

# R-C area history discussed at West Virginia conference

LOGAN, WEST VA—Three researchers who study the multi-racial histories of North Carolina's Roanoke-Chowan area communities made presentations at the 13th Melungeon Heritage Association Reunion conference, held June 26-27 in Logan, West Virginia.

The Melungeons are multi-racial people living in Appalachia whose origins, besides that of Native American, pre-date Jamestown. Many of the Melungeons are descended from eastern

Virginian Native Americans and Mediterranean area immigrants. They are possibly related to the Weavers, a group of people from India, brought to the Chesapeake Bay area in the late 1600's. The Weaver descendants have a strong presence in the Hampton Roads area and in Hertford County's Winton Triangle.

The three researchers are either natives of the Roanoke-Chowan area or have R-C roots.

Author K. Paul Johnson,

whose roots are in South Norfolk and North Carolina's Bertie County, is the author of *Pell Mellers: Race and Memory in a Carolina Pocosin*. Johnson's book combines family history and memoir in an investigation of mulatto ancestors and Union sympathizers in eastern North Carolina.

Dr. Arwin D. Smallwood, Associate Professor, The University of Memphis Department of History and a native of Bertie County's Indian Woods community, is

the author of *Bertie County: An Eastern Carolina History* and is doing scholarly work on the intersection of the histories of Native Americans, African Americans, and Europeans. Dr. Smallwood is completing his latest book about the Tuscarora Indians and spoke about the Tuscarora roots of the Melungeons.

Hertford County native Marvin T. Jones is the Executive Director of the Chowan Discovery Group which researches the 400+

year old history of Winton Triangle people, a tri-racial land-owning people of color in the Winton-Cofield-Ahoskie area of Hertford County, North Carolina. Jones's lecture about the Winton Triangle was also recently staged at Ahoskie's Gallery Theatre.

Among the topics highlighted at the conference were:

The documentary film *Melungeon Voices* by Julie Dixon Williams, who is now producing a film history of North Carolina;

Human migration from 150,000 BC to 1586 AD;

The 300 Africans delivered to Roanoke Island by English Explorer Francis Drake during the year of Ralph Lane's visit to the Chowan River in 1586 - one year before the landing of the Lost Colony;

Tuscarora migrations after the Tuscarora Wars in North Carolina in the early 18th century;

Bertie County's Indian Woods community and its Tuscarora past;

Medical histories of migrant groups in the Appalachians;

Spanish explorations of the Carolinas and Virginia before the Roanoke Island explorations; and

The African, Mediterranean and Middle Eastern presence in the Carolinas and Virginia before 1607 settlement in Jamestown, Virginia.

Other presenters came from institutions such as Rutgers University, New Jersey; Berea College, Kentucky; West Virginia Division of History and Culture and the Naval Medical Center in Portsmouth, Virginia. The attendees, mostly from Appalachia, warmly received the Roanoke-Chowan presenters and were anxious to know if their ancestors had any Roanoke-Chowan connections.



Dr. Irene M. Wright of St. Louis, Missouri (second from right) shares a laugh with researchers of Roanoke-Chowan history – from left, K. Paul Johnson, Dr. Arwin D.

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Smallwood and Marvin T. Jones – at the 13th Melungeon Heritage Association Reunion Conference in Logan, West Virginia, June 26-27.

For more information about this article,  
contact the  
Chowan Discovery Group  
Marvin T. Jones  
[info@chowandiscovery.org](mailto:info@chowandiscovery.org)