

CHALLENGING THE SOUTH'S BLACK-WHITE BINARY: HALIWA-SAPONI  
INDIANS AND POLITICAL AUTONOMY

Marvin M. Richardson

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Approved by,

Malinda Maynor Lowery

Daniel M. Cobb

William Fitzhugh

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## Abstract

MARVIN M. RICHARDSON: Challenging the South's Black-White Binary: Haliwa-Saponi Indians and Political Autonomy  
(Under the Direction of Malinda Maynor Lowery)

This thesis explores how the Haliwa-Saponi Indians Halifax and Warren County, North Carolina, challenged the Jim Crow black-white racial classification system between the 1940s and 1960s. To seek political autonomy the Indians worked with and against the dominant strategies of the civil rights movement. The Indians strategically developed Indian-only political and social institutions such as the Haliwa Indian Club, Haliwa Indian School, and Mount Bethel Indian Baptist Church by collaborating with Indians and whites alike. Internal political disagreement led to this diversity of political strategies after 1954, when school desegregation became an issue throughout the nation. One faction of Meadows Indians embraced a racial identity as "colored" and worked within the existing black-white political and institutional system, while another group eschewed the "colored" designation and, when necessary, asserted a separate political identity as Indians; as such, they empowered themselves to take advantage of the segregated status quo.

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## **Introduction**

For months in late 1953 and early 1954, rural southwestern Warren County and southeastern Halifax County, North Carolina had buzzed with unease ever since members of the Haliwa Indian Club began meeting in Haliwa Indian leader B.B. Richardson's pack house, a building to store feed and other farming supplies. The matter was urgent; they wanted to break Jim Crow customs. The southern racial culture grouped Indians like Richardson together with blacks into the category "colored," effectively denying recognition of their identity as Indians. Those Indian meetings prompted violent threats from both black and white locals, many of whom accused the men and women meeting at that "old club" of being so-called "fake" Indians who were acting "uppity", as if they were better than other colored folk. At the local colored schools, such as Hollister School, the rumor mill swirled as children who possessed a colored identity informed their openly Indian classmates of their parents' plots against the Indians. "Oh they're gonna kill my daddy," thought one Indian student after a classmate told her that his parents planned to burn down her house. The members of the Haliwa Indian Club deemed the threats serious, and on one cold January night in 1954, newly elected Haliwa Indian Chief Jerry Richardson and a few others patrolled a wheat field parking lot, with loaded shotguns in hand to protect club members. While Richardson patrolled the outside, the other Indian leaders occupied the small pack house, sitting on bags of wheat, hog feed, and fertilizer, while conducting the Indian business. The pack house brimmed with emotions of outrage

and protest, prompted not only by outsiders' threats but also by the determination to overcome discrimination and gain recognition of their birthright as Indian peoples.<sup>1</sup>

This meeting was but the first of many actions the Haliwa-Saponi Indians took to assert their political autonomy in the Jim Crow South. Haliwa-Saponis and other American Indians challenge the fallacious belief that only African Americans and whites have historically occupied the South. Recognizing a third race in a racially binary society belied both blacks' and whites' notions of race and identity in the South. The Haliwa-Saponis sought political independence, but not because of their "pure blood" or any stereotypical markers of Indian identity. Rather, their survival as an intact group showed that even under the essentialized racial system of segregation, mixed racial ancestry was not a barrier to outsiders' acknowledgement of Indian identity. Indians finessed this question with remarkable shrewdness. Indians, blacks, and whites have intermingled and mixed for hundreds of years, but Meadows Indians (as the Haliwas had historically referred to themselves)<sup>2</sup> strategically denied African American ancestry, while acknowledging white ancestry. Racial ancestry and identity are different, even though American society has often conflated them.

Halifax and Warren County Indians challenged the Jim Crow status quo between the 1940s and 1960s by working both with and against the dominant strategies of the civil rights movement. Community organizing and outside assistance combined powerfully to

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<sup>1</sup> Dr. Joseph Oliver Richardson and Dr. Brucie Ogletree Richardson to Cynthia Greenlee-Donnell, Interview, 3 August 2009, Haliwa-Saponi Indian Tribe, Hollister, NC; Haliwarnash Croatan Indian Club Minutes, 1953-1954, Haliwa-Saponi Indian Tribe, Hollister, NC.

<sup>2</sup> To avoid ambiguity and confusion, the entire community of Indian descendants or the group before formal tribal organization shall be referred to as the Meadows Indians or the Meadows Indian descendants, while the group and individuals of the club and tribe shall be referred to as Haliwas or Haliwa-Saponis.

stimulate local action, as they did across the South.<sup>3</sup> But the Indians also worked against the avowed goals of the civil rights movement, like school integration, by developing and supporting Indian-only political and social institutions, such as a segregated Indian school, church, and tribal organization.<sup>4</sup> Internal political disagreement led to this diversity of political strategies after 1954, when school desegregation became an issue throughout the nation. One faction of Meadows Indians embraced a racial identity as "colored" and worked within the existing black-white political and institutional system, while another group eschewed the "colored" designation and, when necessary, asserted a separate political identity as Indians; as such, they empowered themselves to take advantage of the segregated status quo.<sup>5</sup> One Indian group was willing to collaborate with whites and other Indians, while another showed a stronger propensity to work in coalition with blacks and to support black institutions. These divergent strategies disrupted age-old community relationships between blacks, whites, and Indians in the community.

The term "colored" was ambiguous and referred locally to non-whites, including blacks and Indians. Though the Meadows Indians recognized the "colored"-white binary, and initially accepted the "colored" moniker, they still tried to maintain their distinctiveness from "Negro" or "black" within this classification system. But during the civil rights era some Indians shunned the colored classification to articulate a distinct identity as Indian.

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<sup>3</sup> Charles M. Payne, *I've Got the Light of Freedom: The Organizing Tradition and the Mississippi Freedom Struggle* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, and London: University of California Press, 2007); John Dittmer, *Local People: The Struggle for Civil Rights in Mississippi* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1994).

<sup>4</sup> Malinda Maynor Lowery, *Lumbee Indians in the Jim Crow South: Race, Identity, & the Making of a Nation* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2010), xii.

<sup>5</sup> William H. Chafe, *Civilities and Civil Rights: Greensboro, North Carolina and the Black Struggle for Freedom*, (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1980).

While protest and discrimination have been two core themes of histories of the civil rights movement, other important themes exist. In 1954, the same time the Haliwa Indians constructed their strategy to pursue autonomy and Indian recognition, the Supreme Court deemed school segregation illegal in the *Brown v. Board of Education* decision. Previously, scholars often marked this landmark case as the beginning of the civil rights movement. Recently, however, scholars have pushed the beginning of the civil rights movement back further and recognized the importance of the World War II era to the movement. The United States denied minority soldiers, brave enough to risk their lives on the battlefield overseas, their rights and freedoms as American citizens at home. Focusing on the black-white experience, historians have largely left southern Indians out of the civil rights story. To Meadows Indians, the events and injustices of both eras marked opportunities for some Indians to declare their distinctiveness from other people classified as “colored,” while other Indians saw opportunity in joining forces with their black neighbors and family members.

Factionalism among American Indians has been a driving force for political organization, identity, and survival. Scholars have debated the stimulus for factionalism and have cited various examples to back up their claims. Factionalism can come from internal and external sources, or a combination of both.<sup>6</sup> Among the Meadows Indians internal politics among leaders and external pressure to conform or not conform to the rules of Jim Crow motivated factionalism, but could also be brought on by outsiders and the institutions they brought with them, including the church. In the mid to late 19<sup>th</sup> Century Indian leaders disagreed over which denomination, Methodist or Baptist, they

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<sup>6</sup> Lowery. *Lumbee Indians in the Jim Crow South*, xiv-xv, 277.



would support and whether their churches would be exclusively Indian or not. These two opposing philosophies—“isolationist,” or exclusively Indian association and “integrationist,” accepting interactions with non-Indians, especially African Americans at church and other institutions— were divisive and carried forward into the 20<sup>th</sup> Century.<sup>7</sup>

Because of the complexities of eastern American Indian issues, scholars have recently realized how important studies of eastern North Carolina American Indians are to the field of American Indian history. Christopher Arris Oakley surveys the political renaissance of eight Native American tribes: the Coharies, Haliwa-Saponis, Lumbees, Meherrins, Occaneechi Saponis, the Person County Indians, the Tuscaroras, and the Waccamaw-Siouans. Oakley traces how they maintained their Indian identity and finds that eastern North Carolina Indians’ identity is “intertwined with the local geography,” or tied to a certain homeland, and is the primary ethnic boundary (in the sense of anthropologist Frederik Barth) that separates Indians from other ethnic groups.<sup>8</sup> These ethnic boundaries have changed over time. North Carolina Indians debate whether Indian identity is biological or cultural. Indian identity is also formed by “a combination of internal assertions of identity (who Indians think they are) with external expectations of identity (who others think they are).”<sup>9</sup> As Oakley points out, ethnic boundaries and

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<sup>7</sup> P.A. Richardson, “Tilman Parsons Lynch 1858-1944,” November 1944, Haliwa-Saponi Indian Tribe, Hollister, North Carolina.

<sup>8</sup> Christopher Arris Oakley, *Keeping the Circle: American Indian Identity in Eastern North Carolina, 1885-2004*, (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2004), 12; According to Barth, the ethnic boundary “defines the group, not the cultural stuff that it encloses.” The boundaries are social boundaries, though they may have territorial counterparts. If a group maintains its identity when members interact with others, this entails criteria for determining membership and ways of signalling membership and exclusion.” An ethnic boundary “entails a frequently quite complex organization of behaviour and social relations.” Frederick Barth, ed., *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries: The Social Organization of Culture Difference* (Prospect Heights Illinois: Waveland Press, 1998), 15.

<sup>9</sup> Oakley, 12.

internal and external debates about Indian identity were essential to the Meadows Indians' assertions of identity and strategies to achieve political autonomy.

Meadows Indians maintain and recognize their distinctiveness as Indians based on a number of factors including ancestry, kinship, place, cultural practices, and in some cases "Indian" physical features. Meadows Indian kinship is a complex web of marriages and relationships between certain families that they consider to be of Indian descent and who have occupied The Meadows community for over 200 years. Lonnie A. Richardson, an early tribal leader, in 1955 remembered, "I have always took for Company", or associated with, the Richardson, Copeland, Lynches, Silvers, Evans, Hedgepeth, and other families.<sup>10</sup> P.A. Richardson recalled "my father Daniel Richardson, and his father Jeremiah Richardson and his grand-father John Richardson are said to have lived in that community since before the Revolutionary War."<sup>11</sup> Haliwa-Saponis refer to the community as "Indian Territory" and talk about how the Indians have lived there mostly alone until the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. Avis Lynch Green described one of her aunts as a "pure old ugly one", "she was dark-brown skin, but she had just straight hair, a old fashion Indian, them old kind."<sup>12</sup> What we today would recognize as Indian cultural practices were just a part of the Meadows Indians' daily lives. Clarine Daniel Lynch's grandmother Matilda Lynch Daniel "was a old herbal Indian woman... she went and got herbs and

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<sup>10</sup> Lonnie A. Richardson, "To whom it may concern," 18 February 1955, Haliwa-Saponi Indian Tribe, Hollister, NC.

<sup>11</sup> P.A. Richardson, "To Whom This May Concern," 1940, document on file at the Chief W.R. Richardson Tribal Government Complex, Haliwa-Saponi Indian Tribe, Hollister, N.C.

<sup>12</sup> Avis Lynch Green to Marvin Richardson, interview, 29 May 2000, interview in possession of Marvin Richardson.

made things.”<sup>13</sup> Ruth Lynch remembered how her grandfather informed her of her heritage when they were fishing together and had caught and cleaned some eels: “his mom's hair was so long she couldn't comb it down the back, she had to pull it around and she would take that eel skin and wrap her hair and his sisters did too. That's how they did their hair. He said that that's what Indian people used to do.”<sup>14</sup> Many non-Indians did not recognize these Indian cultural and social markers, and perhaps recognized only political and social institutions that upheld and recognized only a black-white division.

Before World War II, there were few opportunities for Meadows Indians to participate in Indian-only institutions, such as military units, schools, churches, and affiliated organizations. According to the one-drop rule of southern social relations, the institutions that Meadows Indians did join were labeled “colored” or “negro,” because they typically had support from the more populous black community and because a recognized Indian school or church system did not exist locally. These institutional affiliations led to other ways that Indians were routinely classified as negro. Draft registrars in World War I typically labeled Indians as “negro,” and the census takers routinely marked Indians as “negro,” with a few exceptions. Indians’ opportunities to express their identity in such public settings were thus extraordinarily hampered, even though they considered themselves as quite different from the African Americans with whom they associated. Around 1940, however, this situation began to change. That year, a few Indians managed to convince the census enumerator to use the correct racial category. Indian draftees for World War II began to insist that registrars label them

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<sup>13</sup> Clarine Daniel Lynch to Marvin Richardosn, interview, 1 February 2011, Haliwa-Saponi Indian Tribe, Hollister, NC.

<sup>14</sup> Archable Davis Lynch II and Ruth Lynch to Marvin Richardson, Interview, 28 June 2007.

accurately, but they marked “negro” as well. Service in World War II heralded a different turn in how Indians articulated their identity; previously, association with blacks was unavoidable and it was therefore impossible to publicly articulate Indians’ distinctiveness. But during and after the war, new opportunities arose to distance themselves from blacks, and Indians took advantage of these.

Meadows Indian leaders had attempted to organize their kin and gain recognition as Indians since at least the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, but they failed to sustain a long-term formal tribal government or secure their Indian identity to outsiders.<sup>15</sup> Those leaders spawned a generation of Indian advocates who challenged the Jim Crow status quo and attempted to register as Indians for the World War II draft, only to have their distinct identity expunged with the stroke of a pen by local white registrars that also checked “Negro” on most of their cards.<sup>16</sup> These denials outraged Indians and spurred them into action. But, similar to the African American civil rights movement, the roots of Haliwa-Saponi activism are found not only in the outrage that provoked protest but also in coordinated campaigns, sometimes for autonomy and sometimes for integration.

All the Meadows Indians agreed that breaking the grips of Jim Crow was the goal, but opposing strategies led to a split within the tribe. One group of Indians pursued a separatist path by establishing the Haliwa Indian Club by 1953, the segregated Haliwa

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<sup>15</sup> In 1896 approximately 300 Haliwa-Saponi ancestors applied to the Dawes Commission seeking citizenship in the Cherokee Nation of Oklahoma. Though all of the applicants were rejected, their efforts represents the political mobilization of the Indians and an earlier attempt to loosen the grip of the Jim Crow black-white binary.

<sup>16</sup> World War II, Selective Service System Registration Cards, Record Group 147 Records of the Selective Service System, 1926-1975, National Archives and Records Administration; these include some individuals in Halifax and Warren County with Haliwa-Saponi surnames including Richardson, Lynch, Silver, Evans, Daniel, and Hedgepeth.

Indian School in 1957, and the segregated Mount Bethel Indian Baptist Church in 1958.<sup>17</sup>

Another group chose not to join the Indian club or abandoned it early, in order to work within the existing civil rights movement with all of the colored residents of the community to achieve their goals. Some Indians had supported institutions classified as colored, which were controlled locally by a coalition of Indian descendants and African Americans. A number of factors, including personal leadership disputes and varying philosophies regarding interracial relations, caused the split. These community rifts were controversial, not amicable, and divided immediate families in many cases.

Today, approximately 70 percent of the Haliwa-Saponi Indians' 4,000 enrolled tribal members, and a sizeable number of non-enrolled relatives, reside in a rural area traditionally called the Meadows. The American Indian population has always been small as compared to non-Indians in Halifax and Warren Counties. Population figures are hard to gather for the 1940s and 1950s because Indians were not consistently classified as Indians. Today Indians make up only about four percent of the population in Halifax County and six percent in Warren County.<sup>18</sup> The Meadows territory is within a ten-mile radius around the unincorporated towns of Hollister and Essex, which straddle the borders of Halifax and Warren Counties in North Carolina. The community is largely a community shaped around ideas of belonging and consists of small houses, old fields, woodlands, crossroads, small businesses, and convenience stores. The Meadows Indians

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<sup>17</sup> Here I use name Haliwa Indian Club to describe the organization, because that is the name that was used the longest. Initially, the club was called the HaliwaNash Croatan Indian Club (because Nash county was also a homeplace for community members) and also the Essex Indian Club (after one of the nearby towns).

<sup>18</sup>United States Census Bureau,  
[http://factfinder2.census.gov/faces/tableservices/jsf/pages/productview.xhtml?pid=DEC\\_10\\_DP\\_DPDP1](http://factfinder2.census.gov/faces/tableservices/jsf/pages/productview.xhtml?pid=DEC_10_DP_DPDP1); [http://factfinder2.census.gov/faces/tableservices/jsf/pages/productview.xhtml?pid=DEC\\_10\\_DP\\_DPDP1](http://factfinder2.census.gov/faces/tableservices/jsf/pages/productview.xhtml?pid=DEC_10_DP_DPDP1)

descend from the Saponis, Nansemonds, Tuscaroras, and other regional tribes that survived the devastation caused by non-Indian contact.

Even though the events described here happened more than a half-century ago, they still weigh heavy in the thoughts and actions of Haliwa-Saponi community members, especially the community's elders. I am Haliwa-Saponi and related to many of the leaders of the original Haliwa Indian Club and the Haliwa-Saponi Indian Tribe. Like most tribal members, I also have family members that never joined the club or tribe for various reasons. While factionalism within the community has been divisive and devastating in some respects, the split was necessary for the Indians to break the confines of Jim Crow's black-white binary. At the time no one knew the full effects of their actions, nor could they have predicted that the decisions they made would steer later generations of the Meadows community.

### **Racial Classification and the Foundation of Indian Activism**

Residents, government officials, and scholars have long seen the American South through a black-white prism, and subjected the ancestors of the Haliwa-Saponi Indians to racial classifications not of their own choosing. The Meadows Indians may have been aware of their racial classification, but they had no leverage to challenge the system. In the early American Republic, starting with the 1790 census, outsiders labeled Meadows Indians "free persons of color," which was an ambiguous term that included Indians and free blacks. In 1850 Meadows Indians were classified "mulatto", another term that implied "mixed" ancestry but included Indians as well. Still later, as Jim Crow segregation began to take hold, outsiders described Haliwas as "black" or Negro. At various times these racial classifications overlapped and varied depending on how well

the recording officials from local and state governments understood the community and its history. For example, some Meadows Indians were listed as “Indian” or partly Indian on some documents.<sup>19</sup> By the early 20<sup>th</sup> century birth certificates, death certificates and other vital documents used the ambiguous term “colored” to racially classify African Americans and Meadows Indians contrary to the Meadows Indians’ assertion of an Indian identity.

Anthropologists, who outsiders considered experts in questions of Indianness, took an interest in the Indians of the Meadows. In 1889, James Mooney of the Bureau of American Ethnology undertook a survey of eastern American Indians that included the Meadows Indians. But because he did not visit the community and perform ethnographic and historic research, scholarship about the Meadows Indians had to wait another fifty years. Gideon Branch Alston, a resident of Warren County, responded to Mooney and observed in Halifax County, North Carolina “a settlement of half-breed Indians numbering 3 to 5 hundred in a poor district called the meadows – Fine formed with straight black hair. Fond of intermarrying.”<sup>20</sup> Although Alston’s response and observations serve as an important source about Meadows Indians history, it also represents a missed opportunity for scholarship. Other respondents in Virginia, for example, reported other similar communities such as the remnants of the Powhatan Confederacy, and these communities garnered interest from Mooney and other

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<sup>19</sup> See, for example early Indian leader and Dawes Rolls applicant Alfred Richardson (Jr.) and family who were listed as Indian on the 1900 United States Census, Nash County, South Whitaker Township, Households 28 and 29, p. 2A, enumeration district 65. Alfred Richardson (Jr.) was also a rarity in that he was also listed as Indian on his March 8, 1917 death certificate, Warren County, Fishing Creek Township.

<sup>20</sup> James Mooney, “Circulars and other material concerning Indians and traces of Indians in Virginia, Maryland, Delaware, and North Carolina 1889-1912,” NAA MS 2190.

researchers, who actually visited these places and provided assistance in forming tribal organizations.

Between the 1940s and the 1960s, interest in surviving eastern American Indians, and the racialized biological philosophies of the eugenics movement, converged as researchers physically poked and prodded so-called “tri-racial isolate,” “in-bred” communities to explain their pertinence to eugenics research.<sup>21</sup> Though scholars acknowledged that Meadows Indians and others possessed Indian ancestry, they did not regard them as “real” Indians, because of their perceived mixed ancestry and their lack of official government recognition. The Haliwas did not live on a reservation and probably did not exhibit stereotypical Indian cultural traits readily identifiable to outsiders. What is clear, however, is that Haliwa Indians lacked the political leverage, momentum, or for many, education and were not free to self-identify themselves as Indians, except in limited cases.

Locally, before the late 1940s, the Meadows Indians acknowledged their “colored” classification, but were careful to stress their Indian identity, and deny black ancestry. In 1940, Plummer Alston (P.A.) Richardson, speaking of his family’s history and the Indian descendant people in the community, noted that according to the “tradition handed down by our fathers,” the family descended from “Indians and white people, and had no negro blood.” Further “these people have been classed as ‘colored’, because of their Indian blood,” but “except in a few cases, there is no intermixture [of] negro [sic]

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<sup>21</sup> See for example, William Harlen Gilbert, Jr., “Surviving Indian Groups of the Eastern United States.” *Annual Report of the Board of Regents of The Smithsonian Institution Showing the Operations, Expenditures, and Condition of the Institution for the Year Ended June 30, 1948*: 407-438; Calvin L. Beale, “American Triracial Isolates Their Status and Pertinence to Genetic Research.” *Eugenics Quarterly* 4, no.4 (December 1957):187-196; W.S. Pollitzer, R.M. Menegaz-Bock, and J.C. Herion, “Factors in the Microevolution of a Triracial Isolate,” *The American Journal of Human Genetics*, no. 18 (1966):26-38; Carl J. Witkop, Jr., Charles J. MacLean, Paul J. Schmidt, Joseph L. Henry. “Medical and Dental Findings in the Brandywine Isolate,” *Alabama Journal of Medical Science* 3 (1966).



blood.”<sup>22</sup> Richardson acknowledged that his people were called colored by outsiders, but was sure to draw a distinction between “colored” Negroes and “colored” Indians. Richardson and others denied any “Negro” ancestry to avoid the application of the one-drop rule that specified that individuals with any Negro blood were Negroes. They may have felt that they could not assert a distinctive Indian identity if they were known to have African ancestry.

To other Meadows Indians the use of “colored” as a racial term was not an acceptable descriptor. Avis Lynch Green told how when she conducted business in town and filled out paperwork during the 1950s, “they would put colored on there, they wouldn't ask you your race...when they would sign me up I'd look on that slip and see what was on there. If they had colored on there, I'd go tell them ‘take this off, I ain't no colored, I'm Indian.’ Make them change it.”<sup>23</sup> Alert to the racial dynamics that surrounded them, Meadows Indians vigilantly voiced their concerns about the matter. As the twentieth century progressed, Indians recognized that “colored” came to equal “Negro” or “black.”

During the World War II era, Meadows Indians demonstrated their self-consciousness about racial classification on official documents and challenged the black-white binary. Some Meadows Indians volunteered for World War II and served their country, but ideas about race under Jim Crow governments obstructed, in many cases, their right to express their own identity. Meadows Indians used the draft system as an opportunity to challenge the racial classification system of the federal government and local registrars. Though we do not know how many Meadows Indians actually served, we

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<sup>22</sup> P.A. Richardson, “To Whom This May Concern,” 1940.

<sup>23</sup> Interview with Avis Lynch Green and Marvin Richardson, 29 May, 2000.

know that between 1940-1944 about 40 Indian men registered as Indian for the World War II Selective Service. In most cases, however, the registrant's race was checked "Indian" by one person and "Negro" by another.<sup>24</sup> The draft registration card of Haliwa Indian Club founder John C. Hedgepeth, for example, was clearly marked this way.<sup>25</sup> Alternately, Jessie Willard Richardson registered in April 1944 and was listed solely as "Indian," but such designations were not the norm on the Indians' draft cards.<sup>26</sup> Meadows Indians watched how registrars marked their race and if they did not mark "Indian" on their draft cards, the Indians communicated their dissatisfaction. Jessie Richardson, discussing the World War II draft cards and other official documents remembered that he made sure his race was recorded correctly: "I always watched, if I been signing for anything, I always watched my race, all the time. If you don't they'll get you mixed up with somebody else."<sup>27</sup> Generally, Indians from other places served in white units during the war. That someone checked "Negro" on most of the Indians' cards indicates an institutional attempt to disallow Indian self-identification and place them in Negro units if called to duty.

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<sup>24</sup> World War II, Selective Service System Registration Cards, Record Group 147 Records of the Selective Service System, 1926-1975, National Archives and Records Administration; these include some individuals in Halifax and Warren County with Haliwa-Saponi surnames including Richardson, Lynch, Silver, Evans, and Hedgepeth.

<sup>25</sup> John C. Hedgepeth, World War II Selective Service System Registration, order number 10649, Serial Number 732, 16 February 1942, Record Group 147: Records of the Selective Service System, 1926-1975, National Archives and Records Administration.

<sup>26</sup> Jessie Willard Richardson, World War II Selective Service System Registration, order number 12694, Ser. 495, 17 April 1944, Record Group 147 Records of the Selective Service System, 1926-1975, National Archives and Records Administration.

<sup>27</sup> Interview with Jessie Willard Richardson and Bertha Mae Daniel Richardson and Marvin Richardson, Thursday 16 October 2008, interview in possession of Marvin Richardson.

These actions spurred Haliwa leaders to action and some sought assistance from the Office of Indian Affairs (OIA), the federal authority on Indians. Vernon Lynch, who would later be at the center of Haliwa Indian factionalism and controversy in the 1950s, registered for the draft on October 16, 1940. Lynch's race was checked "Indian," but "Negro" is also visibly checked and partially erased.<sup>28</sup> Perhaps Lynch himself ordered the erasure of the check mark beside Negro. Just four months later, Lynch wrote to the United States Department of the Interior to "ask [if] you would you search up and see if I have any Indian related [sic]." Lynch noted "I am told by my Grandfather that my foreparents was Indian, I am regeistering [sic] as a [sic] Indian now." Vernon Lynch sought verification from the OIA and asked "if it is possible for me to have my blood tested and see if I am a Indian;" he was willing to "pay whatever the charge is to get a certificate of the Indian race."<sup>29</sup> Lynch's grandfather was the Indian elder and advocate Tilman Lynch, who had fought for Indian rights and been one of the main community leaders for over fifty years.<sup>30</sup> In the twilight of his life, the elder Lynch contacted the Commissioner of Indian Affairs to stress the Indian descent of his people, which had been suppressed. Lynch got to the heart of matter: "they Want us to Register Say Negro when we have always been free American citizen [sic] now I Want to know will you have

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<sup>28</sup> Vernon Lynch, World War II Selective Service System Registration, order number 2173, serial number 2164, 16 October, 1940, Record Group 147: Records of the Selective Service System, 1926-1975, National Archives and Records Administration.

<sup>29</sup> "Vernon Lynch to United States Department of Interior Office of Indian Affairs" 22 March 1942, National Archives and Records Administration, RG 75, General Service 053, Box 258, File 13195-1942.

<sup>30</sup> Tilman Parsons Lynch (b. 5 June 1858 d. 5 November 1944) was a Dawes Applicant in 1896 and known as the community's "lawyer." He possessed above average intelligence and put his skills to use helping folks in the community. Among one of his greatest accomplishments was his efforts to establish the first United States Post Office in the late 19th Century.

our Rac [sic] put on Record So we can give our Rac [sic] as free [Indians]”<sup>31</sup> Lynch’s message was crystal clear and influenced by the racial binary he lived within: he and his people were Indians and wanted to be recognized as such.

Like thousands of other Americans who claimed Indian ancestry and wrote the OIA seeking rights or special privileges as Indians, such as annuities or healthcare, the Lynches apparently received no special attention or help. J.M. Stewart, Director of Lands, gave Vernon Lynch the standard response by informing him “the mere possession of Indian blood is not, of itself, sufficient to entitle a person to Indian benefits.” Stewart informed Lynch that often only those Indians who have an affiliation with a reservation receive benefits from the federal government and “there are many persons having some degree of Indian blood in different parts of the country but who have never belonged to a tribe having land or money under the control of the Federal government. Such persons usually have no claim to Indian rights.”<sup>32</sup> But unlike many others that contacted the Office of Indian Affairs, the Lynches represented a historic Indian community that was seeking not only rights as Indians, but also rights as American citizens to have their identity correctly recognized. The Meadows Indians were seeking their civil right to be who they wanted to be and distinguish themselves from other non-whites living within the black-white binary of Jim Crow.

In addition to contradicting the standard definition of "Indian" at the OIA, Meadows Indians constantly stood at odds with other “coloreds” and whites over their identity. An Indian openly identifying himself as such in public or on paper could draw

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<sup>31</sup> “T.P. Lynch to the Superintendent of Indian Affairs” 24 Apr 1942, National Archives and Records Administration, RG 75, General Service 053, Box 258, File 20081-1942.

<sup>32</sup> “J.M. Stewart to Vernon Lynch,” 31 Mar 1942, National Archives and Records Administration, RG 75, General Service 053, Box 258, File 13195-1942.

opposition from whites and blacks. This conflict over racial classification became apparent in two ways: first, racial identification on official documents such as voter registration, census records, vital records, and licenses; and second, through personal contacts with blacks and whites who insulted Indians and denied their Indian identity by calling them Negro or free or yellow “issues.” According to one Haliwa community member, yellow or free issues designated “colored folks” who were “light-skinned.”<sup>33</sup> Black children often voiced these derogatory names at school; black and Indian children attended school together before the Haliwa Indians obtained their own school. In an interview with USDA demographer Calvin Beale, Indian leader Bell (B.B.) Richardson “stated that the children are ‘dogged’ by the Negro children about their race” at the mostly Negro school in Warrenton.<sup>34</sup>

After their attempts to seek relief through the federal Office of Indian Affairs in 1940 failed, Meadows Indians adopted new strategies to achieve political autonomy and recognition as Indian. Distinguishing themselves as Indians from colored and Negro people was the primary reason for the Meadows Indians’ political organizing and activism in the 1940s and early 1950s. In this period, the Indians of Halifax, Warren, and adjoining counties began a concerted effort to create a permanent Indian organization that maintained political autonomy as Indians, rather than as “colored,” “yellow issue,” or any other designation. Club members saw recognition of their distinct identity as a means to pursue both autonomy and inclusion, albeit through a means—segregation—that seemed to contradict the broader aims of the contemporary civil rights movement. At the time,

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<sup>33</sup> Clarine Ruby Richardson to Marvin Richardson, phone interview, 27 October 2012.

<sup>34</sup> Calvin Beale “Notes on Visit to the Warren County, North Carolina, Mixed-Racial Community,” In *A Taste of the Country: A Collection of Calvin Beale’s Writings*, ed. Peter A. Morrison (University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1990), 132.

this contradiction seemed unimportant; for Indians, civil rights meant the right to self identify as Indians and resist a racial and social classification system that recognized only two races.

### **Affirming Identity Through the Haliwa Indian Club**

The Meadows Indians' efforts to organize a campaign to have their Indian identity recognized can be compared to a smoldering fire that died down until a group of strong leaders came along to throw some more logs on top to keep it burning. After World War II ended and Indians did not succeed in registering for the draft solely as Indians, they continued to discuss among themselves how they could establish their race. By 1949 the media had picked up on the organizing activities of the Indians. Reporter Bill Sharpe noted that the Indians in Halifax County numbered 1,000, and that locals called the Indians "free issues." Reaffirming the Haliwas' earlier efforts to assert their identity, he noted, "many of them insist on registering for the draft or for taxes as Indians."<sup>35</sup>

Between 1949 and 1953, Indians met secretly at various locations throughout the community. Jessie Richardson recalled "it was a little school down in Silvertown called Silver Hill and that's where three or four of them got together at, say 'Let's have a meeting try to do something about ourselves.'" From there they moved the meeting to the yard of Bethlehem School, but since the school occupied public property, they decided to meet in private homes. Finally, the meetings saw a more semi-permanent home at B.B. Richardson's pack house in Warren County.<sup>36</sup> When they finally founded an organization

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<sup>35</sup> Bill Sharpe, "Lost Indian Tribes of State Seek Identity," *The News and Observer*, 3 July 1949.

<sup>36</sup> Jessie Richardson, , Haliwa Indian School Documentation Project Public Forum, Haliwa-Saponi Indian Tribe, 9 June 2009.

in August of 1953, J.C. Hedgepeth initially led it.<sup>37</sup> Hedgepeth knew about the organizing efforts of Lumbee Indians in Robeson County, North Carolina and travelled the two and a half hours there in 1952 to meet with influential Lumbee leaders. The Lumbees were state-recognized, supported their own Indian school system, and had created a network of Indian churches. The Lumbees became the Indian leaders' mentors and were the outside organizers who stepped in to put them on the path towards recognition.<sup>38</sup>

Among the first actions of the Haliwa Indian Club was to select leaders and set policies and goals. The club's leaders enforced a strict policy against interracial marriage and association and were not afraid to announce it publicly. In one article the Haliwa Indian Club President stated that he "deplores any marriage of his people with members of the Negro race." These marriages were rare but "the girl who makes such a marriage is apt to be ostracized by her people."<sup>39</sup> Though the president did not mention males, club rules stated that men could be dismissed if they were known to have had a relationship with, or otherwise associated with a black person. Those who came to club leaders seeking membership were given a "good talking to" about their personal relationships with blacks before they were allowed to join. In the minds of Indian club leaders, these prohibitions were necessary to maintain Indian "blood," ensure the legitimacy of their organization in the minds of outsiders (both white and black), and to keep the activities of the club secret, since various individuals in the community threatened to disrupt the meetings.

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<sup>37</sup> Richardson, "To whom it may concern."; Blanche Copeland Mills, Haliwa Indian School Documentation Project Public Forum, Haliwa-Saponi Indian Tribe, 9 June 2009.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid.

<sup>39</sup> Bignall Jones, "The Haliwars: Tribe of Mystery," *The News and Observer*, 29 January 1956.

Haliwa Indian Club members set a goal to document their historical Indian ancestry in order to correct their vital documents and legally call themselves Indian. Between the fall of 1953 and summer of 1954, the Haliwas hired several lawyers from Warrenton and Roanoke Rapids, North Carolina to research their Indian ancestry in documentary sources.<sup>40</sup> In July 1954 the Haliwa Indian Club's lawyer, William W. Taylor, Jr., wrote to sociologist and anthropologist Dr. Guy B. Johnson of the University of North Carolina Chapel Hill. Taylor wrote that the Haliwas wanted him to “do some research into their Indian background” to document their Indian identity in terms outsiders would understand.<sup>41</sup> This goal was a top priority of the club in order to distinguish themselves from the black “colored” population.

Though the Haliwa Indian Club was a forum to conduct Indian business, it was also a place where the Haliwas could pray, sing, socialize together, and take pride in their Indianness. On a typical Monday night in the early days, Haliwa Indians, men and women, crowded into B.B. Richardson’s pack house; children played outside. The meetings started much like church with a couple of opening hymns like “Where Could I Go?” or “Leaning on the Ever Lasting Arms” before the president would rise and the business would begin.<sup>42</sup> At each meeting a few individuals or even whole families would join the group. Club members genuinely cared for one another and helped those in need.

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<sup>40</sup> Haliwarnash Croatan Indian Club Minutes, 27 October 1953, Haliwa-Saponi Indian Tribe, Hollister, N.C.; Essex Croatan Indian Club Minutes, January 31, 1954, Haliwa-Saponi Indian Tribe, Hollister, N.C.; in some of the early minutes the name of the club fluctuates between HaliwarNashCroatan Indian Club and Essex Croatan Indian Club. Later the name is shortened to just Haliwa Indian Club.

<sup>41</sup> William W. Taylor, Jr. to Dr. Guy B. Johnson, 29 July 1954, Southern Historical Collection, University of North Carolina Chapel Hill, Subseries 1.2. 1930-August 1969, Folder 6.

<sup>42</sup> Haliwarnash Croatan Indian Club Minutes, 28 September 1953, Haliwa-Saponi Indian Tribe, Hollister, NC.



Often, members took up collections for others whose houses had burned or for other emergencies. Not everyone in the community supported the Indians' efforts to organize, however, and threats of violence to disrupt the meetings or harm its members loomed.

Haliwa Indian Club leaders took the threats of violence by non-Indians and even relatives in the community seriously. John Daniel Hedgepeth, son of club founder J.C. Hedgepeth, shared a memory of his father: "one particular night they [some blacks] had said they was coming down to kill him because he [J.C. Hedgepeth] was more or less spearheading the movement."<sup>43</sup> Almorris Lynch simply remembered of this crisis that, "It was hell."<sup>44</sup> These threats, however, only worked to widen the rift between community members who did not support the club's segregationist policies, and those drawn together by the work of the Haliwa Indian Club.

In the early years of the Haliwa Indian Club, Indians made significant strides in asserting their distinct identity, but at a heavy cost. They worked towards this goal by starting an organization specifically political in nature, by soliciting help from the recognized Lumbees, promoting their Indian "blood," pursuing a segregationist philosophy, and doing research to legitimize their Indian and communal identity. Through their organization Haliwa-Saponis gained media attention, which forced outsiders to consider the possibility that the Haliwas were not simply African descended colored people, but were ancestral aboriginal peoples. Historical research revealed that American Indians did in fact inhabit the areas near and within the Meadows and that most Meadows Indian ancestors were never slaves. In addition, Haliwa-Saponis gained the

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<sup>43</sup> John Daniel Hedgepeth and Connie Lynch Hedgepeth to Marvin Richardson, Interview 25 July 2011, Haliwa-Saponi Indian Tribe, Hollister, NC.

<sup>44</sup> Almorris Lynch to Marvin Richardson, Interview, 27 September 2012, interview in possession of Marvin Richardson.

confidence to correct their race on their vital records and demand that they be identified as Indian on official documents. The stand that the Haliwas had made was not popular with everyone, including some of their blood relatives. The Haliwas' strict, racially-based segregationist philosophy, which stood in opposition to how community members had articulated their identities as both "colored" and "Indian" for decades before, alienated some Indian families and many decided not to join the club. Some members of Indian families had married non-Indians and refused to cut ties to their relations. Others held high positions in integrated churches and would not turn their backs on fellow church members. Still others were business people who dealt with Indians and non-Indians alike and would not sacrifice their business for an Indian club that some said "ain't never gonna amount to a hill of beans."<sup>45</sup> These decisions split the people and left deep scars. Yet, in their rejection of older ways of identification, members of the Haliwa Indian Club saw an important and strategic opportunity to assert their identity as Indians in this political climate of the civil rights movement.

In 1955 and beyond, both the gains and costs would continue as the Haliwas pushed to further solidify their separate Indian identity and to secure political autonomy. Within two years, the members of the Haliwa Indian Club would further isolate themselves from other community residents by instituting a segregated Indian school. In order to implement their school and push their agenda, the club members would use the tools and philosophy of white segregationists, which conflicted with the existing civil rights strategies both locally and statewide. Two brothers-in-law would emerge out of a personal and political struggle to become leaders of two opposing agendas: one isolationist and the other integrationist. The isolationist philosophy manifested itself by

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<sup>45</sup> Jessie Willard Richardson and Bertha Mae Daniel Richardson to Marvin Richardson.

Meadows Indians shunning interactions, including friendly and marital, with non-Indians especially African Americans. Isolationists did not want to associate with non-Indians at church or at school. Integrationists, on the other hand, tolerated to some degree friendly and marital relations with non-Indians, but also had no prohibition about going to school and church with non-Indians. Neither of these categories is absolute and variations on these philosophies existed.

### **A Family Divided**

Within the Meadows Indian community memories are long and traditions are handed down from generation to generation. Among the many traditions is the strategy for dealing with non-Indians, both black and white. In the mid 1950s, two Indian leaders and brothers-in-law became bitter enemies, each one representing different traditions and competing strategies for political autonomy and civil rights. William Robert (W.R.) Richardson became a leader of the Haliwa Indian Club, whose members became what we know today as the Haliwa-Saponi Indian Tribe. In the mid to late 1930s, while in his early twenties, W.R. Richardson and his wife Annora Lynch Richardson followed his father north to Philadelphia to become part of a rather sizeable contingent of Indians that had moved to northern cities in order to seek better opportunities for employment.<sup>46</sup> While in Philadelphia W.R. Richardson and his wife kept close ties to home and also continued to purchase property and engage in community affairs when possible. Although elders I have spoken to do not remember Richardson as one of the earlier founders or leaders of the Haliwa Indian Club, he was present at many of the earlier

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<sup>46</sup> Arnold Richardson to Marvin Richardson, Interview, 23 February 2012, interview in possession of Marvin Richardson.

meetings in 1953.<sup>47</sup> W.R. Richardson and Annora Lynch Richardson moved back to Hollister, North Carolina permanently in 1954, so that he could more deeply involve himself in the burgeoning Haliwa Indian organization.<sup>48</sup>

Annora Lynch Richardson's brother Vernon Lynch was one of the original leaders of the Haliwa Indian Club, and served as its first Secretary.<sup>49</sup> As discussed earlier, Vernon contacted the Office of Indian Affairs in 1940 to ask for assistance in having his Indian identity recognized. He lived outside the community for a time as well in the 1940s, finding employment at the Norfolk, Virginia shipyards. Lynch held various leadership positions at Pine Chapel Baptist Church and the Hollister School Parent Teacher Association (PTA), where he served as President. The Hollister School PTA supported Hollister School, which was the local "colored" elementary school that most students on the Halifax County side of the community attended. The PTA advocated for school resources and later pressed the Halifax County School Board for a new building to replace the old dilapidated school.<sup>50</sup> Although W.R. Richardson and Vernon Lynch were close family, the two brothers-in-law—both strong personalities and capable leaders—began to feud viciously in 1954 or 1955. Club members chose W.R. over Vernon as club president, leading to a split within the community. Community members remember W.R., though not very well-educated, as "knowledgeable, street [smart], and not [easy to push] around. And if he found out something, or if he was determined to do something, he

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<sup>47</sup> Haliwa-Nash Croatan Indian Club Roll, October 1953, Haliwa-Saponi Indian Tribe.

<sup>48</sup> Arnold Richardson, Interview.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid; Archable Davis Lynch II to Marvin Richardson, Interview, 13 April 2012, interview in possession of Marvin Richardson.

<sup>50</sup> "School Hearing Held Today: Patrons Told P-TA Leader Is Holding Up 'Progress,'" *Roanoke Rapids (N.C.) Daily Herald*, 27 February 1959.

didn't care if anybody was against him, he was gonna do it.”<sup>51</sup> His experiences outside of the community in the “big city” of Philadelphia helped form these traits and people saw them as useful. W.R. Richardson had strong business sense that he probably honed as a short-order cook and by managing several properties he owned in Philadelphia.<sup>52</sup> After losing the Haliwa Club presidential election to his brother-in-law, Vernon Lynch stopped attending the meetings.<sup>53</sup>

The national and local press found a provocative story in the dispute between the in-laws. An article in the black-centered *Jet Magazine* highlighted the dispute between the two and was extremely negative towards the Haliwas' Indian claim, calling them “so-called Indians.”<sup>54</sup> The Haliwa problem probably caught the attention of *Jet Magazine* due to African Americans' efforts to integrate schools and the misguided idea that the Haliwas were simply “Negro” people changing their identity to Indian to somehow escape Jim Crow's wrath. The magazine relied on the fact that up until the Haliwas' established their organization, they did, to a certain degree, acknowledge the term “colored” and did attend colored schools and churches. The situation was much more complicated than that and fighting that designation was not new, but it was largely invisible to outsiders. Lynch, however, confirmed the leadership dispute and also his involvement in the Indian club: “everything was going along lovely until Richardson

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<sup>51</sup> Arnold Richardson, Interview with Marvin Richardson, 23 February 2012.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid.

<sup>53</sup> Avis Lynch Green and Marcellous Green to Marvin Richardson, Interview, 2000.

<sup>54</sup> The magazine's front page featured a picture of Elois McGee, a Haliwa Indian, who successfully sued the magazine for calling her a “Negro.”

come back (from Philadelphia),” he told the reporter.<sup>55</sup> One relative of Vernon Lynch remembered, “they had bitter battles, Vernon knew he was an Indian, but I don’t know if it was because he was not in a leadership position that he fought it so badly or, I don’t know the reason. But, I do know that he and W.R. had some bitter battles over that.”<sup>56</sup> Some Indians in the community were not braced for the earthquake that shook up the internal social order.

Some Indian descendants did not join the Indian club because of the club’s strict segregation policy and because they saw progress in changing the existing black-white Jim Crow system. Thomas Olival Hedgpeth<sup>57</sup>, a friend of Vernon Lynch and fellow member of the Hollister PTA, had been asked by W.R. Richardson to join the Haliwa Indian Club, but declined. Richardson “came by and talked to me and wanted me to join him and I told him ‘I can’t join you...cause you all are separating people against people.’” At the time Hedgpeth worked with the poverty program “with black folks, white folk, and everybody else, anybody. And I just didn’t feel like it was right to segregate in the community.” Individuals of the same immediate family split and went their separate ways. Even in Hedgpeth’s own family some of his sisters and other family members joined the Indian club, but he felt that club members were mistreating other non-whites in the community by separating themselves. In heartfelt remembrances of over fifty years ago, he thought the Haliwa Indian Club “caused a lot of mess. My sisters, I had some sisters that were married and they registered with their husbands as Indians. It separated

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<sup>55</sup> “Haliwa Indians in Hassle Over Going to N.C. Negro School: Negros Who Want to Be “Indians”,” *Jet Magazine*, 5 December 1957, 26-29.

<sup>56</sup> Barbara O. Lynch Brayboy to Marvin Richardson, Interview, 16 July 2009.

<sup>57</sup> Thomas O. Hedgpeth used an alternate spelling of his last name than the modern standard “Hedgepeth”

families. It separated churches.”<sup>58</sup> Though he readily acknowledged his mixed ancestry, which included American Indian, he decided to register to vote as a “black man,” which at the time would have actually been the ambiguous non-white encompassing term “colored,” but in his 2012 recollections, he shifted and used the more modern term “black.” Not once did Hedgpeth refer to himself as a “black man.”

As an eighteen year-old, Hedgpeth had voted and encouraged others to vote, despite ploys that white registrars used to discourage “colored” voting. One time while registering to vote “this old white man” begrudgingly asked him, ““Thomas tell me what do ya’ll want, ya’ll got some of everything we got?”” to which he responded “we just want equal rights, that’s all.” Thomas Hedgpeth and others accepted and did not challenge the Jim Crow black-white racial binary of the South. As a “colored man” Hedgpeth could and did participate in local and countywide politics and ally himself with other colored individuals and sympathetic whites to achieve racial and political equality. Hedgpeth, Vernon Lynch, and others like them believed that the Indian-descended people of the Meadows were a small population in Halifax and Warren Counties and did not hold much political clout by themselves, but with African Americans they could achieve their political goals.

On the other hand, the establishment of the Haliwa Indian Club solidified not only a racial identity, but a political one as well, which carried implications on behavior and relationships. Thomas Hedgpeth’s family story and the rift between Vernon Lynch and W.R. Richardson illuminate how these stipulations, shifting values, and decisions molded identity. To be a Haliwa Indian in the 1950s one was expected to reject relationships with blacks and only associate with whites to a limited a degree. Vernon Lynch and many

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<sup>58</sup> Thomas Olival Hedgpeth to Marvin Richardson, Interview, 7 March 2012.

others discarded both the leadership of W.R. Richardson and his segregationist policies. Lynch was proud to be Indian, but his philosophies regarding interracial relationships were not the majority view of club members and he was not selected President, nor did he continue to support the club. Alternately, Hedgpeth recognized his Indian ancestry, but chose to continue through life as a “colored” individual, which may have been an easier option to pursue in order to be neighborly and gain power within the political system among other “colored” folks fighting for equal rights. To W.R. Richardson and the Haliwa Indian Club members, however, being Indian was their birthright—and a civil right—and they dismissed the claim that they were not simply “colored” individuals with Indian ancestry. They were no longer willing to accept that only two races occupied their community. While acknowledging their “mixed” ancestry, they nevertheless had an Indian identity and wanted it recognized.

Ultimately, Vernon Lynch, Thomas Hedgpeth and others pursued opportunities and rights for all of Hollister’s colored citizens, including those who possessed a strong Indian identity and those who did not. Vernon Lynch was a strong-willed leader in the community, whose family was well respected and had helped build up a number of community institutions, including Hollister School and Pine Chapel Baptist Church. Though he valued his Indian heritage, Lynch and others like him were accustomed to working within the system to gain rights as minority citizens. Lynch and Hedgpeth essentially shut themselves out of the Haliwa-Saponi Indian organization by publically opposing the club.

W.R. Richardson and his followers chose the path of Indian segregation, Indian organization, and a separate Indian identity. Determined leaders like W.R. Richardson,



J.C. Hedgepeth and other club leaders led the Haliwas into uncharted territory with help from the experienced Lumbees and white legal counsel. The Indians pooled their resources, and power in numbers reigned supreme. If starting a private Indian club stirred a range of emotions, the Haliwas' next project, pushing for a separate Indian school, brought a firestorm of controversy and statewide, national, and even international attention. Further, the Indians' strategy to gain recognition and draw a distinction between themselves and "colored" people adapted the tools of white segregation and contradicted both the aims of the broader civil rights movement and the goals pursued by Vernon Lynch and his followers.

### **Building a Foundation: The Haliwa Indian School and the Mt. Bethel Indian Baptist Church**

The start of the Indian club only exacerbated the tensions among the Meadows residents. No longer totally secret, the aims of the Haliwa Indian Club were clear: those who openly identified as Indians in this altered environment of civil rights activism wanted to band together so they could have a louder voice and push for separate recognition. Progress on this front emboldened the oldest and youngest of the Indians. All Indians, however, regardless of their families' alliances, continued to attend the Negro or colored schools and attended colored, that is, black and Indian, churches. Indian students received harsh treatment from non-Indian students and teachers, while members of the Haliwa Indian Club were made to feel uncomfortable attending Pine Chapel Baptist Church and other community churches.

Non-Haliwa students and teachers alike ostracized Haliwa students at Hollister School just for expressing an Indian identity. One student recalled, "what happened, one

of my classmates had told the teacher that ‘MacArthur says that he’s an Indian.’ Well, that wasn’t the end of it, my school teacher called me up in front of the class and paddled me before the whole class, because I said I was Indian.”<sup>59</sup> Another Haliwa Indian explained that at Hollister School,

...a lot of Indians were going to school there and...a lot of black guys was going to school there and girls. And it was always an interracial thing, people gruded and then hated, but [some] didn’t want you to be what you wanted to be. We ended up having to fight about three days a week on account of you not being what they want you to be and what they wanted to call you names and stuff. Issue, yellow issue and stuff. ["Issue"] was a bad word.<sup>60</sup>

Now that the Club's activities were out in the open, even the school children recognized sharp divisions among divided community members.

The motivations behind the racial resentments were complicated, but they were related to the fact that some Meadows Indians constructed their identity at home and some did not. If we are to believe the countless testimonies from Indians and non-Indians alike, the majority of the students attending Hollister School and other community schools were actually Indian descendants and not exclusively “black.” During the time period in question most non-whites would have been called colored, not black. At this time, most members of the Meadows community were essentially all related, but immediate and extended family members molded the identity of the students in the home. Lonnie A. Richardson, Willis James Richardson’s father and Indian club leader noted “my parents taught me I was Indin [sic] in fact all of us were Indins [sic], but some did

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<sup>59</sup> MacArthur Mills, Haliwa Indian School Documentation Project Public Forum, 2009, Haliwa-Saponi Indian Tribe, 9 June 2009.

<sup>60</sup> Willis James Richardson, Interview with Marvin Richardson, 27 October 2009, Haliwa-Saponi Indian Tribe.

not heed but was sorry later.”<sup>61</sup> When trying to explain the motivations of his “colored” classmates picking on him, Willis James Richardson boiled the issue down to jealousy “because they wanted you to be what they were.”<sup>62</sup> More likely though, the politics of race and political factionalism trickled down from the students’ parents to the playground. Some Indian students got along just fine at Hollister School, but also did not dwell on their race. Others, however, wore their Indian pride on their sleeves and occasionally some of their classmates tried to knock it off, only causing fights.

Although the Indian-descended people were always the most populous in the area surrounding Hollister and Essex, blacks wielded significant political influence over them and held them to the black-white binary at school and church just as much as whites did. Haliwa Indians attended “Negro” schools and attended churches that belonged to black associations. Daisy Richardson Mills, daughter of Haliwa leader B.B. Richardson, remembered going to Bethlehem School, which was attended mostly by Indians, but had all black teachers. One “old lady Jones, she was the teacher, she used to say ain’t none of ya...Indians around here, all of us is Negros. I says, alright, that’s what my daddy told me I was Indian.”<sup>63</sup> Likewise, mostly Indian descendants attended Pine Chapel Baptist Church, but the church was a member of a black association. Some of the Indian members wanted to designate Pine Chapel as an Indian Church, “but the black association came in and said you can’t do that. If you want a church you’ll have to leave here and go build you a church.”<sup>64</sup>

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<sup>61</sup> Lonnie A. Richardson, “To Whom it May Concern,” 18 February 1955, Haliwa-Saponi Indian Tribe.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid.

<sup>63</sup> Daisy Richardson Mills and Murzie Mills to Marvin Richardson, Interview, 9 May 2011, Haliwa-Saponi Indian Tribe.

<sup>64</sup> Almorris Lynch Interview.

The leaders of the Haliwa Indian Club were determined to make a change that supported their longstanding Indian identity and their political autonomy. The Club believed that an Indian-only school and church was the best solution and option to break the black-white binary and enlisted their Lumbee friends for help. The Lumbees had gained recognition from the state in 1885 and received state support to have their own Indian school system. Since “segregation mandated that Indians teach Indians,” state legislator Hamilton McMillan pushed through legislation to fund an Indian Normal School to train Indian teachers.<sup>65</sup> By 1957 the Lumbees were well advanced in education, with their own Indian school system and their Indian Normal School, which had grown to become the state-supported Pembroke State College. In addition, Robeson County Indians had a network of segregated Indian churches and had their own Burnt Swamp Baptist Association.<sup>66</sup> These segregated institutions generated political power for the Indians in Robeson County and also produced leaders, particularly for the group historian Malinda Maynor Lowery calls “town Indians.” Town Indians wanted “leaders who had friendly, rather than antagonistic, relationships with the whites in power.”<sup>67</sup> The Haliwas tapped into the Lumbees’ “town Indian” network of leaders to help direct their campaign for their own segregated Indian institutions, starting with the Haliwa Indian School.

The Haliwas had stepped out on faith and were determined to gain allies and work cooperatively with Lumbees and influential whites to have their own Indian school. As early as May 1957, they were meeting with both Halifax and Warren County leaders to

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<sup>65</sup> Lowery, *Lumbee Indians*, 25-26.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid, 75.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid.

ask for assistance in getting a separate school. On May 6, 1957 at the meeting of the Halifax County Board of Commissioners, W.R. Richardson, accompanied by R.B. Jacobs, a Lumbee official of Pembroke State College, told the commissioners that he was willing to donate his land and his peoples' labor and money to build a school for the Indians. The commissioners initially approved of the idea, but believed that the issue would have to be settled by the boards of education from both counties.<sup>68</sup> Both counties, however, refused to fund staff and other necessities for the school.<sup>69</sup> In the near future, the Haliwas' constant pressure at meetings and in the media forced the school boards to reconsider, and the Haliwa Indian school issue bounced back and forth between various local and state education boards.

In the meantime, the Indians did not wait on the counties and completely funded the school's building and operation out of their own pockets. Initially they requested to use the old Bethlehem School for their school, but the Warren County school board rejected their request, so they decided to use their clubhouse, which they had erected in 1956, as the school's location.<sup>70</sup> On September 7, 1957 members of the Haliwa Indian Club met the first teacher and principal of their school and voted to fund its operation by themselves.<sup>71</sup> Dorthess "Bill" Lynch, one of the original members of the Haliwa Indian Club, recalled the personal and financial sacrifice: "We'd work all day and we'd go down there and didn't have no money much. We'd put in... What you could get rid of, you put

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<sup>68</sup> "Want Own School," *The Daily Herald*, 7 May 1957.

<sup>69</sup> "Haliwar Tribe Hopes to Get Pearsall Funds," *News and Observer*, 11 September 1957.

<sup>70</sup> W.R. Richardson, "Haliwas Hold First Meet."

<sup>71</sup> Haliwa Indian Club Minutes, 7 September 1957, Haliwa-Saponi Indian Tribe.

whatever you could spare in the hat, when they took up donations.”<sup>72</sup> With the funds, the Haliwas added more rooms onto their clubhouse and hired Lumbee Indian teachers from Robeson County.

The decision to operate a segregated Indian school was contrary to the Supreme Court’s landmark *Brown v. Board of Education*, which deemed school segregation illegal. But, the Haliwas, through advice from their legal counsel, were ready to test North Carolina’s moderate approach to keep segregation by using the Pearsall Plan.

The Pearsall Plan's origins lay in the North Carolina General Assembly's Pupil Assignment Act of 1955, which “authorized local school units to set up administrative procedures regarding school transfers and reassignment requests.”<sup>73</sup> Through this process, black parents would have to “go through endless administrative procedures to transfer their children” as well as a series of interviews.<sup>74</sup> Governor Luther Hodges, pursuing a moderate, that is non-confrontational, racial agenda, then appointed a seven-man pro-segregation all-white Pearsall Committee, which created the Pearsall Plan “To Save Our Schools.” In a special session, the General Assembly ratified the plan in July, 1956 and voters approved an amendment to the North Carolina State Constitution in September, 1956 to make it law. In addition to the Pupil Assignment Act the Pearsall Plan gave “a local option provision permitting the suspended operation of public schools by popular vote”, education grants “to private schools for children whose parents objected to attending school with the child of another race” and a “repeal of the

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<sup>72</sup> Dorthess “Bill” Lynch to Senora Lynch, Interview, 25 July 2009.

<sup>73</sup> Wilma Peebles-Wilkins, “Reactions of Segments of the Black Community to the North Carolina Pearsall Plan, 1954-1966,” *Phylon* 48, no. 2 (1987), 113.

<sup>74</sup> Chafe, 68.

compulsory school attendance requirements when a segregated school experience was not immediately available to those objecting to desegregation.”<sup>75</sup>

Officials undeniably intended the Pearsall Plan to promote segregation of whites from blacks, but the Haliwas attempted to use it to facilitate their own private Indian school. In doing so they demonstrated that not only whites saw segregation as a way to meet their political and personal agendas. In 1957 W.R. Richardson appeared before the Warren County Board of Education to inform them that the Haliwas would apply for the funds as required by law.<sup>76</sup> This action brought local, state, national, and even international attention. Not only were the Haliwas the first in the state to apply for the controversial funds, but also the entire situation became a bureaucratic quagmire.

Immediately, the Haliwas’ pursuit of Pearsall Funds hit a snag at the state level because officials still questioned their Indian identity.<sup>77</sup> These outsiders judged identity by racial associations, and the Haliwas had long attended schools and churches seen as colored with some African Americans. Furthermore, most of Haliwas’ vital documents and other papers classified them as Negro, colored, or mulatto. Now they demanded a separate Indian school. Unlike the Lumbees and even the Indians of Person County, Coharies and the Waccamaw-Siouans of Columbus and Bladen Counties, the Haliwas had not yet established their own Indian school system, due to their apparent inability to prove to the state's satisfaction that they possessed Indian "blood" and were not, in fact, Negroes.

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<sup>75</sup> Peebles-Wilkins, 114.

<sup>76</sup> “Haliwar Tribe Hopes to Get Pearsall Funds.”

<sup>77</sup> “Indian School Denied Pearsall Plan Money: Race Issue Not Settled” *The Littleton Observer*, 19 September 1957.

Yet the Pearsall Plan strategy began to turn this perception around; outside attitudes began to change because the Haliwa School supported segregation, and therefore appeared to support white supremacy as well. Using the Pearsall Plan to fund their school could not only help the Haliwas reach their political goals, but could also help whites further their own goal of keeping schools segregated. At a Halifax County Board of Education meeting, board attorney Joe Branch exclaimed, “this board has always stood for separation of the races and will continue to do so,” but the Indians posed a problem since they had always gone to Negro schools. Five Lumbee Indians testified on behalf of the Haliwas and stated that if the Haliwas were in Robeson County they would be accepted as Indians. The Haliwas’ attorneys gave passionate pleas to the board on behalf of the Haliwas invoking the thought of the white South:

Who are the people who want to integrate?...People who have lost their pride of race and do not want to improve it...This state and the South gave people the right, I say the right to stand apart. These people say to you, you can have your own the colored man can have his own and we as Indians want our own.<sup>78</sup>

While the Haliwas and their supporters argued their case for their own segregated school on the state and county level, locally the school issue fueled the rivalry and factionalism among the Indians and the clashing philosophies of race in the Jim Crow South and competing strategies for progress.

The Haliwa Indian School debate reiterated two competing ideals about the black-white segregated social order. W.R. Richardson, on one hand, had a “fierce urge to ‘rescue’ an Indian identity among a people who, while having some unmistakable Indian physical features and ancestry, for years have lived alongside and legally been identified

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<sup>78</sup> “Race Designation Problem is Pondered,” *The News and Observer, Raleigh, N.C.* 21 August 1958, 3.



as, Negroe [sic],” according to a newspaper article.<sup>79</sup> Vernon Lynch, on the other hand, spoke for the community “which has indicated its preference to remain in the road which it has been traveling better than 50 years.” Lynch meant “that his mother and father...have supported the Hollister PTA actively for the past 40 years” and other colored community institutions like Pine Chapel Baptist Church. Even though some characterized Pine Chapel as a colored church, as early as 1949, the media recognized some community churches as “Indian.”<sup>80</sup>

During the Haliwa Indian School controversy, many Haliwa Indians still attended Pine Chapel Baptist and other Indian and black churches, but they began to grow more uncomfortable there. The tension sometimes grew into open hostility. John Daniel Hedgepeth remembered, “I got the same treatment at the Pine Chapel Church that I got at the school. In fact there were two particular young men who were bigger than I was and soon as my parents [and I]...would get out of the car and go in the church, if I came outside they would be out there and say that old Injun.” When Avis Lynch Green and her family decided to follow her brother and sister-in-law Allen Randolph and Lily Green to the new Indian church she recalled “some of our cousins said that Lily and Avis is going to Hell, cause [there] ain't no Indians.” Attending a “colored” church with individuals who were Indian descendants themselves, and did not share the same values or political goals did not make much sense to government officials like school board members, or to many Haliwa Indians themselves.

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<sup>79</sup> Howard Lindsay, “Opinions Differ On Issue of Private Haliwa School.” *Scotland Neck Commonwealth*, 8 November 1957.

<sup>80</sup> Bill Sharpe, “Lost Indian Tribes of State Seek Identity.”

Many members of Pine Chapel, and apparently even county government officials, began to question why the Haliwas were attending a mixed-race church, but a segregated Indian school. Vernon Lynch reported “a lot of us can’t understand why some of our people feel like they can’t send their children to the same school as ours attend five days in the week, but on Sunday, send them to Sunday School to be taught the Bible by a Negro.”<sup>81</sup> Many Indians, however, felt that Pine Chapel was their church and wanted to designate it as an Indian church, but church leaders, including Vernon Lynch, resisted.<sup>82</sup> Since Pine Chapel was a member of a black church association, the association resisted the Indian designation as well.<sup>83</sup> Perhaps even some officials such as county board of education members questioned why the Haliwas were still attending colored institutions. Avis Lynch Green, recollected, “the head man said, ‘why you ask for an Indian school and still in a colored church?’... We had to get out there and go build a church to get the government to [support] the school.” Facing harassment and discomfort at church and threats to their strategies to fund their school, the Haliwas decided to build their own church.

On March 25, 1958, Haliwa Indian Club founder John C. Hedgepeth and his wife Ruth R. Hedgepeth donated two acres of land in Warren County to the Trustees of the Saponi Indian Baptist Church. The trustees themselves were B.B. Richardson, Allen R. Green, and Elzia T. Richardson.<sup>84</sup> Use of the tribal name Saponi was spurred on by the

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<sup>81</sup> Ibid.

<sup>82</sup> Avis Lynch Green to Marvin Richardson.

<sup>83</sup> Almorris Lynch to Marvin Richardson.

<sup>84</sup> John C. Hedgepeth and Ruth R. Hedgepeth, John H. Kerr Jr. to B.B. Richardson, Allen R. Green, and Elizia T. Richardson, Trustees of The Saponi Indian Baptist Church, Warren County Deed Book 190, p. 240-245, 25 March 1958.

research of the Haliwa Indian School's first principal C.D. Brewington, who determined "the most likely antecedents [to the Haliwas] were the Saponas and Meherrins."<sup>85</sup> Perhaps not all agreed using Saponi in the church name, since members changed the name to Mount Bethel Indian Baptist Church. The church site itself was only 200 hundred yards from the Haliwa Indian School and when it was time to break ground on March 29, 1958 at their new Indian sanctuary, Haliwa Indian Club members literally marched across the road to their church site. The record of those in attendance testifies to the importance of the occasion to Haliwa Indian Club members and documents the coalition of tribal groups in which the Haliwas were a part of. In attendance were Haliwa members from Philadelphia, Lumbee Indian Reverend R.W. Maynor, and representatives from Sampson County Indians' (Coharie) New Bethel Church.<sup>86</sup>

While the Haliwas celebrated their new institution of Indianness, their new church also irritated fresh wounds from the split among families and challenged individuals to choose their loyalties. Reverend Charles Horace (C.H.) Richardson had served as pastor of Pine Chapel Baptist Church for a number of years, but chose to take his calling as pastor of the new Indian church.<sup>87</sup> Connie Lynch Hedgepeth's father Fletcher Lynch was a dedicated deacon at Pine Chapel, but made the difficult decision to join Mount Bethel and send his children to the Haliwa Indian School. The animosity on both sides of the

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<sup>85</sup> Howard Lindsay, "Opinions Differ."

<sup>86</sup> "Haliwas Begin Hollister Church," *Roanoke Rapids (N.C.) Daily Herald*, 10 April 1958.

<sup>87</sup> Almorris Lynch, Interview.

controversy was bitter and immediate family members did not speak for years, or set foot in each other's church, even for funerals of close family members.<sup>88</sup>

W.R. Richardson and his followers were willing to go against this grain to pursue recognition as Indians. By the late 1950s, colored came to mean the same thing as Negro, an association they rejected, whereas some had never fully rejected colored. Some Indian descendants did not publically affiliate with the Haliwa Indian Club and accepted the ambiguous colored designation. Haliwa Indians would not continue attending Negro schools where teachers and other students taunted them about being Indian. Vernon Lynch and his followers, however, did not see the point of abandoning the community institutions they had founded and supported. They were fine with supporting colored schools—and their families' identities as colored—as long as their children received a good education. Further, they believed that the Haliwa Indian School and the Indian club was not worth the scarred relationships among interrelated kin.

Vernon Lynch and his followers also opposed the Indian school because it threatened the financial and educational stability of Hollister School. Lynch, as President of the Hollister School Parent Teacher Association (PTA), led the opposition to the Haliwa Indian School for financial and educational reasons. In October 1957, members of the Hollister PTA submitted a signed petition to the Halifax County Board of Education alleging that “providing the [Pearsall] grant would create discord in the Hollister community and eventually result in the loss of teachers in the Hollister School.”<sup>89</sup> Further, if a new Indian school opened, the number of students attending the Hollister School might drop, impacting the size of the building and possibly closing the

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<sup>88</sup> Murzie and Daisy Richardson Mills, Interview.

<sup>89</sup> “Hollister Group Petitions Board,” *Daily Herald*, 8 October 1957.

school.<sup>90</sup> The PTA also lobbied the school board for a new building. The school board responded by halting construction of a new school until they resolved the Haliwa Indian School question. Lynch and the PTA withdrew their petition sometime around October or November 1957 and dropped their opposition when he learned that funds towards the Indian school would not be diverted from Hollister School and not as many children as feared were leaving Hollister. About 100 Indian students had left Hollister and other Negro schools when the Indians opened their school.<sup>91</sup>

The Haliwa school controversy was not only a local issue; it had statewide ramifications and aroused statewide opposition as well. Since the Haliwas were the first to attempt to use Pearsall Funds, their case drew opposition from African American organizations hostile to the state's circumvention of federal law. In 1958 Reverend A.D. Moseley, who represented the Progressive Civic Union of Northampton, Warren, and Halifax counties, described as a "Negro 'betterment' union," addressed State superintendent Dr. Charles F. Carroll, warning him "that granting tuition funds for private education would be 'one step closer toward liquidation' of the North Carolina public school system."<sup>92</sup> The group also presented a resolution calling on the Superintendent and the State Board of Education to "refuse to accredit or even consider private schools set-up for segregated educational purposes." Carroll responded to the group stating that the board would be "'within the law' in approving the Haliwa school

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<sup>90</sup> "School Hearing Held Today: Patrons Told P-TA Leader Is Holding Up 'Progress,'" *Roanoke Rapids (N.C.) Daily Herald*, 27 February 1959.

<sup>91</sup> Lindsay, "Opinions Differ On Issue of Private Haliwa School."

<sup>92</sup> "Negroes Hit Indian Plea For Schools," *The News and Observer*, Friday 17 October, 1958.

for private educational purposes."<sup>93</sup> Most likely other civil rights groups, including the NAACP, kept a close watch on the Indians' Pearsall Plan attempts. Though the Haliwas submitted applications and lobbied both the county and state boards of education, they never received Pearsall Funds.<sup>94</sup>

Ultimately, the pressure to use the Pearsall Funds for Indians and the determination of the Haliwas themselves to have their own Indian school forced the county boards to compromise with each other and jointly fund the Haliwa Indian School. On January 5, 1959, the Warren County Board of Education voted to take the Haliwa Indian School into its system, thus ending two long years of intense lobbying, fundraising, sacrifice, and determination on a part of the Indians and their allies.<sup>95</sup>

While the Haliwa Indians pursued their Indian political agenda by allying themselves with sympathetic whites and recognized Indians, other Indian-descended people in the Meadows worked within the civil rights network with African Americans to achieve their political goals. In July of 1959 the Halifax County School Board let the contract for a new Hollister School Building for the "Negro" students.<sup>96</sup> As president of the Hollister PTA, Vernon Lynch led the movement. Later on in the 1960s, Lynch also pushed for integration of schools and his daughter was identified as the first "black" child to integrate Aurelian Springs School, a historically white school.<sup>97</sup> Thomas Hedgpeth,

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<sup>93</sup> Ibid.

<sup>94</sup> At this point we do not have definitive documentation explaining why the Haliwas were not given the Pearsall funds. Further research may provide an answer. Perhaps the county school boards were tired of the controversy and wanted to move on.

<sup>95</sup> "Haliwa's School Becomes Part of Halifax's System," *The News and Observer*, 8 January 1959.

<sup>96</sup> "Contracts Approved For New School At Hollister," *The Littleton Observer*, 23 July 1959.

<sup>97</sup> Thomas Olival Hedgpeth, Interview.

who had earlier decided to register to vote as a “black man”, involved himself in county politics and was instrumental in helping non-whites take over the Brinkleyville district Democratic Party. At one meeting the whites presented their slate of candidates for the board, but then, as Hedgpeth recalled, “we presented [our] slate and when we voted we outnumbered them and that’s when we got some control on the voting precinct. And I served, I serve now, as chairman of our voting precinct.” Though Vernon Lynch pursued another agenda from the Haliwa Indians, he apparently never gave up his Indian identity and was listed as such on his 1979 death certificate.<sup>98</sup> Despite their split, both groups achieved their rights as minorities of color.

For the Haliwa Indians the Haliwa Indian School was a sanctuary and a safe and caring place where Indian children could learn from mostly Indian teachers without worrying about someone challenging their identity. A 1958 newspaper article effectively summarized the importance of the Haliwa Indian School to the Indians: “The school was a rallying point, the inspirational banner, which molded the community of Haliwas into their first concerted effort to rise above the status of Negro. It also won them their first concession toward social recognition as Indians.”<sup>99</sup> Even in the midst of the U.S. Supreme Court’s *Brown v. Board of Education* decision, the school offered grades 1-12 for the Indian children of Halifax and Warren Counties for ten years before the high school was closed in 1967. Two years later, in 1969, the counties closed the Haliwa Indian elementary school, integrating Indian children into the regular public school system. Closing the Haliwa Indian School severely upset the Haliwa Indians and took

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<sup>98</sup> Vernon Lynch, Death Certificate, Chapel Hill, N.C., Orange County, 9 July 1979, accessed through ancestry.com.

<sup>99</sup> Dwayne Walls, “Haliwa Pays Prohibitive Price To Live As Indian,” *Durham Morning Herald*, 22 February 1959.

away their primary symbol of their Indian identity. But, the Haliwas had become a state-recognized tribe in 1965 and celebrated their recognition with an annual powwow.

## **Conclusion**

From before the World War II era the South's racial and ethnic limitations black-white binary blocked the Meadows Indians' attempts to assert a separate Indian identity. Federal, state, and local governments and organizations opposed the Indians' strategies towards achieving separate recognition. Brothers-in-law W.R. Richardson and Vernon Lynch represented different philosophies and strategies on how the Meadows Indians could gain equal rights. W.R. Richardson sought to break the grip of Jim Crow's black-white binary by creating segregated Indian institutions, securing alliances with Indian tribes, and seeking Indian unity. Lynch, on the other hand, after the leadership dispute, believed that working within the existing black-white binary would help his followers enjoy the social and educational institutions that residents had supported for years, even though those institutions were part of a colored classification system. On the local level, supporters of the Hollister School, including its PTA, opposed the Haliwa Indian School because it threatened the financial and population stability of Hollister School. The Haliwa Indian Club appeared to break the desegregation movement by trying to secure Pearsall Plan funds. African American organizations opposed the state's circumvention of the Supreme Court's ruling and thought that use of the funds, by any group, would destroy the public school system.

The Haliwa Indians' political mobilization depended on their ability to distinguish themselves as Indians and disavow the local, state, and regional black-white binary. The roots of this attempt lay in the World War II era, when several Meadows Indians



registered as Indians for selective service, but were nevertheless also classified as Negro. Denial of their civil right to identify themselves as Indians motivated Haliwa activism, and dates earlier than most discussions of the civil rights movement. By the time many civil rights histories begin, around the time period of the *Brown v. Board of Education*, the Indians already recognized that their identities and opportunities could be curtailed even further if they attended fully integrated schools under this new desegregated legal regime. So they sought outside help to form their own Indian organization, the Haliwa Indian Club. Both inside and outside stakeholders collaborated to accomplish Haliwa goals. Finally, Indians built and initially funded the Haliwa Indian School to provide segregated education for their children in Halifax and Warren Counties in 1957 and the Mount Bethel Indian Baptist Church in 1958. After the counties would not fund the school, the Haliwas tapped into the supposedly moderate tool of segregation: the Pearsall Plan. Ironically, they used a state-furnished, white supremacist tool and forced their historic oppressors locally to create a school for them and free them from one kind of discrimination they had experienced.

The Haliwa-Saponi story provides a number of lessons and consequences for Haliwa-Saponi Indians, and for the historiography about Indians, Jim Crow, and the Civil Rights Movement. For the Haliwa-Saponi Indians, the organization of Haliwa Indian Club, Haliwa Indian School, and Mount Bethel Indian Baptist church, was “like a light, a beacon of light, a beacon of hope,” in the words of Almorris Lynch. He continued, “when that school was built[,] it gave us more determination. It gave the people a desire to be more aggressive to be more, because we want more now.”<sup>100</sup> To achieve their political goals, Haliwa Indians utilized strategies that were seemingly contrary to the

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<sup>100</sup> Almorris Lynch, 27 September 2012

Civil Rights Movement. On the other hand, other Indian descendants broke Jim Crow by joining their black allies on occasion in the cause of integration and civil rights. The Haliwa-Saponi story also testifies to the fact that not all minorities reacted to Jim Crow in similar fashion, and that even during the reign of Jim Crow the definitions of race and identity were subject to change.

Both groups sought strategies to break the hold of Jim Crow on their people even though the personal tensions remain, in decreasing degrees, in the community. What binds the Meadows Indians together, even now, is an ongoing sense that civil rights not only means equal access to voting and education, but also the ability to express a historical, self-articulated identity as either Indian or black, depending on the traditions of one's own family. While *Brown v. Board* brought a particular change to the Meadows Indians' strategies to break Jim Crow, all reacted in a fashion that sought to maintain the political strategies of their ancestors.

In 2000, the Haliwa-Saponis revived the spirit of their historic Indian school by opening the Haliwa-Saponi Tribal School, a public charter school. The school utilizes the original Indian school building, offers grades k-12, and provides an American Indian studies and college prep curriculum. Though the school is not fully supported by all tribal members, nor is it 100 percent American Indian (more like 98 percent), it nevertheless serves as a modern symbol of Indianness and promotes American Indian community.

Another symbol of Indian identity is the tribe's annual powwow. The Haliwa-Saponi powwow, one of the largest and oldest powwows in the Southeast, is a three-day festival, which includes not only the conventional aspects of powwow dancing and singing, but also the presentation of local Haliwa crafts and art, attracts 8,000 visitors

each year and contributes to the decreasing tensions among the tribe. The powwow has, in a way, replaced the school as a symbol of Haliwa identity, formed in a crucible of controversy. For many Indian nations, a coherent, autonomous political identity emerges out of such a crisis, and the Haliwa-Saponi crisis was the movement for integrated education during the civil rights movement.<sup>101</sup> Meanwhile, the Haliwa-Saponis still continue to worship at Mount Bethel Indian Baptist Church and other Indian and community churches, and invoke the old practice of hymn-singing, support for destitute families, and belonging that has marked all the Meadows Indians for centuries.

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<sup>101</sup> Thomas Biolsi, *Organizing the Lakota: The Political Economy of the New Deal on the Pine Ridge and Rosebud Reservations* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1992); John Moore, *The Cheyenne Nation: A Social and Demographic History* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1987); Loretta Fowler, *Arapahoe Politics, 1851-1978: Symbols in Crisis of Authority* (Lincoln Nebraska: University of Nebraska Press, 1982); Morris Foster, *Being Comanche: A Social History of an American Indian Community* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1991).

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