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THE  
MID-CONTINENT MAGAZINE

(Formerly The Southern Magazine.)

VOL. VI.

JULY, 1895.

No. 3.  
Old Series No. 33

CROATANS: THE LOST COLONY OF AMERICA.

BY FRANCES JONES MELTON.

IF we are to have a return of romance in fiction writing there is no place in America richer in material than the portion of North Carolina, where there may be found to-day the supposed descendants of "The Lost Colony of America."

For nearly three centuries the fate of those colonists has been a theme of historical speculation; and probably when the last word about them shall have been written, these mystical capital letters, CROATAN, carved on the tree inside the entrance to the frontier palisade, will remain as inscrutable as they were to the bewildered savage who took possession after Roanoke had been abandoned by the colonists.

Briefly, the story of the lost colony is that they were sent from England by Sir Walter Raleigh in 1587, about one hundred and fifty strong, under Governor John White, and landed on Roanoke Island.

After a little while Governor White found it necessary to go back to England for supplies. For some reason he did not return to America for three years, notwithstanding he had left his own family among the waiting colonists on Roanoke Island.

When he at last came back, he found no trace of those whom he had left behind when he departed for England three years before, except the word "Croatan" carved upon a tree within the palisade: "which letters," he says in a report of the last voyage, "presently

we knew to signify the place where I should find the planters seated, according to a secret token agreed upon between them and me at my last departure from them, which was that in any way they should not fail to write or carve on the trees or posts of the doors the name of the place where they should be seated, for at my coming away they were prepared to remove from Roanoke fifty miles into the main. Therefore, at my departure from them in August, 1587, I willed them that, if they should happen to be distressed in any of those places, they should carve over the letters or name a cross (†) in this form, but we found no such sign of distress. And, having well considered of this, we passed through the place where they were left in sundry houses, but we found the houses taken down and the place very strongly enclosed with a high palisade of great trees, with curtains and flankers, very fort-like, and one of the chief trees or posts at the right side of the entrance had the bark taken off, and five feet from the ground in fair capital letters was graven 'Croatan,' without any cross or sign of distress. This done we entered into the palisade, where we found many bars of iron, two pigs of lead, four iron fowlers, iron locker, shot and such heavy things thrown here and there, almost overgrown with grass and weeds."

"But, although it grieved me much to see such spoil of my goods, yet on the other side I greatly joyed that I had

Hamilton McMillan says concerning the Croatans: "At the coming of white settlers there was found located on the waters of Lumber river a large tribe of Indians, speaking English, tilling the soil, owning slaves and practicing many of the arts of civilized life. They occupied the country as far west as the Pedee, but their principal seat was on the Lumber, extending for twenty miles along that river. They held their lands in common, and land titles only became known on the approach of white men. The first grant of land to any of this tribe, of which there is any written evidence in existence, was made by King George the Second, 1732, to Henry Berry and James Lowrie, two leading men of the tribe, and was located on the Lowrie swamp, east of Lumber river, in the present county of Robeson, in North Carolina. A subsequent grant was made to James Lowrie in 1738.

"According to tradition there were deeds of older date, described as 'White' deeds and 'Smith' deeds, but no trace of them can be found at this date.

"Many families described as white people emigrated toward the Alleghany mountains; and there are many families in Western North Carolina at this time, that are claimed by the tribe in Robeson county as descendants of the lost English colonists, who had preserved their purity of blood to that degree that they could not be distinguished from white people.

"These Indians built great roads connecting the distant settlements with their principal seat on the Lumber, as the Lumber river was then called. One of these roads can be traced from a point on Lumber river for twenty miles to an old settlement near the mouth of Heart's Creek.

"James Lowrie, previously mentioned as one of the grantees in the

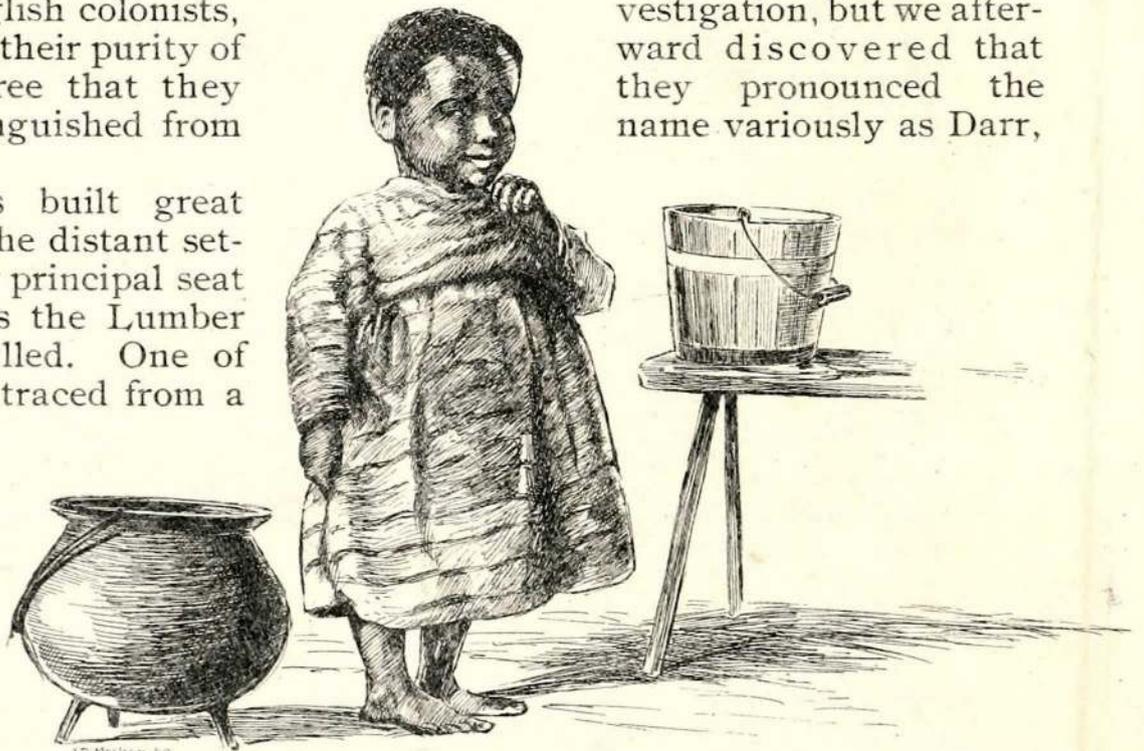
land deed made by King George the Second, and recognized as a chief man in his tribe, is described as an Indian, who married Priscella Berry, a sister of Henry Berry, the other grantee mentioned.

"James Lowrie was a descendant of James Lowrie, of Chesapeake, who married a Croatan woman in Virginia (as Eastern North Carolina is still described by the tribe), and became the progenitor of all the Lowries belonging to this tribe.

"According to the traditions respecting this family, the men were intellectual and ambitious and 'leaders among men.' Henry Berry, the grantee mentioned, was a lineal descendant of the English colonist, Henry Berry, who was left on Roanoke Island in 1587. Many of this tribe served in the Continental army during the Revolutionary war, and enjoyed pensions within the memory of persons yet living.

"A considerable number served during the war of 1812, some of whom received pensions within the recollection of the writer. Some of the tribe fought under 'Bonnell,' as they term Colonel Barnwell, and we have reliable evidence that they brought home as contraband of war a few Mattamuskeet Indians as their prisoners and slaves.

"The name Dare was not recognized by them in our first investigation, but we afterward discovered that they pronounced the name variously as Darr,



Another Type.

Dorr and Durr. This discovery was made when we related to an old chronicler of the tribe the story of Virginia Dare, the first white child born on American soil.

"This name Dorr appears on the muster roll of 1812, but has since

"*Mension* is used for measurement, *aks* for ask, *hit* for it, *hosen* for hose, *loven* for loving, *housen* for houses.



disappeared from on the Lumber river.

"Several affirm that the Dares, Harvies, Coopers and others retained their purity of blood, and were generally the pioneers in emigration. Many names are corrupted so that it is difficult to trace them.

"Traditions are fading fast. As far back as 1820 their traditions were more vivid than now, and familiar to old and young. Now you will find their ancient traditions confined to a comparatively few old persons. The language spoken is almost pure Anglo-Saxon, a fact which we think affords corroborative evidence of their relation to the lost colony of White.

"*Mon* is used for man, *fayther* for father, and a tradition is usually begun as follows:

"*Mon*, my *fayther* told me that his *fayther* told him, etc.

They seem to have but two sounds for the letter *a*, one like short *ô*. Many of the words in common use among them have long been obsolete in English-speaking countries, and this is corroborative of the truth of their tradition that they are the descendants of the lost Englishmen of Roanoke. Their language has many peculiarities, and reminds one of the English spoken in the days of Chaucer."

"In traveling on foot they march in 'Indian file,' and exhibit a fondness for bright red colors. They unconsciously betray many other traits characteristic

A Croatan Woman.

of Indians. The custom of raising small patches of tobacco for their own use has been handed down from time immemorial. In building they display no little architectural skill. In road-making they excel. Some of the best roads



A Croatan Girl.

in North Carolina can be found within their territory. They are universally hospitable and polite to strangers. They are proud of their race and boast of their English ancestry. Like their Indian ancestors, they are friendly to white men. They never forget a kindness, an injury nor a debt. In common with all Indians they have a great respect for Quakers, and look upon them as the true friends of the In-

dians. In the olden time they had houses of entertainment for travelers."

The chief settlement of these people to-day is Scuffletown on the historic Lumber river. This river pursues a southeasterly course through Scuffletown. Its waters are very dark, and flow swiftly between flat, swampy banks. Pine, cypress and gum trees thickly stud its waters, except in its deepest and swiftest currents. It very rarely confines itself to one current, and lovely islands full of feathery greenness are constant in the dark stream. The soil of the flat lands bordering the river is moderately fertile and very easily cultivated. The country is pretty, but is marred somewhat by the ever present sameness of a land unvaried by hills and diversity of forest; while the glare of unending reaches of white sand tire the eyes and tan the complexion.

The Croatans till small farms and live in small houses, but the habitations have an air of homelike convenience. Their dooryards are ornamented with shrubs, vines and flowers, and

their gardens are large and stocked with vegetables. Their farms are usually a clearing of four or five acres immediately surrounding the house. A large farm is a rare exception, and an evidence of superior prosperity, among these primitive people.

The women and children cultivate the tiny crops, principally; while the men work at making turpentine, ditch for the neighboring planters, labor at the saw-mills, make splint baskets, vessels from juniper, and pick cotton to earn money for necessities the farms are inadequate to produce.

In former times, no doubt, when the swamps were full of game and the streams were more prolific, the men hunted and fished, and the women tilled the cleared patches of land; but with the coming of the white men they forsook fishing and hunting to serve for hire. Why they did not enlarge their farms and embrace the advantage of markets brought so near them, is a mystery pertaining to their Indian blood.

With their English thrift and economy, and Indian simplicity and seclusiveness, they have evolved a personality of race to be found in no other people in existence. They are extremely interesting as a product of the mingling of two distinct races, entirely opposite to each other in habits, color and physical traits. They can hardly be declared a mixed race even at this distant day. The physical traits of each were so indestructible that they persist in declaring themselves in all their purity after the lapse of centuries. There was not a point, it seems, at which their blood could mingle and produce a type that would harmoniously combine the characteristics of both races. When a Croatan is English he is almost entirely so; when he is an Indian he is an almost perfect type of the red man, robbed of his typical sternness by civilized habits and surroundings.

There are freaks among them, in whom the color is pronounced Indian and the features pure Anglo-Saxon. Again this type is reversed, and Indian features are clothed in a fair, rosy complexion. Another exception is an amber-tinted

color, with the features of either race. There are fair maidens and Anglo-Saxon young men; and maidens and young men who might be lineal descendants of Hiawatha and Minnehaha. As the men grow old they assume the characteristics of the Anglo-Saxon, typically, while the women seem to degenerate into the Indian type phenomenally. They are also the product of the coalescence of two very different intellects; and the more enlightened mind of the civilized man must have dominated the Indian very powerfully to eliminate the language, the names and the uncleanly sloth of the savage. There is not an Indian word, name or appellation among them, and often they have an exaggerated habit of cleanliness. Their uncarpeted floors are scrubbed to an almost snowy whiteness, their unpainted furniture is kept in the same spotless condition, and their dooryards are neat and tidy. Their dress is like that of an ordinary rural people, who work and pay but little attention to the toilet.

They are fond of bright colors and eschew neutral tints in dress fabrics. Bright pinks, deep reds, vivid greens, gay plaids and dark grounds spangled with large flowers or mottled with intricate blossoming vines are their most popular fancies in attiring themselves. They are quick-witted and appreciative. As a race they are unpretending and retiring, the more benighted ones preferring to live away from the public highways in the undisturbed solitude of the swampy pine lands. Their implements of agriculture and other industries are like those of the white people, with whom they trade almost exclusively. The Croatans, with a few exceptions, are not a mercantile people. They have no means but what is attained by patient toil and stern economy, involving much self-denial. The majority of them can read and write, and some have sufficient education to thoroughly appreciate literature. They thirst for knowledge when they are so enlightened as to feel their need of it. A newspaper is universally prized among them. They reverence that medium between them and the busy

world in which they have so little part. In former times it was impossible for a Croatan to get any education at all except by hiring some one to teach him privately, and this was difficult and expensive. When the free schools were established for the colored race they were given the privilege of attending them, but they indignantly declined to do so. In 1885 they were given separate schools, and since that time their progress has been phenomenal. Their public school houses, built entirely by private means, are all frame, and are much better equipped than those of the colored race. By an act of the General Assembly of North Carolina, passed in 1887, the Normal School for teachers of the Croatan race was established, and the sum of five hundred dollars is annually given by the State for its support. The Normal School has sent out thirteen instructors for the race, and is doing much to elevate the Croatans. At the present time there are thirty-seven pupils in attendance, but all are not teachers. The children of the public school near by are included in the instruction given by the Principal, because the attendance after the spring opens is small, and separate schools at that point are not necessary. The Principal is a white man, a graduate of Edinburgh, Scotland. The Croatans praise him warmly for his conscientious work in their behalf.

There are about two thousand five hundred Croatans in Robeson county; and eleven hundred children between the ages of six and twenty-one years are entitled to the benefit of public instruction. They generally avail themselves of this opportunity for an education. There are sixteen churches owned by the Croatans, divided between the Baptist and Methodist denominations. Their churches are frame buildings, but like, their houses, are as clean as scrubbing with white sand can make them. They are austere furnished with the bare necessities of pioneer worshippers.

The Croatans as a people are devoutly pious, and reverential of sacred things. The great faith which illumined the lives of their English ancestors in

the vast solitude of the American wilderness, and the sublime conception of the Great Spirit embraced by Manteo and his people, have descended as a redemptory benediction, even unto the present day, upon this lowly people.

In Scuffletown are many names derived from the English colonists. Lowries are there in abundance. Sampson, Brookes, Allen, Johnson, Graham, Thompson and many others, identical with the lost colony. Many of the colonial names have become extinct, and other names, through inter-marriage with settlers around them, have become incorporate with them.

When a white man married a Croatan woman, the children of such a union, with their father's name, became Croatans, and thus French, German, Irish and Scotch names are among them. In the original colony left upon Roanoke Island were one hundred and twenty persons in all; ninety-two men, seventeen women and eleven children, including the two who were born at the "city of Raleigh," on Roanoke Island, the first of whom was Virginia Dare. They were embraced in ninety family names, the majority of which can be found in the settlements on the Lumber river. This must be irrefutable evidence that the Croatans are the descendants of White's colony. They should be simply Croatans, not Indians or English.

Through misfortune of color they incurred the resentment of the white people in the unhappy days before and after the Civil war. In eager but sad

tones they will tell you how they suffered through another mongrel race, the ante-bellum free negro, who required laws to regulate his behavior. Every law passed for the free negro's government was enforced upon the proud, harmless, retiring Croatans, who only asked to be let alone in their poverty and isolation. The blood inherited from the protégés of the mighty Sir Walter Raleigh, and the royal tribe of Manteo, "Lord of Roanoke and Dasamonguepeuk," boiled with fiery but impotent indignation when those humiliating laws were executed upon them by uninformed officials, who did not know or care about the extreme difference between a Croatan and a person with African blood in his veins. Learned men came to their rescue in many instances, and gained the eternal gratitude of the oppressed Croatans. This wrong-doing finally ended in a series of horrible tragedies. The famous outlawry of Henry Berry Lowrie and his associates was a result of those tyrannical laws unjustly enforced. One law forbade a free negro to carry a gun, and the Croatan's much-loved weapon of sport was wrested from him.

As a people the Croatans are peaceable in disposition, but when aroused by repeated injury they will fight desperately. The great mass shun notoriety, and carefully avoid places where crowds of other races assemble. They are exclusive and seclusive; they have the combined traits of English and Indians; they are "The Lost Colony of America."



In the Croatan Public School.





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