

The Lumbee, Tuscarora, Cherokee, Catawba & Cape Fear Peoples

The Nations That Were Here

The land that became North Carolina had been continuously inhabited for at least fourteen thousand years before Europeans arrived and named it. The people who lived here built cities, farmed the river valleys, governed through councils, traded across hundreds of miles, and maintained territorial sovereignty for fourteen thousand years.

They were not the prologue to North Carolina history. They were North Carolina history. They are still here. That fact — that they are still here — is itself the contribution this entry documents.

Prologue Contribution Entry · c. 12,000 BCE – Present · Sacred & Political (Dual Lens)
Pairs with P-4 The Tuscarora War · Living Record: Lumbee Recognition Act pending

I.

THE LAND BEFORE THE NAME

Fourteen Thousand Years · Cumberland County · Fayetteville

The land that became Cumberland County, North Carolina, was inhabited for fourteen thousand years before European settlers arrived and named it. Stanley Knick's archaeological work at the University of North Carolina at Pembroke, published in 1988, documented continuous human occupation of the Lumber River and Cape Fear watersheds from the Paleo-Indian period — approximately 12,000 BCE — through the Archaic period (8000–1000 BCE), through the Woodland period (1000 BCE–1600 CE), and into the colonial era and the present.¹

Fourteen thousand years is not an abstraction. It is 560 generations of people farming, fishing, building, governing, praying, burying their dead, and raising their children on the land where Fayetteville now stands. The Cape Fear River was not named the Cape Fear by the people who lived along it for those fourteen thousand years. Every name on the map of this region is a colonial overwriting of a prior name — and the prior names represent a prior civilization whose existence the colonial project required to be denied.

The Two Americas archive begins its Prologue with the African cradle of humanity. It ends here — on the specific ground where Two Americas readers live — with the acknowledgment that this ground had its own civilization, its own governance, and its own people, for fourteen thousand years before the standard curriculum calls "North Carolina history" began.

Continuous Human Occupation — Cape Fear / Lumber Region

Period	Dates	Documented Evidence
Paleo-Indian	~12,000–8,000 BCE	Fluted projectile points, stone tools recovered from Lumber River and Cape Fear sites. First documented human presence in the region.
Archaic	~8,000–1,000 BCE	Fishing camps, gathering sites, early horticulture. Trade networks reaching Atlantic coast and Appalachian highlands. Gulf Coast shells and Appalachian copper found at NC interior sites.
Woodland	~1,000 BCE–1600 CE	Permanent villages, agricultural fields, longhouses, council houses, burial mounds. Maize agriculture. Pottery traditions distinct to the region. Distinct tribal identities forming.
Pre-contact / Contact	c. 1500–1700 CE	Skarure (Tuscarora) territories documented across Cumberland, Robeson, Sampson, Bladen, Brunswick counties. Cape Fear and Waccamaw Siouan peoples in lower Cape Fear. John Lawson survey (1709) documents active villages.

Period	Dates	Documented Evidence
Post-contact / Present	1700 CE–Present	Tuscarora War (1711–1715) dismantles Skarure territorial base. Lumbee convergence in Lumber River swamplands. Eastern Band of Cherokee in western NC mountains. Nations continue to exist and govern.

II.

THE FIVE NATIONS — WHO THEY WERE AND WHAT THEY BUILT

Lumbee · Skarure · Cherokee · Catawba · Cape Fear Peoples

The Lumbee Tribe of North Carolina

The largest Indigenous tribe east of the Mississippi. Descended from the convergence of Cheraw, Saponi, Hatteras, Tuscarora (Skarure), and Cape Fear peoples in the Lumber River basin. The Lumbee historian Malinda Maynor Lowery has documented this multi-origin convergence as a deliberate act of survival — as colonial pressure reduced individual tribal communities, surviving members came together in the swamplands where European access was difficult.² The Lumbee resisted racial categorization under Jim Crow — classified as neither Black nor white, they defended this ambiguous status with community solidarity and organized political action. In January 1958, the Lumbee confronted and routed a Ku Klux Klan rally held in Robeson County, led by Klan organizer James "Catfish" Cole — an act of organized resistance that became one of the most celebrated moments of Indigenous civil rights in American history. They are the largest tribe east of the Mississippi without full federal recognition. The Lumbee Recognition Act is pending in the United States Senate.

Headquarters: Pembroke, Robeson County, NC

The Skarure (Tuscarora) Nation of North Carolina

An Iroquoian-speaking people — linguistically related to the Haudenosaunee Confederacy — who built a sophisticated agricultural and diplomatic civilization in eastern NC. Their pre-contact territory included Cumberland, Robeson, Sampson, Bladen, and Brunswick counties. John Lawson's 1709–1710 survey documented Skarure villages on the lower Neuse and lower Cape Fear.⁷ The Tuscarora War of 1711–1715 (subject of P-4) destroyed the Skarure's territorial base, killed thousands, and enslaved thousands more. Some Tuscarora moved north and joined the Haudenosaunee as the Sixth Nation of the Iroquois Confederacy. Others remained in NC. Their descendants maintain tribal organization in eastern NC today.

Tribal organization: Eastern NC · Related to: Haudenosaunee Confederacy (Sixth Nation)

The Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians

The Tsalagi occupied the mountain country of western NC. One of the most politically sophisticated Indigenous nations in North America: complex clan governance, a diplomatic tradition that engaged European powers on near-equal terms, and — after Sequoyah developed the Cherokee syllabary between 1809 and 1821 — one of the only literate nations in the hemisphere that had achieved literacy without European instruction.⁵ The Trail of Tears (1838) forcibly removed approximately 16,000 Cherokee west to present-day Oklahoma; an estimated 4,000 died on the march. The Eastern Band remained in the mountains of western NC. They are a federally recognized sovereign nation. The Museum of the Cherokee Indian and the New Kituwah Academy language program are among their active cultural institutions.

Headquarters: Cherokee (Qualla Boundary), Jackson and Swain counties, NC

The Catawba Nation

Occupied the Piedmont Carolinas for centuries. Skilled farmers, traders, and diplomats. European diseases reduced their population from an estimated 5,000–6,000 in 1700 to fewer than 500 by 1826. Survived a federal termination period (1959–1993) during which the government unilaterally ended their recognized status — a termination reversed by the Catawba Indian Nation Land Claims Settlement Act of 1993.⁶

Headquarters: Rock Hill, South Carolina · Community presence in NC Piedmont · Federally recognized

The Cape Fear, Waccamaw Siouan & Coharie Peoples

Multiple Siouan-speaking communities whose territories converged in the lower Cape Fear watershed — present-day New Hanover, Brunswick, Pender, Columbus, and Cumberland counties. The "Cape Fear Indians" of colonial records represent these communities. The Waccamaw Siouan and Coharie peoples are state-recognized NC tribes whose territories were most immediately affected by the colonial settlement that followed the Tuscarora War — their lands were specifically opened to plantation agriculture by the Skarure's forced removal.

State-recognized: Waccamaw Siouan (Columbus / Bladen), Coharie (Sampson / Harnett)

III.

WHAT THEY BUILT

The Civilizational Record That the Standard Curriculum Omits

The standard American history curriculum frames Indigenous peoples as pre-civilizational: present before history, swept aside by history. This framing is wrong in every particular.

The Cherokee Syllabary — One of the Most Remarkable Intellectual Achievements in North American History Between approximately 1809 and 1821, a Cherokee man named Sequoyah — who was not literate in any European language — independently invented a writing system for the Cherokee language. The syllabary consists of eighty-six characters, each representing a syllable. Adult Cherokees could learn to read and write in days. Within months of its introduction in 1821, the majority of the Cherokee Nation was literate. Within years, the Cherokee had a printing press. By 1828, they were publishing the Cherokee Phoenix — a bilingual newspaper in Cherokee and English. By 1827, they had a written constitution establishing three branches of government. A nation that the Indian Removal Act of 1830 classified as "savage" had independently invented writing, established a free press, and written a constitution — all before the federal government removed them at gunpoint.

Sequoyah was not tutored by Europeans. He was not working from a European template. He invented a writing system the way the inventors of writing in Mesopotamia, in Egypt, and in China had invented writing systems: by thinking carefully about how sound could be rendered in marks. The Cherokee syllabary is an independent intellectual achievement of the first order. It belongs in the same conversation as Timbuktu and the Kouroukan Fougá.

The Haudenosaunee Confederacy — to which the Tuscarora's Skarure predecessors were related — exercised documented influence on the framers of the United States Constitution. A 1988 United States Senate concurrent resolution formally acknowledged that "the confederation of the original 13 colonies into one republic was influenced by the political system developed by the Iroquois Confederacy."⁸ The Great Law of Peace established representative governance, separation of powers, and the impeachment of leaders — centuries before the Constitutional Convention met in Philadelphia. The people whose constitutional tradition helped shape American democracy were forcibly removed from their lands by the government that adopted it.

IV.

THE 1958 CONFRONTATION — LUMBEE VS. THE KKK

Robeson County • January 18, 1958 • "The Battle of Hayes Pond"

In January 1958, Klan organizer James "Catfish" Cole held a rally in a field near Maxton, Robeson County — specifically targeting the Lumbee community, whom Cole had been traveling through the South denouncing as a people "who were integrating with white people and Indians." Cole had held similar rallies across the South with impunity. He did not know the Lumbee.

Approximately 500 to 1,000 Lumbee men — many armed — surrounded the rally site. When Cole's single light bulb was shot out, the crowd charged. Cole and the Klan leadership fled into the swamp. The Lumbee seized the Klan's banner. Photographs of Lumbee men holding the captured banner were published across the country. Time magazine ran the story. The Associated Press distributed the photographs nationwide.

No Lumbee were killed or seriously injured. Cole was arrested — for inciting a riot. The Klan never held another significant rally in Robeson County. The event became known as the Battle of Hayes Pond and is celebrated annually by the Lumbee community.

The Lumbee did not petition the government for protection. They handled it themselves. That is what sovereignty looks like when the government will not provide what sovereignty requires.

V.

STILL HERE — THE CONTRIBUTION

Survival as Civilizational Achievement

The contribution track of Two Americas documents what was built. In the case of North Carolina's Indigenous peoples, the most significant contribution of the post-contact period is the fact of survival itself.

Nation	Status	Present-Day Anchor
Lumbee Tribe of NC	State + limited federal recognition. Full federal recognition pending in Senate.	Headquarters: Pembroke, NC. Land base includes Cumberland County. Largest tribe east of Mississippi.
Eastern Band of Cherokee	Federally recognized sovereign nation.	Qualla Boundary, Jackson/Swain counties. Museum of the Cherokee Indian. New Kituwah Academy language program.
Catawba Indian Nation	Federally recognized (restored 1993 after termination 1959–1993).	Rock Hill, SC. Piedmont NC community presence. Catawba Cultural Center.
Skarure (Tuscarora) Nation of NC	Tribal organization maintained. State recognition process ongoing.	Eastern NC. Related to Haudenosaunee Sixth Nation in New York.
Waccamaw Siouan Tribe	NC state-recognized.	Columbus and Bladen counties.
Coharie Tribe	NC state-recognized.	Sampson and Harnett counties.
Haliwa-Saponi · Meherrin · Others	NC state-recognized (multiple nations).	Halifax, Warren, Hertford counties and others. NC has 8 state-recognized tribes + 2 federally recognized nations.

Survival under these conditions is not passive. It is active, organized, multigenerational, and ongoing. It is a contribution to the human record of the same order as building a university or administering an empire. The people of these nations are still here. That is the contribution.

CITATIONS

Chicago Manual of Style · Tribal Sources and Peer-Reviewed Authorities

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11. Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians. "Our History." ebci.com.
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PAIRED ENTRY REFERENCE

entry_related / entry_see_also

P-4	Persecution · The Tuscarora War (1711–1715): How Cape Fear Was Opened to Settlement · Prologue · Direct Pair
C-1	Contribution · The Cradle: Where Humanity Began · Prologue · Foundational Entry
P-2	Persecution · The Hamitic Hypothesis — Denial of Indigenous Civilizational Achievement · Prologue
LR	Living Record · Lumbee Tribe Federal Recognition · ERA VII / Living Record · Senate action pending

C-12 is the local-lens capstone of the Two Americas Prologue. The entire entry is Cumberland County. The Lumbee territorial base includes Cumberland County. The Skarure pre-contact territory included Cumberland County. The land where Fayetteville

was built was Indigenous ground for fourteen thousand years. C-12 and P-4 together close the Prologue by bringing the entire arc — from the African cradle of humanity to the specific ground where the reader stands — to its local conclusion. These nations are still here. The Prologue that began with the origin of the human species ends with the people who were already here when the history the standard curriculum calls "North Carolina" began.

TWO AMERICAS · twoamericas.us · C-12 The Nations That Were Here · Prologue Contribution Entry