

American Indian Life

Archaeological evidence indicates that Indians were living in North Carolina at least 10,000 years ago. For centuries before European contact, these native people lived in harmony with the natural environment, taking no more from the land than they needed to survive. For Indians, individual ownership of land was completely alien. Fishing, hunting and farming simply provided a food source.

Early Encounters

American Indians of the Virginia and North Carolina coasts were hosts to the first English-speaking explorers and settlers. Initial contacts between these people groups were generally peaceful and friendly. American Indians taught the newcomers fishing and agricultural techniques, introduced them to corn and tobacco cultivation, demonstrated methods of land clearing and showed them efficient use of the forest's bounty. The settlers exchanged manufactured goods for the Indian's knowledge of life and land. Unfortunately, they did not realize that they had sacrificed their own self-reliance for the settler's convenience. The European concept of land was ownership or possession, not sharing. Hostile feelings developed between the Indians and the settlers which set the stage for continued clashes.

Coastal Plains Indians

At that time, the coastal plains Indians of North Carolina numbered approximately 35,000 or about 30 tribes geographically separated by linguistic groups. Along the northeastern and central coast were the Algonquians. To the south resided Indians of Siouan lineage. To the west lived the Iroquoian-related Tuscarora. For these Indian tribes, early contact with white men often was followed by early extinction. Among the causes were warfare and disease. By 1710, the coastal Indian population had dwindled to no more than 5,000 and little remained of their lifestyle due to the banishment of the Indians by the settlers.

Tuscarora War

The Tuscarora War in 1711 marked the last significant effort of the eastern Indians to halt the settler's spread that abolished their lifestyle, culture and swept them off the land. For two years, the Tuscarora fought many military expeditions. In 1713, they suffered a major defeat which broke their power forever.

Indian Removal Bill

By the 1760s, colonial government and settlement had reached the mountain foothills of North Carolina, the home of the Cherokee. In 1838, under the authority of the Indian Removal Bill, nearly 17,000 Cherokee were forcibly removed from their ancestral homes and marched on the Trail of Tears to Oklahoma. Nearly a quarter of the Cherokee

resisted removal, and it is from this nucleus, that the Eastern Band of the Cherokee was formed and remains in western North Carolina today.

Present Day Tribes

By the mid-1800s, European settlements had spread across the central piedmont of North Carolina. Small tribes fled before the expansion and most joined kinsmen in eastern and southern North Carolina, southern Virginia or South Carolina. It is from these last surviving groups that the state-recognized tribes of North Carolina – the Coharie, Haliwa-Saponi, Lumbee, Meherrin, Occaneechi, Sappony and Waccamaw-Siouan – trace their ancestry.

Little Recorded History in 1700s

Little history is recorded regarding the surviving eastern Indians between the early 1700s and the early 1800s. However, it must be remembered that for these Indians, survival depended largely on their ability to withstand the state's policy of forced anonymity for their kind, and their ability to accept their designated place in the white social order.

Post-Civil War Reconstruction

During Reconstruction, political equality was supposedly restored when the vote was extended to all men regardless of color. However, when Reconstruction ended in North Carolina, the NC General Assembly established separate schools for whites and blacks but no schools were established for Indians. This can be viewed as another attempt to remove any reference to American Indians.

Indian Schools – In History

In 1885, however, the NC General Assembly passed legislation which established separate schools for the Indians of Robeson County. In 1887, Croatan Normal School opened its doors. Over the next 100 years, other Indian communities in the State were successful in establishing schools. East Carolina Indian School was established in the Coharie Indian Community of Sampson County, the Haliwa-Saponi Indian School in the Haliwa-Saponi Indian Communities of Halifax and Warren Counties, the High Plains Indian School was established in the Sappony Indian community of Person County, and Hawkeye Indian School was established in Hoke County.

Indian Recognition

Beginning in the late 1800s and continuing into the early 1970s, Indians in North Carolina re-established their formal tribal identities and sought recognition from the state and federal governments. In 1889, the federally recognized Eastern Band of the Cherokee was incorporated under North Carolina law. In 1910, the Lumbee were formally recognized by the State of North Carolina. The "Lumbee Bill," passed by the

US Congress in 1956, recognized the Lumbee as an Indian tribe but denied them access to services from the Bureau of Indian Affairs. In 1965, the Haliwa-Saponi received state recognition, as did the Coharie and Waccamaw-Siouan in 1971. In 1971, the NC Commission of Indian Affairs was authorized by the North Carolina General Assembly to advocate for the needs of North Carolina's American Indian population. In 1979, it established procedures for state recognition of North Carolina Indian tribes and organizations. Under these procedures, state recognition was granted to the Meherrin Tribe of Hertford County in 1986. The Triangle Native American Society, an Urban Association located in Wake County, was established in 2000. The Indians of Person County, now the Sappony, gained state recognition through the General Assembly in 1913.

More Progress

Throughout the 1960s and 1970s, NC Indians continued to make progress despite discrimination and many obstacles. Seven Indian organizations, chartered by the State of NC, provided a variety of services for Indian people in the state. Pembroke State College for Indians, the first four-year institution for Indians in the US, became a member of the University of North Carolina system and its name was changed to University of North Carolina at Pembroke. As a result, American Indians started to receive professional degrees in fields such as law and medicine, and gained seats on many local boards, obtained numerous high level positions in local, state and federal government. Presently, an American Indian represents the American Indian population in the North Carolina General assembly, and has done so for the past 18 years.

Commission of Indian Affairs Formed

In 1971, the NC Commission of Indian Affairs was established by the NC General Assembly to advocate for the rights of the state's American Indian population, a population which in 1990 numbered over 80,000. This was the largest Indian population east of the Mississippi River and the seventh largest in the nation at that time. According to the 2010 US Census, that state's American Indian population is 122,000 if you use the "American Indian alone" population total, and 184,000 if you use the "American Indian in combination with other" population census total.

A Look at the Future

Despite the advances of North Carolina's Indian people during the last 200 years, serious health, social, economic and educational problems still remain. However, these problems have not caused North Carolina's Indians to lose their confidence or hope for a bright future.

Prepared by: NC Commission of Indian Affairs