

Committee: Education and Culture
Date: 12-30-09 Committee Date: 02-16-10

Author: Julia Coates
Sponsor: Julia Coates

RESOLUTION NO. 16-10

COUNCIL OF THE CHEROKEE NATION

A RESOLUTION IN SUPPORT OF THE NAMING OF A BUILDING AT THE UNIVERSITY OF NORTH CAROLINA AFTER PROMINENT CITIZEN OF THE EASTERN BAND OF CHEROKEE INDIANS HENRY OWL

WHEREAS, the Cherokee Nation since time immemorial has exercised the sovereign rights of self-government in behalf of the Cherokee people;

WHEREAS, the Cherokee Nation is a federally recognized Indian Nation with a historic and continual government to government relationship with the United States of America;

WHEREAS, the Cherokee Nation and the Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians enjoy a historic and mutually supportive relationship;

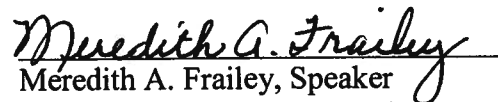
WHEREAS, Henry Owl, a citizen of the Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians, was admitted as a graduate student in 1928 to the University of North Carolina and was the first person of color admitted to the University of North Carolina;

WHEREAS, Henry Owl was instrumental in prompting Congress to pass legislation extending the rights of United States citizenship to members of the Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians;


BE IT RESOLVED BY THE CHEROKEE NATION, that the Council hereby supports the effort to name a building at the University of North Carolina after a prominent citizen of the Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians, Henry Owl.

CERTIFICATION

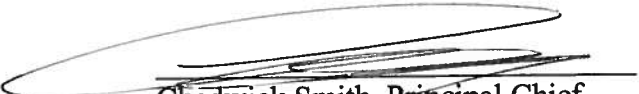
The foregoing resolution was adopted by the Council of the Cherokee Nation at a duly called meeting on the 16th day of February, 2010, having 17 members present, constituting a quorum, by the vote of 17 yea; 0 nay; 0 abstaining.


Meredith A. Frailey, Speaker
Council of the Cherokee Nation

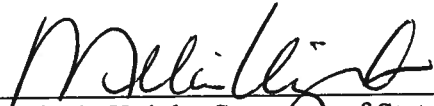
ATTEST:


Don Garvin, Secretary
Council of the Cherokee Nation

Approved and signed by the Principal Chief this 23rd day of FEBRUARY, 2010.


Chadwick Smith, Principal Chief
Cherokee Nation

ATTEST:



Melanie Knight, Secretary of State
Cherokee Nation

Henry Owl

By Theda Perdue, Department of History, University of North Carolina

Henry Owl was born on the Cherokee Indian reservation in western North Carolina on August 1, 1896. His father, Lloyd Owl, was a Cherokee blacksmith; his mother, Nettie Harris Owl, was a Catawba Indian from the Catawba reservation near Rock Hill, South Carolina. Cherokees and Catawbas had had close relations since 1840 when the Catawbas lost most of their land and some moved temporarily to North Carolina, but Nettie and Lloyd had met at an Indian boarding school. Nettie was a skilled potter, an art at which the Catawbas excelled, and she was one of the Catawba women who reintroduced a pottery tradition to the Cherokees. Lloyd Owl died when Henry was fourteen, leaving Nettie with seven children. For awhile, she cleaned houses for local whites, but ultimately she moved back to the Catawba reservation since she could only draw her share of the small amount paid for the land ceded in 1840 if she was a resident of the state. Sampson Owl, Henry's great uncle who would serve as the principal chief of the Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians in the 1920s, became the children's guardian.

In 1912, Henry went to Hampton Institute in Virginia. Hampton had been founded for freed slaves after the Civil War, but in the 1870s the school began to admit Indian students as part of a program to see if Indian warriors could be educated. The experiment worked so well that by the early twentieth century young Indians from all over the country attended Hampton, which provided facilities separate from those for African American students in accord with the Jim Crow practices of the time. Henry, along with

his siblings who also attended, excelled. He not only played football, but he also published articles in *The Southern Workman*, Hampton's magazine. In 1918 he graduated from Hampton and joined the army, where he rose to the rank of sergeant.

When Henry left the army, he returned to Cherokee, where he taught in the Cherokee Training School, a boarding school operated by the United States government. In 1923 he accepted a position teaching agriculture and "manual training" at Bacone College, an institution for Indians in Oklahoma. Henry recognized the need for more education, so in 1925 he enrolled in Lenoir Rhyne College in North Carolina. In its winter 2007 issue, Lenoir Rhyne's magazine, *Profile*, recounted his accomplishments, which included lettering in football, baseball, and debate as well as singing in the glee club and winning an oratorical contest. He received his B.A. in spring 1928, and entered the graduate program in history at the University of North Carolina that fall.

We know far less about Henry Owl's experiences at UNC than we do about his undergraduate career at Lenoir Rhyne, but his very presence is remarkable. Henry Owl was the first person of color admitted to UNC. In 1928 education in North Carolina was rigidly segregated. In 1887 the state had established the institution that would become UNC-Pembroke for Indians, but that school limited its admissions to Indians from Robeson County, the people now called Lumbees. Even if the doors had been open to him, the Lumbees' ambiguous Indian origins might have dissuaded Owl from attending. A degree from Lenoir Rhyne, a white college, almost certainly eased his matriculation at UNC. Owl's daughter, Gladys Cardiff, remembers that her father talked about how much he enjoyed his studies at UNC, but his limited financial resources created considerable

anxiety. Owl wrote a thesis, "The Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians Before and After the Removal," and he received his M.A. in history in 1929.

Owl returned to western North Carolina. He made his mark on the history of Indian civil rights when he tried to register to vote in Swain County. At first, the registrar refused to register him on the basis that he was illiterate. When Owl presented his thesis, the registrar claimed that Cherokees did not have the right to vote in North Carolina because they were wards of the government and not citizens, despite a federal law in 1924 that made all Indians citizens. Owl filed suit, but ultimately Congress intervened. In 1930 Owl's testimony before the Senate about the discrimination he had suffered prompted Congress to enact a law extending citizenship rights to members of the Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians, the last Indian tribe in the United States to be guaranteed the right to vote.

Owl left North Carolina to teach in Bureau of Indian Affairs schools and work for the Veterans Administration and Boeing Aircraft Corporation. He died in 1980.

Sources:

Asheville Citizen, March 11, 1980

Henry Owl file, Thomas Blumer Papers, University of South Carolina at Lancaster,
Lancaster, SC

John R. Finger, *Cherokee Americans: The Eastern Band of Cherokees in the Twentieth Century* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1991), 49-50.

"Living in Two Worlds," *Profile* 75 (1007): 10-11;

<http://www.lrc.edu/news/profile/winter%2007%20finalA.pdf>