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From Princess to Chief: Life with the Waccamau Siouan Indians of North Carolina

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as it turned the lives and future of this place in a direction not common to the other sea islands.

In 1862 Laura Towne and Ellen Murray were missionaries who established the Penn School. Their focus was upon teaching liberal subjects—imparting the basics of a European education, reading, writing, history, arithmetic, music and geography. By the time the war was over, the former slaves were freedmen and eager to be educated and own land. Most of the white landowners and slave owners fled the island, leaving it to the slaves who stayed on as freedmen. Given the chance to “catch the learning” (p. xiv *Foreward*) (as the former slaves called it), the idea of the liberal education fueled many to seek admission.

Soon after its beginning, the Penn School was easily attracting and educating St. Helena students. It was clear that some type of vocational training was needed to prepare the students for work in new methods of agriculture and home economics. The Penn School expanded to add industrial education to its training. What began as an experiment offering educational opportunities for enslaved young people on an isolated island proved that slaves “caught the learning” and profited greatly leading them to land ownership and community leadership.

A gradual turn for the Penn School occurred between 1900 and 1948 according to Burton and Cross after “two world wars and the Great Depression” (p.5 *Introduction*) when public schools became available to the islanders. Turmoil in the public arena concerning costs of a Penn Center education for blacks impacted the sustainability of its mission and funding sources. Change led to the Penn School becoming a community center, a center in later days for political activism, a strong voice for equal rights across the nation and today as a center that honors and preserves the Gullah traditions and languages that evolved over the 19th and 20th centuries.

Burton and Cross’s research is enthusiastically presented and leads us to want to go back in time and be with them on St. Helena in the first days of 1862 as they observe Laura and Ellen under the trees of St. Helena teaching and encouraging the students. A collection of photographs and extensive Chapter by Chapter Notes, a Bibliography and an Index provide valuable primary resources.

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From Princess to Chief: Life with the Waccamaw Siouan Indians of North Carolina. Priscilla Freeman Jacobs and Patricia Barker Lerch. Tuscaloosa, AL: The University of Alabama Press, 2013. ISBN 978-0-8173-1797-3. \$34.95

Professor and ethnographer Patricia Barker Lerch sets her qualitative research of the life of Priscilla Freeman Jacobs in the Waccamaw Siouan community in Eastern North Carolina. The five Chapters of the revealed life of Priscilla

Freeman Jacobs read like the lives of most women with birth, contextual developments in a community, marriage and personal family development. We learn the difference in Priscilla’s life came when she combined a path of Indian activism with a redefined spiritual life and a career choice filled with barriers and unclear outcomes. Many of us who were born in the Southern United States can relate to the daily life that Priscilla lived, infused with strong family ties, and dedication to church and community; however, few of us broke free and became the independent spirit we see in this portrayal of her life.



In the *Introduction*, Dr. Lerch tells the reader that numerous voices will come in and out to help tell Patricia’s story. We are invited to hear conversations of everyday life through voices from female relatives. Priscilla also contributes, in the first person, through remembrances of the cultural and political transitions she experienced as a member of the Waccamaw Siouan tribe. She talks of her attempt to leave the Indian community with a move of her young family to Wilmington but after 15 years she and her family returned. She talks of her marriage, her devotion to her heritage, her determination to shed light on the Waccamaw Siouan heritage she treasures and the future she sought.

Readers who like ethnographic studies will enjoy the detail and rich conversations from Priscilla’s life. For those who are fascinated by Native Americans and their strengths and struggles during the 20th Century, this research sheds light on a little known tribe and a woman who became its Chief. Priscilla Freeman Jacobs “descended from a family of Indian leaders whose activism dates back to the early years of the 20th Century...advocating for local schools for the Indian community children, driving for Waccamaw Sioux to be recognized as Indians in state and federal legislation”, and “working tirelessly to preserve the customs of her people” (cover leaf). This book is an excellent resource for high school and college students.

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