



# Keeping the Circle: American Indian Identity in Eastern North Carolina, 1885-2004 (Indians of the Southeast)

*Christopher Arris Oakley*

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*Keeping the Circle* presents an overview of the modern history and identity of the Native peoples in twentieth-century North Carolina, including the Lumbees, the Tuscaroras, the Waccamaw Sioux, the Occaneechis, the Meherrins, the Haliwa-Saponis, and the Coharies. From the late 1800s until the 1930s, Native peoples in the eastern part of the state lived and farmed in small isolated communities. Although relatively insulated, they were acculturated, and few fit the traditional stereotype of an Indian. They spoke English, practiced Christianity, and in general lived and worked like other North Carolinians. Nonetheless, Indians in the state maintained a strong sense of “Indianness.”

The political, social, and economic changes effected by the New Deal and World War II forced Native Americans in eastern North Carolina to alter their definition of Indianness. The paths for gaining recognition of their Native identity in recent decades have varied: for some, identity has been achieved and expressed on a local stage; for others, sense of self is linked inextricably to national issues and concerns. Using a combination of oral history and archival research, Christopher Arris Oakley traces the strategic response of these Native groups in North Carolina to postwar society and draws broader conclusions about Native American identity in the late twentieth and early twenty-first century.

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