian identity may rest on a complex blend of factors, ranging from tribal language and tribal origins, to traits of white origin reinterpreted in the local context, to "Pan-Indian" traits so widely diffused as to be characteristic of many tribal societies (Lurie 1971:409). One such Pan-Indian feature is the powwow complex.

Tribal communities in North Carolina survived more than three hundred years of contact with Euro-American society and yet managed to hold on to their Indian identity despite major changes in tribal lifestyle and the loss of their indigenous languages. These surviving Indian communities have been variously referred as "remnant" Indian communities, "mixed bloods," "tri-racial isolates," "folk societies," "racial islands," or "marginal peoples." Their tenacity has been attributed to a number of factors, including physical isolation from

whites, structural isolation resulting from practices of endogamy, and close-knit community life (Gilbert 1948:420; Price 1953:143; Berry 1978:290-295; Thompson 1972:1297-1298; Boyce n.d.:131; Frazier 1966:164; Dane and Griessman 1972:694).²

In this essay I shall use Lurie's concept of articulatory relationships to interpret the actions of Waccamaw Siouan Indian leaders during the first half of the twentieth century. Rather than assimilate into Southern society as either white or black, the people of these small North Carolinian communities chose to assert their Indian identity and to encourage their leaders to negotiate informal contractual agreements with white-dominated government agencies controlling the distribution of public resources and services. The basis of this relationship was to be recognition as an Indian community. Two areas of activity are reviewed: the fight for Indian schools (1900 to 1939) on the local and state level, and the battle for recognition through special legislation (1940 to 1950) on the federal level. The archival and field research on which this essay is based was conducted between 1982 and 1984.³

THE COMMUNITY

The Waccamaw Siouan Indians live in two settlements bordering Columbus and Bladen counties in southeastern North Carolina. The St. James settlement is located in Waccamaw Township, Columbus County, and the Buckhead settlement lies partly in Bolton Township of Columbus County and partly in Carver's Creek Township of Bladen County. About half the approximately fifteen hundred men, women, and children are currently on the tribal roll. Until 1950, farm work and forestry provided the most income for the small landowners, tenant farmers, and sharecroppers. The Waccamaw Siouan economy depended very little on paid public work because it was scarce and difficult to obtain. Since 1950 many younger Waccamaw have left farming and turned to full-time employment in local paper industries, apparel factories, chemical plants, construction, and a variety of positions and professions in the surrounding urban areas. The following occupational fields were represented by economically active male heads of households in a 1983 survey of the Buckhead Indian settlement: con-

struction (47 percent), forest and paper industry (30 percent) and farming (6 percent). Of the economically active women, work in the sewing and apparel industries employed many (45 percent).

Twelve tribal surnames have remained consistent through time: Blanks, Baldwin, Freeman, Graham, Jacobs, Kerksey, Mitchel, Moore, Patrick, Spaulding, Strickland, and Young. However, these surnames are not evenly represented in the tribe and each community has been dominated throughout its history by a smaller number of families. For example, in the Buckhead community, with 190 households, the Jacob and the Freeman surname is predominant. Among the Jacob households, 16 percent of the male heads of households had married women from the Freeman family. Likewise, in the Freeman households, 25 percent had married women from the Jacob family. Of all the other households within this community with surnames other than Jacob or Freeman, 47 percent had married with a Jacob or a Freeman.

The Jacob and Freeman families are also among the oldest in the Buckhead community. Abraham Freeman held deeded land in this region as early as 1787 and, together with Shadrick Jacobs, a community land base was established along the Buckhead and Ricefield branches running north out the Green Swamp, just above Lake Waccamaw.⁴ Shadrick Jacobs appears in the 1800 federal census of Bladen County with six family members listed as "all other free persons" as opposed to either white or slave. The Waccamaw family surnames are consistently referred to in this fashion in this early census. The small number of people listed as "all other free persons" in Bladen County in 1800 (159 of a total county population of 7,028, including 4,577 white and 2,299 slave) and the proximity of these two early ancestors to the present Waccamaw community of Buckhead suggest that survival depended upon isolation, social endogamy, and a strategy of articulation rather than assimilation. Endogamy may have preserved a sense of community identity, fostered a feeling of distinctiveness as a "people," and established a basis from which Indian leaders could operate and forge articulatory relationships on behalf of the community.

TRIBAL LEADERSHIP

Articulatory relationships are generated through the actions of individuals who emerge as leaders and spokesmen for the Indian commu-

nity in its dealings with the dominant society. Such leadership requires skill in negotiation. The leaders must have the confidence of their own people and of those in the agencies of the dominant society with whom they interact. They must be able to persuade the representatives of the dominant society that their community deserves and has rights to certain services because of their Indian status. Furthermore, when necessary, leaders must be able to recruit the help of friendly whites to act as brokers or mediators for the Indian community. These might be lawyers, businessmen, government officials, anthropologists, and others. Articulation demands that Indian leaders on behalf of their community seek services, benefits, and rights by establishing linkages based on an underlying recognition by the dominant society that they are an Indian community.

Centrality in the kinship system, dedication to community issues, affability, generosity, charisma, and good communication skills are all qualities central to the definition of Waccamaw leadership. Waccamaw leaders have generally lived within one of the settlements near their family and kin. Leaders were prepared to spend a great deal of time on community issues. They exhibited "good sense," a "nice personality," and the ability to communicate and get along with insiders as well as outsiders. Formal education was advantageous but never a requirement since in the past educational opportunities were greatly limited. As one Waccamaw put it, "mother wit" was essential, referring to common sense and experience. Leaders participated in community-wide affairs, and church membership was essential.

Articulation required leaders who could effectively negotiate between the Indian community and outsiders. There were special domains of influence: economic, religious, or educational. Some men rose to prominence within the community because of individual economic success, defined as the ability to secure employment for Indians in their own businesses or industries or by hiring Indian assistants to work with them in some skilled area such as carpentry, logging, or turpentine manufacture on contracts with whites outside the tribal settlements. Those leaders with special influence within the religious domain served one of the tribal churches as preachers or pastors. Such religious leaders might gain a reputation outside the Indian settlements as well. And finally, education, a dominant concern to the Waccamaw in the early twentieth century, called for dedicated and articulate leaders who were willing to serve on the local school committees where

they represented interests of the tribe to the county and state school boards. The domains were not mutually exclusive nor were leaders prevented from operating in more than one at a time. Nor were they ranked. Depending upon the issues that were before the community at a given time, one domain might become more important than the others.

The Waccamaw leaders operated within an essentially egalitarian society with little formal political organization. Formal rank and hierarchy were absent, and even the number of leadership positions varied from time to time. In more recent times, W. J. Freeman became recognized by the majority of the tribe as "chief" spokesman. He held this role from 1924 until 1949, when the council appointed the Reverend R. T. Freeman to lead the fight for federal recognition. In 1950 he passed the position on to his nephew, Clifton Freeman, Sr., who held the position until his death in 1985. The chief spokesman embodied the ideal qualities of leaders. He was said to have spent more hours, energy, and effort than the others. He was also more articulate and better able to establish the contractual relationships with the outside world so necessary to improving conditions within tribal settlements. Furthermore, success depended upon his ability to establish these relationships while maintaining the important Indian identity of his tribe.

THE WIDE AWAKE INDIAN COUNCIL (1910-1950)

The Wide Awake Indian Council of the Waccamaw Tribe is the earliest remembered governing body. According to oral history, it was established in 1910. From then until 1950, the council provided the leadership necessary to pursue two important objectives: winning county and state recognition as Indians so that tax dollars could be used to fund Indian schools in the Waccamaw settlements, and passing a bill in the U.S. Congress designating them the Waccamaw Sioux Tribe of North Carolina. They worked toward these goals by establishing articulatory relationships with the local, state, and federal government.

The council was comprised of "men of age" who were chosen by family groups living within the tribal settlements. It met in homes, churches, or in the settlement schools. At such times, council members gave reports of their travels on behalf of the tribe and discussed com-

munity concerns. Council membership ran along family lines and the tenure of council members was determined by continuing support from family members and by the member's willingness to serve. The council (1900 to 1945) worked closely with a specially appointed school committee whose duty was to speak before the county school boards on behalf of the tribe and with a special committee to seek federal recognition.

The first objective of the council was to achieve recognition that they were Indians from local and state officials and as such had the right to Indian schools within their communities.⁵ Even before 1900 community representatives had been placed on the local school committees in Columbus County in order to insure direct participation by Indian parents in the education of their children.⁶ Although not totally effective, the tribe sought to maintain *de facto* control over the schools during a time when the schools which the Indians attended were officially open to both Indians and blacks.⁷ Oral history of these years describes them as ones during which the tribe was learning how to influence the local white school administrators. From the actions of the Waccamaw leaders it can be deduced that they were aware that earlier (1885) the state of North Carolina had opened schools for the "Croatan" Indians of Robeson and adjoining counties (Blu 1980:78-79). Since the state acknowledged the rights of Croatan Indians, the Waccamaw leaders sought to have themselves designated Croatan, too.

Successful strategies of articulation typically diffuse from one Indian community to the next as leaders experiment with various approaches to achieve their goals (Lurie 1971:419). But gaining recognition as Croatan Indians was never a satisfactory solution for the Waccamaw because outside the state it was seen merely as a convenient label for a group with mixed ancestry (Mooney in Hodge 1907:365, cited by Blu 1980:77) and it did not guarantee any other rights. Even within North Carolina, the label Croatan, shortened to "Cro(w)," was being used by some whites to mean Negro (Johnson 1939:520; Berry 1963:33, cited by Blu 1980:78). However, the Waccamaw continued with this strategy for winning the right to Indian schools, and in 1914 the question of Indian schools came to the attention of the county school superintendent, F. T. Wooten, and the federal Indian Agent, O. M. McPherson, who was in charge of an investigation into the

conditions of the Croatan Indians of southeastern North Carolina (McPherson 1915:237-238).

An entry in Book I of the school board minutes of Columbus County in 1920 shows that the "Indian School" question was still unsettled as members of the Wide Awake Indian Council continued to pressure the board for separate schools.⁸ The Waccamaw tribal leaders hired Donald McRackan, an attorney, to present their case to Dr. E. C. Brooks, superintendent of public instruction, arguing that since the Croatan of other counties had already won separate Indian schools their rights as Indians were being denied. McRackan was informed by the state superintendent that "the law does not compel the County board of education to provide separate schools for the Indians of its county."⁹ The matter was left up to the discretion of the local school board. This action may have been precipitated by the Columbus school board's refusal to allow the Waccamaw school committee to keep non-Indian children from attending their schools. The board reprimanded the tribal school committee and threatened to take them to court unless they opened their schools to all "colored" children.¹⁰ Perhaps because of slow communication, the Waccamaw were trying to be recognized as Croatan the same time the name was being dropped in favor of "Cherokee" by those already designated Croatan Robeson County.¹¹ Thereafter, from 1913 until 1953, Cherokee was synonymous with Indian within the state, protected by state law, and provided with state tax dollars to support education (Blu 1980:80-87).

Unable to control admission to their community schools, in 1923 some parents in the Buckhead community abandoned the county schoolhouse and moved their children to St. Mark's Church, where they would have direct control;¹² others began to construct their own schoolhouse.¹³ This situation was accepted by the Columbus school board because in 1924 the Wide Awake Indian Council, led by W. J. Freeman, had managed to convince the school board to reimburse the tribe for expenses incurred during the use of "a church for school purposes two years."¹⁴ That year (1924), tribal members deeded land to the board for a school in the Indian settlement at St. James.¹⁵ Evidence that the school authorities accepted this situation appeared in the board minutes for 1927 when the two Indian settlement-controlled schools and their committees appeared on the school list.¹⁶ Events of

the 1920s reveal that tribal effort was concentrated on controlling entry to the Indian community schools and on pressing the board for recognition as an Indian community. Tribal leaders worked simultaneously on both the local and state levels.

In 1927 Waccamaw leaders dropped their campaign to be identified as Croatan and tried instead to be designated Cherokee. They hired Thomas Johnson, an attorney from Lumberton, North Carolina, to present their argument to an unsympathetic school board.¹⁷ Once again a successful strategy for articulation was adopted from the Lumbee of Robeson County. The Waccamaw won a minor battle when they successfully passed Chapter 213, Public School Law in 1927. This law guaranteed separate schools to the Cherokee of Columbus County; however, no action was taken to implement the law. By 1928 the school board's inaction caused the tribal council to press mandamus proceedings through their attorney. Then in 1929 the Columbus County board of education and the Columbus County commissioners lobbied successfully for the repeal of Chapter 213.¹⁸ This stopped the flow of state and county funds to the support of Indian schools.

With characteristic persistence, Waccamaw leader W. J. Freeman continued to appear in the board minutes presenting the needs of the Indian community, including that of well-trained Indian teachers.¹⁹ St. James committeeman George Mitchel asserted his Indian status when he refused to accept a position on the school committee until the board granted him recognition as an Indian.²⁰ Then in 1933, the tribe experienced a victory when the Bladen County board of education accepted the proposition that the Waccamaw deserved separate Indian schools, granting them permission to open the first such school within their community on the Bladen side of the county line.²¹ This first county-funded Indian school was known as the Wide Awake Indian School.

Stimulated by this success, tribal members living in Columbus County once again renewed their efforts and petitioned the board to officially designate the St. Mark's school (held in the community church by the same name) an Indian school.²² Their petition failed, but they maintained their efforts until 1945, when the Columbus County board of education finally agreed to support separate county schools for Indians.²³ Throughout this struggle, the Wide Awake Indian Council played an important role, providing leadership which presented the

same articulation strategy in their 1940 to 1950 effort to become federally recognized. The Wide Awake Indian Council attached "Siouan" onto the name "Waccamaw," referring both to their county and to the lake by which they had always lived. Use of the name "Siouan" was apparently fairly widespread, as Gilbert (1948:420) notes in his survey of Indians within the state.

In November of 1949 members of the Wide Awake Indian Council traveled to Washington, D.C. in the company of James Alexander. There they visited the BIA offices, seeking advice on how to pursue their objective of federal recognition.²⁸ Through their representative, Alexander, the tribe also made contact with the Association of American Indian Affairs of New York City. The president of the Association, Oliver La Farge, and the association's executive director, Alexander Lesser, both anthropologists, were persuaded by Alexander to look into the Waccamaw case. Later they became convinced that the Waccamaw had the right to federal recognition as an Indian tribe.²⁹ The Washington attorney and council to the association, Felix Cohen, reviewed the Waccamaw case and eventually drafted a bill to the U.S. Congress which became known as the Waccamaw Bill (H.R. 7153, H.R. 7299).³⁰ In consultation with Cohen, the Waccamaw decided to place their lands in trust in order to establish a land base for tribal members living in the Buckhead area. This was done to prevent any further loss of landholdings. At a meeting in the Buckhead area, 157 Waccamaw adults signed a resolution stating their support of the terms of the Waccamaw bill.³¹

The bill was submitted to Congress in the spring of 1950 and directed to a House committee that referred the matter to the Office of Indian Affairs in April of that year. By the end of May, the Office of Indian Affairs, headed by Dillon Myer, was encouraged by Alexander Lesser to expedite matters.³² The legislation proposed two steps: (1) give the Waccamaw Indians protection as regards their lands, and (2) give them rights and privileges as a tribe under the Indian Reorganization Act of 1934. By August of 1950, the Office of Indian Affairs had returned a negative response to the House committee recommending that the Waccamaw Bill be defeated. While sympathetic to the Waccamaw petition, Dale Doty, the assistant secretary of the interior, expressed the fear that recognition of the Waccamaw would encourage

Indian position to the local and state education officials. Their actions showed that they deliberately chose an articulatory relationship rather than an assimilative one. The county and the state provided schools for "colored" children throughout this period and it would have been easy for the Indian leaders to simply accept this situation. Yet they chose to press for separately funded Indian schools as a strategy for maintaining their separate Indian identity.

many other unrecognized groups in North Carolina and other eastern and southeastern states to seek recognition.³³ Thus, despite considerable effort on the part of the Association for the Waccamaw, the bill was defeated in late summer of 1950.

SUMMARY

This brief essay has presented highlights of the history of the Waccamaw Sioux during the first half of this century when they and their leaders focused attention on the pursuit of articulatory relationships with the dominant American society in order to preserve their community identity as Indians. Lurie's model of articulatory relationships was used to further our understanding of the Waccamaw leadership style and what at first glance appear to be rather contradictory actions concerning the naming and identity of the tribe. While this contradictory action may suggest to some that the Waccamaw were insecure in their own identity, it is argued in this essay that the Waccamaw leaders knew precisely what they were doing and why. Faced with the choice of assimilation or articulation, they repeatedly chose the harder road of articulation in their determination to maintain an Indian identity for their community and to use that recognition to further the socio-economic development of the community. Furthermore, the negotiating skills required of leaders which emphasize communication, affability, getting along, and "mother wit" are particularly well suited to the process of articulation.

NOTES

1. Following Lurie (1971:470), tribe will mean "any local administrative unit that sees itself as a defined community of the Canadian and American bureau, state reservation communities, and communities that identify themselves as Indian, although entirely independent."

2. The Waccamaw Sioux who received state recognition in 1970 are one of four state-recognized tribes in North Carolina. The others are the Cohaire of Sampson County, the Haliwa-Saponi of Halifax and Warren counties, and the Lumbee of Robeson County. There are several other tribes which do not have

state recognition: the Meherrin of Hertford County, the Eno-Occaneechi of Alamance and Orange counties, the Tuskarora of Robeson County, and the Cherokee of Hoke County.

3. The research on which this essay is based was supported by a grant from the Administration for Native Affairs Status Clarification Office to the Waccamaw Siouan Development Association in 1982.

4. Bladen County Deed Book 26:340 (Microfilm Reel C.011, 40016 Bladen Record of Deeds 1785-1855, Vols. 25, 26, 27): Deed to Abraham Freeman, October 10, 1787 for 200 acres on northeast side of Buckhead Swamp; Brunswick County Deed Book 107:346: Deed to Abraham Freeman May 11, 1795 for 150 acres on Gum Swamp, witnessed by Shadrick Jacobs and Abraham Smith; Bladen County Deed Book 7:142: Deed dated February 6, 1798 to Shadrick Jacobs for "75 acres in fork between Green Swamp and Buckhead, near where Jacobs already owns land on Gum Swamp"; Bladen County Deed Book 121:239: Deed to Shadrick Jacobs, September 3, 1804 for land on west side of Ricefield Branch "to Abraham Freeman's line"; Bladen County Deed Book 11:299: Deed to Shadrick Jacobs, May 27, 1822 for purchase of land on Slade Swamp near "a track of Abraham Freeman's land where he lived and died."

5. The Waccamaw struggle for Indian schools is related to the evolution of schools for the nonwhite population of North Carolina in general. In 1875 thirty amendments were added to the state constitution providing for, among other things, separate schools for each race, forbidding miscegenation between whites and nonwhites, and ending local control over county governments (Lefler and Newsom 1963:471). Thus, two school systems were constitutionally mandated: one for whites and one for nonwhites or Negroes. Indians refused to send their children to Negro schools and were not allowed to send their children to white schools. As Blu (1980:62) points out, in reference to the Lumbee (formerly Croatan), "the Indians' education came to be entwined with their struggle for recognition as Indians at the very beginning and was to remain closely associated with continuing efforts to establish nationally recognized identity."

6. Minute Book I, July 7, 1885 (p. 5), December 12, 1892 (p. 67), June 5, 1893 (pp. 72-73), Columbus County Board of Education, Whiteville, North Carolina.

7. Minute Book I, January 1, 1920 (p. 561).

8. Minute Book I, February 2, 1920 (p. 565).

9. Letter from Donald McRackan to Dr. E. C. Brooks, April 18, 1921, letter from State Superintendent of Public Instruction to Donald McRackan, April 27, 1921, Department of Public Instruction, General Correspondence of the Superintendent, County Files, Box 2, State Archives, Raleigh, N.C.

10. Minute Book I, January 3, 1921 (p. 594), Columbus County Board of Education, Whiteville, N.C.
11. In 1913 Senator Angus W. McLean of Robeson County and later governor of North Carolina put forth a theory that the Indians of Robeson County and possibly other counties were really descendants of Cherokees, who like those in the mountains refused to move from the state in 1830 (U.S. House of Representatives 1913:20, cited in Blu 1980:40).
12. Minute Book II, August 6, 1923 (p. 226), Columbus County Board of Education, Whiteville, N.C.
13. Minute Book II, November 12, 1923 (p. 269).
14. Minute Book II, February 4, 1924 (p. 289), October 6, 1924 (p. 374).
15. Minute Book II, February 4, 1924 (p. 294).
16. Minute Book III, April 4, 1927 (pp. 68-69).
17. Minute Book III, June 6, 1927 (p. 80).
18. Minute Book III, February 4, 1929 (pp. 168-169).
19. Minute Book III, January 6, 1930 (p. 203).
20. Minute Book III, May 5, 1930 (p. 214).
21. Minute Book II, April 3, 1933, June 5, 1933, August 7, 1933, Bladen County Board of Education, Elizabethtown, N.C.
22. Minute Book III, August 28, 1934 (p. 343), January 1, 1935 (p. 351), October 7, 1935 (p. 400), Columbus County Board of Education, Whiteville, N.C.
23. Minute Book IV, May 16, 1945 (p. 269).
24. Letter from Wide Awake Indian Council to Whom It May Concern, September 3, 1940. Records of the Bureau of Indian Affairs, Record Group 75, National Archives, Washington, D.C.
25. Personal interview with Ossie Jacobs, January 5, 1984. Ossie Jacobs served on the Wide Awake Indian Council from 1940 to 1950.
26. Letter from Butler Prescott, Attorney, to Reverend R. T. Freeman, October 21, 1949. Records of the Bureau of Indian Affairs, Record Group 75, National Archives, Washington, D.C.
27. Letter from the Council of Wide Awake Indians, Waccamaw Tribe of the Siouan Nation to the Secretary of the Interior, November 14, 1949, Records of the Bureau of Indian Affairs, Record Group 75.
28. Letter from John H. Province to Hon. Frank P. Graham, December 6, 1949, Records of the Bureau of Indian Affairs, Record Group 75.
29. Letter from Alexander Lesser to James E. Alexander, December 21, 1949, American Association on Indian Affairs Archives, Box 78, Princeton University Library, Princeton, N.J.
30. Letter from Felix Cohen to James E. Alexander, January 3, 1950, American Association on Indian Affairs Archives, Box 78.

31. Letter from James E. Alexander to Dr. Alexander Lesser, January 16, 1950, American Association on Indian Affairs Archives, Box 78.
32. Letter from Alexander Lesser to Dillon Myer, May 26, 1950, Records of the Bureau of Indian Affairs, Record Group 75, National Archives, Washington, D.C.
33. Letter from Dale E. Doty, Assistant Secretary of the Interior, to J. Hardin Peterson, Chairman of Committee on Public Lands, House of Representatives, August 7, 1950, Records of the Bureau of Indian Affairs, Record Group 75.

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