

# H-Net Reviews

in the Humanities & Social Sciences

Patricia Lerch. *Waccamaw Legacy: Contemporary Indians Fight for Survival*. Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2004. xvi + 168 pp. \$29.95 (paper), ISBN 978-0-8173-5124-3; \$57.50 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-8173-1417-0.

Reviewed by Thomas E. Ross (Department of Geography, The University of North Carolina at Pembroke)

Published on H-AmIndian (March, 2007)



## The People of the Falling Star

Patricia Lerch has devoted more than two decades to the study of the Waccamaw Siouan, a non-federally recognized Indian tribe (the tribe is recognized by the State of North Carolina) living in southeastern North Carolina. Her book is the first volume devoted to the Waccamaw. It contains nine chapters and includes sixteen photographs, fourteen of which portray the Waccamaw during the period from 1949 to the present. The first four chapters provide background material on several different Indian groups in southeastern North Carolina and northeastern South Carolina, and are not specific to the Waccamaw Indians. Nevertheless, they are important in setting the stage for the chapters that follow and for providing a broad, historical overview of the Waccamaw and their possible ancestors.

The author “trace[s] the meaning of ‘Waccamaw’ and ‘Siouan,’ relating these words to the language, culture, and history of [Indian] peoples of the Southeast” (p. 1). Lerch points out that Siouan refers to a large language group that is believed by some anthropologists to have originated in the eastern part of what is now the United States. She presents rational assumptions about the Waccamaw tribe’s links to colonial Indians of southeastern North Carolina and the Cape Fear River drainage basin.

She has no reservations about accepting the notion that Indians living in the region were referred to as Waccamaw, Cape Fear Indians, and Woccon. Whatever the name of Indians living in the Cape Fear region during

the colonial period, they had to react to the European advance. In some instances, the Indians responded to violence with violence, and to diplomacy and trade with peace treaties; they even took an active role in the Indian Wars and the enslavement of Africans. The records, however, do no detail what eventually happened to the Indians of the Cape Fear. They could very well have evolved into the present-day Waccamaw.

Throughout the book, Lerch links the Waccamaw to colonial tribes. In the chapter entitled “From the Time of the Indians until 1920,” she discusses a pageant held in Wilmington, NC in 1921 as reflective of the Euro-American view of Indians in the southeast. She relies heavily upon historical accounts of colonial Indians to flesh out this chapter. In chapter 4 (“Tribal Names as Survival Strategies”) Lerch explains that Euro-Americans sought to identify Indians based on “blood” or “racial” descriptions, while the Waccamaw Siouan emphasized their Indian heritage and identity. The Waccamaw struggled to be recognized as Indians rather than descendants of largely African ancestors. In chapter 5 (“The Wide Awake Indians”), Lerch discusses the events leading to the use of the Waccamaw Siouan name and the group’s struggle to establish a school restricted to Indians. She relates that, in the 1930s, the ancestors of the Waccamaw called themselves Cherokee. In 1940 they began to use the name “Wide Awake Indians” and in 1948 Waccamaw Siouan was adopted. In chapter 6 Lerch describes the unsuccessful attempt of the Waccamaw Siouan to gain

federal recognition. The struggle for federal recognition continues, and is the one of the main topics of discussion in this book.

The book is recommended for its ethnographic description of a group trying to validate its claim of “Indianness.” Lerch has written a volume that will be invaluable to future scholars engaged in studies of the Waccamaw, in part because of her close association with the tribe. She knows the Waccamaw better than any non-Waccamaw, and her book describes them well.

That said, the book does have a few weaknesses. A map showing the Waccamaw homeland is conspicuously absent, a flaw that could have easily been remedied by

constructing a map or by using maps in another book.[1] Several cases of redundancy occur that could have been resolved by careful editing.

Nevertheless, Patricia Lerch is to be commended for a volume that should be in the possession of all students of American Indians in the Southeastern United States.

#### Note

[1]. See Kevin Moellenberdt and Christopher Price, “Waccamaw Siouan Indians,” in *American Indians in North Carolina: Geographic Interpretations*, ed. Thomas E. Ross (Southern Pines, NC: Karo Hollow Press, 1999), 137-148.

If there is additional discussion of this review, you may access it through the network, at:

<https://networks.h-net.org/h-amindian>

**Citation:** Thomas E. Ross. Review of Lerch, Patricia, *Waccamaw Legacy: Contemporary Indians Fight for Survival*. H-AmIndian, H-Net Reviews. March, 2007.

**URL:** <http://www.h-net.org/reviews/showrev.php?id=12931>

Copyright © 2007 by H-Net, all rights reserved. H-Net permits the redistribution and reprinting of this work for nonprofit, educational purposes, with full and accurate attribution to the author, web location, date of publication, originating list, and H-Net: Humanities & Social Sciences Online. For any other proposed use, contact the Reviews editorial staff at [hbooks@mail.h-net.msu.edu](mailto:hbooks@mail.h-net.msu.edu).