

## **SPECIAL REPORT: Virginia's Indians, Three-part series (Q&As)**

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### **Q&A: Part 1, Virginia's Indians series**

#### **Isn't it PC to say "Native Americans"?**

You can, but it's not necessary. That oncepolitically correct term is now considered too broad because it covers all indigenous people, such as Alaskan natives, too. "American Indians" or simply "Indians" usually won't cause offense.

#### **How many Indians are there?**

An estimated 10 million to 20 million Americans have some Indian blood. But most lost connection with their Indian side long ago, if they ever had any. According to census reports, roughly 2 million people identify themselves as Native American. That's less than 1 percent of the population.

#### **What defines a "real" Indian?**

Indians say it's about culture, but to qualify for federal benefits, a person must usually be linked to an official – or "recognized" – tribe, and possess a documented percentage of Indian DNA. The so-called "blood quantum" requirement varies from agency to agency, tribe to tribe. One-quarter – or at least one full-blooded grandparent – is a common standard.

#### **Is it true Indians get a monthly check just for being Indian?**

No. But in tribes that make money, members sometimes receive a regular share. Revenue can come from tribal enterprises – timber, oil deposits, gaming – or claims settlements with the government, although most of those are long paid.

#### **Why are Indian reservations treated like separate countries?**

That goes back to the early days, when the new players in this country made diplomatic deals with its original inhabitants. Tribes were a big enough threat to have bargaining power then. Treaties were written on a nation-to-nation basis, with a tribe's right to handle its own affairs spelled out and its territory designated as sovereign. Indian land is subject to U.S. criminal laws, but not state or civil ones. Tribes can make and enforce their own laws, even operate their own court systems and jails.

## **Do Indians pay taxes?**

Yes, with a few exceptions. Indians who live on reservations don't own the land beneath their houses, so they pay no property taxes. And money generated on a reservation isn't subject to income tax, unless it comes from gaming.

## **Is the Pocahontas-John Smith story true?**

Maybe, although it's possible that the whole episode was merely a symbolic ritual Smith misunderstood, embellished or even made up. He didn't write about it for years.

A recap, for those who don't remember: Smith had been captured by the Indians and was about to have his skull crushed when Pocahontas, one of Powhatan's favorite daughters, threw herself upon the captain and saved his life.

Real or imagined, the story is one of America's favorite legends – usually garnished with a romance between Smith and Pocahontas. That part is very unlikely: At the time, the girl was about 12 .

It is a fact, though, that Pocahontas did befriend the colony, acting as a go-between in critical times.

## **DID YOU KNOW?**

**The Washington Redskins** have been fighting a 17-year court battle to keep their name. One side says “redskin” is a racial slur; the other says the name honors the team's roots. Originally based in Boston and called the Braves, the name change coincided with the hiring of a coach in 1933, an Indian named Lone Star Dietz, who brought in half a dozen native players.

“**The New World**” movie helped resurrect the language of Virginia Indians, a longdead dialect of Algonquian. Released in 2006 and based on the founding of Jamestown, the movie featured scenes with authentic Powhatan conversation, reconstructed by a linguist at the University of North Carolina at Charlotte. Local tribes hope to use the script to learn.

## **Q&A: Part 2, Virginia's Indians series**

### **Why do Indians get special treatment?**

Indian policy in this country has seesawed from the get-go. Generally, though, it's been figured that the natives were historically trampled and remain in need of a leg

up. Indians are the only specific group of people mentioned in the U.S. Constitution, which states: “Congress shall have the power to regulate commerce with ... the Indian tribes.” In that context, the word “commerce” makes Washington caretaker over all Indian affairs.

### **What government benefits do Indians get?**

Federally recognized tribes are eligible for programs and services earmarked for Native Americans – grants, loans and cut-rate costs for housing, education, health care and economic development. Tribes are also in line for about \$3 billion in stimulus money.

### **Why do Indians and casinos seem to go hand in hand?**

In 1987, the Supreme Court ruled that because federally recognized tribal lands are separate nations, outside gambling laws don’t apply inside. Also, gaming has been viewed as a way to help tribes get on their financial feet. Indian gaming goes on in 28 states.

### **Will Virginia Indians ever run casinos?**

The six tribes asking Congress for federal recognition have agreed to give up all gaming rights if their request is granted . The state’s other two tribes – the Pamunkey and Mattaponi – are applying for federal recognition through the Bureau of Indian Affairs, where their options would remain open. That doesn’t mean you’ll ever see Indian casinos here. Under a law passed in 1988, that would require state approval.

### **DID YOU KNOW?**

**Yelling “Geronimo”** when you take a plunge harks back to the 1800s and the Apache warrior, at left, known to charge a hail of bullets. He got his name from Mexican soldiers, who used to pray to Saint Jerome (“Jeronimo!”) when they saw him coming.

**Indian remains** are standard inventory at plenty of museums. Tribes with federal recognition can demand the return of their ancestors’ bones.

**In Weldon, N.C.** – not far across the state line from Emporia – a community long thought to be of Portuguese heritage is actually Indian. The error was intentional, sown generations ago by the people themselves, who decided that brown-skinned people from other countries faced less discrimination than natives.

**From 1878 to 1923**, Plains Indians were brought to Virginia to be “re-educated” at what is now Hampton University. Virginia Indians were not allowed to attend.

**Natives** aren’t required to purchase hunting or fishing licenses in Virginia. On the state’s two reservations, they aren’t required to follow game laws or bag limits, though the tribes say they do, for the most part.

### **Q&A: Part 3, Virginia's Indians series**

#### **What happened to all those cool names Indians used to have?**

Intermarriage. Fading culture. Fear of discrimination. They all contributed to the fact that by the mid-1700s, English names had become the norm for the Powhatans. Before that, Indians did not have last names, but they often had a string of first names given or earned over the course of a lifetime – all with meaning.

There’s some shift toward tradition now. Modern natives often have an unofficial Indian name, given by their family or chosen themselves. And middle names like “Rain Cloud” are cropping up on more birth certificates.

#### **Why did Indians sell land for trinkets like beads and copper?**

In the absence of a formal money system, objects that were rare and colorful, like copper – or hard to make, like beads – took the place of currency. For eons, beads and pendants were hand-hewn from shells, a painstaking process with a lot of breakage. A tribe could use copper and beads to finance warriors, conduct trade and cement alliances with other tribes. Worn as decoration, they were also easy to carry – important in a culture that moved mostly on foot.

#### **Do Indians celebrate Thanksgiving?**

Yes, at least most of them. Natives traditionally marked fall with a feast – long before Europeans arrived.

#### **DID YOU KNOW?**

**The expression “Indian giver”** – used to describe someone who gives something and then wants it back – has been around since at least the mid-1700s. One explanation says it referred to the native custom of giving a gift for which a return one was expected. Another says it stems from confused settlers who thought Indians were bringing gifts when they were really bringing goods for trade. Some say the phrase is rooted in plain old racism – a view that the natives were of low or two-faced

character. “Indian summer” is a false season. “Indian tea” is a cheap substitute. An “Indian burn” comes from hands that twist in both directions.

**Only Indians** are allowed to possess any part of an eagle. Others can be fined up to \$25,000 for a single feather. The National Eagle Repository distributes feathers, bones and other parts to federally recognized tribes for use in traditional ceremonies. Zoos, wildlife rehabilitators and others mail dead birds to the repository.

**Natives** are not supposed to give or sell eagle parts to non-natives. A fuss erupted in 1994 when a supporter presented then-first lady Hillary Clinton with native art adorned with eagle feathers. The White House turned Clinton’s gift over to the feds.

**Materials** for adorning regalia – such as deer toes or porcupine quills – can be found at online supply stores (71 cents per deer toe; \$3.75 per thousand quills). Other items in the online inventory: raccoon tails (\$2.95), buffalo jaw bones (\$6), lynx claws (\$2.95), water buffalo teeth (69 cents), badger hides (\$65), coyote faces (\$4.50).

**Even the IRS** watches its manners when dealing with tribes. An agency manual tells tax agents to “respect tribal council officials as officials of another government” and to use a “diplomatic” tone when addressing them. The manual also notes: “Generally, based on history, the Federal government is viewed by tribal entities with mistrust and suspicion.”

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### **Virginia's Indian heirs cling to sliver of native soil**

**It was once theirs.** Every acre under our buildings and boulevards. Every field. Every ribbon of water. All theirs.

The fate of the American Indian is a familiar story, typically told against a sunset in the Old West. History forgets that Chapter 1 was in Virginia – ground zero of a continental invasion that forever changed the native world.

True, Virginia gets a nod for Pocahontas, one of the nation's most beloved legends. But we also hatched the first treaties, first reservations and first Indian school. It was from here that colonists sent the first real reports on "The Naturals," a society that buttoned-down England found fascinating.

And about those Pilgrims? White men and natives broke bread at Jamestown nearly 15 years before the "first" Thanksgiving.

Virginia is also where it all started going wrong: the betrayals, the bloodshed, the anti-Indian laws.

By 1700, Virginia natives had virtually disappeared. Their ranks had shrunk by 90 percent. Survivors melted into the landscape, convinced of the wisdom of being invisible.

The Indian story moved west, following the frontier, where it was forever woven into the romantic lore of an untamed land.

Four centuries after their ancestors heard the first creak of wooden ships in the James River, Virginia Indians are finally ready to come out of hiding.

It's hard to say how many remain. Officially, the state counts eight tribes with about 5,000 members, but scattered pockets hold untold more.

Those who have surfaced want access to the millions of dollars in federal benefits funneled to tribes in other states. They also want to be remembered, so their children will be proud.

They want to learn how to fit in without fading away.

Karenne Wood, a Monacan, puts it this way: “People have told me, ‘I thought all the real Indians were dead.’”

**They call it “The Res”** – 1,200 acres of soil, marsh and riverbank that has sheltered one Virginia tribe for thousands of years. It’s not much, at least by Indian Country standards: Out West, the Navajo claim 27,000 square miles.

It is, however, the biggest reservation in Virginia and home base for the Pamunkey – the descendants of Pocahontas, Jamestown’s best friend, and Opecanough, its fiercest foe.

To find The Res, head toward West Point, a small town north of Williamsburg. Hang a left by the Hardee’s, pass the belching paper mill and snake for miles through rolling pines and rustling crops. Pocahontas Trail doglegs into the reservation, thought to be the oldest in the country.

Inside the entrance, 36 families live in a separate nation, ancestral homelands set aside as “Indian land” by colonists in 1646 and confirmed by a treaty in 1677.

Many outside laws don’t apply here. It’s not unusual to see a 12-year-old driving a car.

The place was once bigger, though no one is sure by how much. Land reserved for Virginia tribes was whittled at over the centuries. Only two tribes managed to keep a grip on any – the Pamunkey and their close kin the Mattaponi, who occupy 150 cramped acres a few miles down the road.

Space is at a premium here, too. The reservation could hold more people, but the tribe likes elbow room. Houses are far apart, buffered by fields and trees. There are upscale brick homes, but plenty of humble trailers, too – a sign that housing loans are hard to come by. The land is held by the state in a tribal trust. Residents don’t own the lots they live on.

Instead, lots are assigned for life by the chief and a seven-man tribal council, and residents must have their permission to live here. There was a time when all were required to have at least one-quarter Pamunkey blood. But standards like that are hard to stick by now.

With fewer than 200 members on the tribal roll, the same clan names crop up repeatedly, evidence that just about everyone is at least distantly related. Outside

marriages, once frowned upon, are simply unavoidable, a diluting that could turn the reservation into a ghost town within a few generations.

So today, “it’s more than just genealogy,” says Chief Kevin Brown. “We also look for a community relationship and community acceptance.”

Among the 80 or so residents are roughly 30 non-native spouses, including the chief’s wife. Only the Indians, however, have a say in tribal matters, and among them only the men.

“We’re catching a lot of flak about that these days,” Brown says. “It’s not our most popular tradition.”

Custom weighs heavy on a culture caught between two worlds. Brown, 54, was elected chief in November, a position that was once inherited. For the election, a basket was passed around with voters placing a corn kernel inside for “yes,” or a dried pea for “no.” Then, Brown says, the outgoing chief “just handed me a box of papers and that was kind of it. No ceremony.”

With short, sandy hair, sweatshirt, jeans and a ball cap, Brown doesn’t look anything like the Indian chiefs of Hollywood Westerns. But he comes from a long line of Pamunkeys and has spent much of his life on the reservation.

His office is a small desk shoved against a wall in the tribe’s museum, where glass cases chronicle 10,000 years of Pamunkey presence on this land. A gift shop sells traditional pottery, crafts and trinkets to the few tourists who manage to find the place.

In the outside world, Brown is a native artist of some repute and a laid-off brick-worker. The job of chief is all-volunteer, the equivalent of running a small town, one with its own rules.

Tribal law governs all civil affairs, and even when it comes to criminal matters, outside authorities tread lightly. If the county sheriff needs to serve a warrant on the reservation, he comes to the chief to ask permission.

“It’s not really written down anywhere,” Brown says. “That’s just the tradition.” He won’t allow outsiders to see the list of tribal laws. In the past, they’ve picked out the quirky ones and poked fun.

“Nothing personal,” the chief says of his decision. Indians say that frequently to non-natives. Experience has taught them to keep up their guard.

Brown does say that the tribe has no jail and no police of its own, and that most residents obey tribal law out of respect for the chief and council.

Also: Bad-mouthing is a big no-no.

“We have real strict slander laws. If you think about it, we’re like a 400-year-old subdivision. If we didn’t get along, we’d have probably killed each other long before now.”

**Warren Cook** is in the shad hatchery, where, every spring, he helps tend the big tanks that nurture thousands of fingerling fish released by the tribe into its namesake river. Most Pamunkey men work drift nets during the two-month spawn that brings shad upriver, and the hatchery’s aim is to put back what they take.

Warren, like many on the reservation, is a retiree and a “come-back.” Now 71, he spent his working years living in Richmond, where an Indian stood a better chance of getting a job. The bustling city was another draw.

“I had to get older to appreciate it back here,” he says. “It’s quiet.”

It’s also not what outsiders expect.

“People come here and ask where the tepees are. Like Indians don’t live in houses these days.” In just a few tiers of Warren’s family tree, a lot has evolved for Indians.

“Now, there’s thousands of wannabe s. People have these romantic notions. They watch TV and movies. None of it’s true, what they portray. There’s nothing romantic about being Indian. The reality is harsh.” Or certainly was.

Warren’s father and grandfather were Pamunkey chiefs. His grandfather, George Major Cook, collected many of the stone relics now on display in the tribe’s museum, then he dropped dead in 1930 on the Capitol steps in Richmond, where he’d gone to fight laws unfriendly to Indians.

Warren’s father, Tecumseh Deerfoot Cook, held the tribal reins for 42 years. He fished, trapped, caught turtles, guided hunting parties and lived to be 103.

Before his death in 2003, Tecumseh shared his secret for longevity with a reporter from The Washington Post: “Eat plenty of raccoons and muskrats and drink Pamunkey River water. But lay off the possum.” He wasn’t joking when he spoke about his people: “There have been many nights when I have gone to bed and woken up with my pillow wet.”

Warren remembers the respect shown to his father, and how it disappeared outside the reservation.

“You felt it as soon as you went into town. The looks. You’d hear people say, ‘Here come the damned Indians.’ People who knew my father well – neighbors of the reservation who made a big deal out of him when they were here, like friends, you know? – they’d cross to the other side of the street so they wouldn’t have to be seen talking to him.”

As an Indian child, Warren wasn’t welcome at Virginia’s public schools. A one-room reservation school offered enough grades to keep him going until age 14. To get a diploma, he had to leave the state for an Indian high school in Cherokee, N.C.

“They had boys there from all kinds of tribes, Seminoles and Choctaws and all these cliques. And they all thought they were better than you, so they picked on you. It wasn’t so bad for me because I didn’t back down. When they pounded on me, I pounded back.”

**It’s a simple act:** dipping needle and thread into a scrap of soft buckskin. Yet each bead laid in an ancient pattern fills an internal void.

“I’ve already cried three times this morning,” says Allyn Cook-Swarts, one of Warren’s daughters.

She’s sitting in the Pamunkey tribe’s first-ever beading class with 20 other women, including her sister Layne and Warren’s 24-year-old granddaughter, Ashley Atkins.

Allyn, 39, is not a woman prone to public tears. She works at the Federal Reserve Bank in Richmond, her mother is white, her hair is blond and her eyes blue, but growing up even half Indian made her and her sisters tough.

Laws had changed since their father’s time. Warren’s girls were allowed to attend white schools. But they found themselves shunned, the subject of whispers that still scar.

“I had a boyfriend whose father made him break up with me when he found out I was half Indian,” Allyn says .

After years away from the reservation, Allyn came home and fought the tribal council to become the first female to hold a land lot in her name. Now, she’s deep in a quiet campaign to win voting rights for the tribe’s women.

“We’re strong, smart women,” she says firmly. “We’ll change it.”

But those tiny beads, this effort to revive some of the tribe’s lost culture ...

“It just gets to me,” Allyn says. “I guess I’ve always felt like I was missing something in my life, and this just brings me back home. I feel it in my soul.”

Warren’s granddaughter Ashley has never known the prejudice faced by earlier generations of her family.

“Most of the time,” she says, “it’s just stupid questions, like, ‘Where are your feathers?’”

She didn’t grow up on the reservation, but regular visits cemented her kinship and her career. Fascinated with the arrowheads and other artifacts that turned up so easily in the dirt, she worked her way through college, with help from her mother. Three weeks ago, Ashley received her master’s degree in anthropology from the College of William and Mary.

She’s been asked why Indians don’t just give up and blend in. Plenty of natives have asked each other the same.

“We’ve always had people who are trying hard to hold on to a traditional way of life, and another side that says, ‘Let’s just do what they tell us and survive.’ It really does create a split in Indian communities.”

Having a homeland makes a difference for the Pamunkey.

“It’s a small piece of land,” Ashley says, “but the fact that it’s never been out of our hands – ever – and that we still manage to exist here ... it just says a lot about who we are as a people. You know that this is where you come from. I’ve carried that with me every day of my life.”

Her greatest hope for her tribe: “That they persist.”

Persisting would be a whole lot easier with help from Washington.

## **Spring shad harvest, every year a ritual renewed**

*Tribes’ ancestors relied on yearly spawning to satisfy winter’s hunger*

**They return each spring**, an ancient migration that slips upriver like a silvery plume of mercury.

Once, the annual shad run meant full bellies after the lean of winter.

Now, it's more about extra income and the renewal of an old bond. A river runs deep through just about every Virginia tribe – its ancestral artery to food, transportation and escape, when necessary.

Fresh water and sandy shallows in the Pamunkey and Mattaponi rivers draw the American shad – a fish that averages about 3 pounds and is prized for its bony meat, strong enough to require little seasoning. Shad roe is also considered a treat, fetching about \$12 for the twin, palm-size egg sacks carried by a single female.

It's those pale-pink eggs that send a shad upriver. Most of an adult's life is spent at sea, but the eggs need a more suitable nursery. So when the spring sun warms the water, the shad come home to spawn.

Unlike the better-known salmon of the North, shad don't necessarily die in the spawning process, unless they're caught in the drift net of a native.

Indians are the only Virginians allowed to harvest American shad. Over fishing and pollution threaten the stock, restricting other anglers to catch and release.

The Indians themselves practice conservation. Hatcheries on the Pamunkey and Mattaponi reservations have returned millions of young shad to the tribe's rivers.

Netted fish are milked for sperm and eggs, which are mixed together in a pan, incubated and hatched. Each female carries enough eggs to produce 100,000 offspring, but left on their own, few will ever see adulthood.

A hatchery improves their odds by providing shelter and food through the first crucial weeks. When fry reach about 1 inch long, they're tagged with oxytetracycline, a chemical that stains an inner ear bone and makes it possible to identify them later, helping a hatchery track its own success.

Finally, the fry are flushed down a pipe directly into the river, where they'll remain until fall, then gradually head for saltwater.

Shad are a big reason the tribes spent 15 years fighting a massive reservoir planned to supply drinking water to the Peninsula. The project, now on hold, would have flooded 1,500 acres between the two reservations and drawn up to 75 million gallons a day out of the Mattaponi River.

Shad have been known to vanish from areas where man has altered nature's delicate balance.



### **Va. Indian population is now a shadow of its past**

Virginia Indian chiefs gather at a pow wow held last month to raise money to lobby for federal benefits. From left : Chief Anne Richardson of the Rappahannock, Chief Kenneth Branham of the Monacan, Chief Ken Adams of the Upper Mattaponi, Chief Barry Bass of the Nansemond and Chief Steve Adkins of the Chickahominy. (STEVE EARLEY | THE VIRGINIAN-PILOT)

**All of Virginia** was once Indian Country, home to an estimated 50,000 people.

Rivers, swamps, mountains and other natural landmarks served as boundaries. Some tribes united under a single strong leader. A shared tongue



built other alliances.

Today, Virginia officially recognizes eight tribes with a total of nearly 5,000 members – remnants of its once-mighty Indian nations. Descendants live in communities on or near traditional territories.

Tribal land totals fewer than 2,000 acres – often purchased in recent years with monthly payments.

1. Nansemond [1] | 2. Eastern Chickahominy [2] | 3. Pamunkey [3] | 4. Mattaponi [4] | 5. Rappahanock [5]  
6. Upper Mattaponi [6] | 7. Chickahominy [7] | 8. Monacan [8]

## 1 Nansemond

**200 members, 0 acres**

When the Europeans first encountered the Nansemond, they numbered about 1,200 people who lived along the river in present day Suffolk. Starving colonists destroyed their villages in 1608, forcing them to give up their corn.

The tribe lost its last-known reservation land in 1792. Descendants are scattered throughout Suffolk, Chesapeake and beyond.

The Nansemond are trying to convince the city of Suffolk to give up 100 acres of an 1,100 - acre riverfront park so the tribe can reconstruct Mattanock – the ancient town of their ancestors. They hope to draw tourists and provide a center for their tribe.

**From the chief:** “I know I’m lucky to live today. It’s a great time to be an Indian now. But sometimes life is such a rat race. ... I wish I could go back ... wa-a-y back ...” – Barry “Big Buck” Bass

## 2 Eastern Chickahominy

**132 members, 41 acres**

In the 1920s, the Chickahominy officially split into two branches. Some blame the hardship of traveling to joint meetings in those days. Others say land use and religious disagreements divided the tribe. Now, the two groups live close together near the small town of Providence Forge. Family ties keep them intertwined.

A particular point of pride: military service, with members of the Eastern Chickahominy having served as far back as World War I.

**From the chief:** “Personally, I wish my grandkids would marry Indian. It’s not about hatred. There’s none of that here. I’d just love to see them marry back into the tribe.”  
– Gene Adkins

### 3 Pamunkey

**200 members, 1,200 acres**

Pamunkey history says theirs was the strongest of Powhatan’s tribes. Their headwoman, whom the English called Queen of the Pamunkey, signed a 1677 treaty on behalf of her tribe and several smaller ones. More than 300 years later, the Pamunkey have managed to hold on to 1,200 acres of reservation land – more than any other Virginia tribe.

About 36 families live on the reservation now, located in a crook of the Pamunkey River, a York tributary. Legend has it that a mound there contains Powhatan’s bones.

**From the chief:** “Our old people are dying. Just a few years ago, there were five or six women who made traditional pottery. Now there’s like two.” – Kevin Brown

### 4 Mattaponi

**450 members, 150 acres**

The Mattaponi live on one of the oldest reservations in the country – and one of just two in Virginia that are still in Indian hands. Located on the west bank of the

Mattaponi River, another tributary of the York, the reservation measures just 150 acres today.

It's crowded with a shad hatchery, the homes of about 70 tribal members, a few pottery shops and a couple of kitschy museums. One claims to have a necklace that belonged to Pocahontas.

**From the chief:** "We're in the same situation as every other group. The big-city lure. Our kids don't know jack. I feel sorry for them." – Carl "Lone Eagle" – Custalow

## 5 Rappahannock

**500 members, 132 acres**

Relations got off to a bad start with the Rappahannock – well before Jamestown. In 1603, an English crew exploring the area killed the chief and kidnapped a handful of men. Later reports tell of natives giving canoe demonstrations on the Thames River in London.

In 1682, a 3,500-acre reservation was set aside for the Rappahannock. One year later, the tribe was forcibly relocated to the Virginia frontier to act as a human shield against marauding Iroquois from New York.

Today, home base is the town of Indian Neck. In 1998, the Rappahannock elected the only woman chief in Virginia.

**From the chief:** "It's miraculous that we're even here – and in the condition which we are. That's a tremendous testament to the tenacity of our people. A refusal to give up who we are and become what we're not." – Anne Richardson

## 6 Upper Mattaponi

**575 members, 32 acres**

This branch of the Mattaponi became isolated upriver from the tribe's reservation. In the 18th and 19th centuries, they were known as the Adamstown Band because so many members had the last name of "Adams."

In the early 1900s, they officially changed their name to the Upper Mattaponi and built a one-room schoolhouse in King William.

Today, Sharon Indian School serves as a tribal center. Across the street, the tribe owns 30 acres, bought in the 1980s and paid for over 15 years at \$439 a month.

**From the chief:** "There are people who say, 'You should be glad we came. Look at all the good things we brought.' I have to think, 'Are you insane? Look at how many of our people died!'" – Ken Adams

## Chickahominy

**840 members, 110 acres**

The Chickahominy lived the closest to Jamestown and were among the first to trade food for other goods with the colonists. They also taught the newcomers how to grow and preserve crops.

In 1646, the tribe was granted reservation land in present-day King William County but eventually lost it all. Families migrated back to more traditional territory in Charles City County. Today, most members live within a 5-mile radius of one another in an area known as Chickahominy Ridge.

**From the chief:** "I have been asked why I do not have a traditional Indian name. Quite simply, my parents, as did many other native parents, weighed the situation and decided giving me a traditional Indian name was not worth the risk ." – Steve Adkins

## Monacan

**2,000 members, 180 acres**

Back in the day, the Monacan were the dreaded enemy of the Powhatan tribes – raiding villages and striking hunting parties before retreating into a vast territory that covered more than half the state. Even now, the western-most tribe on Virginia’s official list remains the state’s largest. Its home base is near the foot of the mountains.

Different from the Powhatan in language and culture, the Monacan of old buried their dead in earthen mounds built up over time. Thirteen have been found in Virginia – some more than 1,000 years old.

**From the chief:** “People say, ‘Why don’t you let this die?’ Well, you didn’t let it die. Up until the ’60s, we had to go to separate schools. You’re the ones who kept us in two separate worlds.” – Kenneth Branham

### **Modern religious services, little trace of native influence**

**Tribal life in Virginia** generally revolves around a church steeple, with each tribe gathering in its own house of worship, where the congregation is all or nearly all native.

Locally, most Indian churches are Baptist, and services are conventional. Other than the occasional mention of “The Great Spirit,” there is little evidence of native culture, and no trace of the bitterness once linked to the “white man’s” religion.

“If you don’t look at the men who brought it, but just look at what it is, Christianity is a good fit for our nature,” says Ken Adams, chief of the Upper Mattaponi.

Indians of old disagreed – not surprising, given the role that organized religion played in their civilization’s demise. Explorers and settlers came armed with a church-inspired mission to conquer heathen lands, a doctrine outlined by the pope 40 years before Columbus sailed.

Evangelizing was also resented. To most Virginia Indians, spirituality was a personal matter. Each tribe had its own beliefs, accompanied by special places within its territory that its people considered sacred.

Global religions – with their reverence for long-ago events and far away lives – made little sense to the natives. Neither did the insistence that unbelievers convert, a pushiness the Indians regarded as rude.

Resistance remained strong – even violent at times – fading as the natives grew weaker and prayers to their own deities went unanswered. In time, the Indians came to lean more and more on missionaries and churches, often the only folks willing to offer

help and education. In pews and parochial classrooms, the seed was ultimately planted deep.

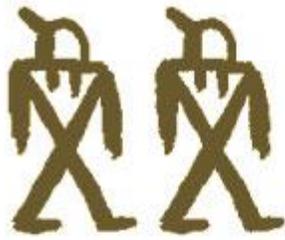
Up until the Civil War, Indians and whites usually attended the same churches. Siding with the North, however, cost a number of natives their welcome. They started their own churches, which soon became sanctuaries for each tribe's spiritual and social needs.

A full house, however, is no longer a sure thing. Indian churches, like many others, are struggling to fill the pews.

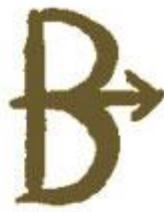
### **Story of Pocohontas and John Smith in Pamunkey writing**



SOURCE: Pamunkey Indian Tribe



Indians



while hunting



discover



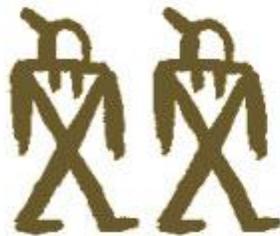
white man



standing



in shallow water.



Indians



agree to



kill white man



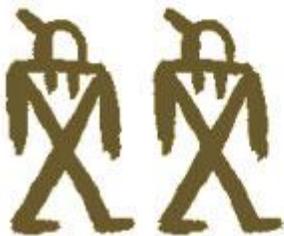
at chief's seat.



Indian maiden



disagrees with



Indian men,



makes no harm



for white man,



but good wishes.

## **SPECIAL REPORT: Virginia's Indians, Three-part series (Part 2)**

Published on HamptonRoads.com | PilotOnline.com (<http://hamptonroads.com>)

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### **Red tape separates Indian tribes from federal cash**

**Hundreds of years** of struggle have come down to one thing for Virginia Indians: Paperwork.

Words written on paper 332 years ago have kept away federal money other tribes have used for college tuition, housing loans, health care and more. Records altered decades ago now stand in the way of changing that.

Other tribes have federal benefits built into their treaties, thrown in to end the fighting and lessen the bitterness of defeat. But with the first successful English settlement as their next-door neighbor, Virginia tribes were crushed before the nation even existed. They cut their treaty in 1677 with the king of England.

It's still in force, at least informally, adopted "as is" by Virginia when the colony broke free from Britain. Under its terms, the Indians do the paying instead of the other way around – an installment of "twentie beaver skinns," due annually.

In the time since the 12 Indian chiefs signed their marks on that treaty, hundreds of tribes in other states have negotiated far better deals, collecting untold millions of dollars worth of help while Virginia Indians had to go it alone.

In the past few decades, they've tried to square things. Eight tribes, with about 5,000 members between them, persuaded Virginia legislators to stamp them as "state recognized" in the 1980s.

Next, they set their eyes on the real prize: federal recognition, the passport to native funding. Tribes left out of government benefits can enter the fold through the Bureau of Indian Affairs, an agency with the unenviable job of sorting "real" Indians from not-real-enough.

"Real" requires a stack of paperwork, including a long list of official records used to document a tribe's history. The thread must stretch unbroken for hundreds of years.

That's not a problem for the Pamunkey and Mattaponi. They have 350-year-old reservations – slivers of their original homelands that should make a timeline easy to establish.

The six other tribes, however, lost their reservations long ago. To make things worse, there's an actual hole in their vital records, a span of 20 years or so when Indians ceased to exist on paper in Virginia.

The blame lies with the state's 1924 Racial Integrity Law. Intended to prevent mixed marriages, the law pigeonholed everyone in Virginia into one of two categories, black or white, leaving no place for the natives. Under the zealous reign of Walter Plecker, the state's first records registrar, the word "colored" took the place of "red" or "Indian" on countless birth, death and marriage certificates.

It was a felony to refuse the change. Indians who did went to jail.

Enforcement eroded with Plecker's retirement in 1946, but by then a gap had been created in Indian racial lineage – major trouble when the BIA begins scrutinizing a tribe and its members. Cases with lesser obstacles have taken decades to get through the agency. The Pamunkey say they've been waiting in line for 25 years.

Because of Plecker, says Steve Adkins, chief of the Chickahominy, the BIA informed the six tribes that "we'd never see federal recognition in our lifetimes."

So the Indians turned to Washington. Ten years ago, they began asking Congress to let them bypass the BIA. They hired lobbyists to plead their case behind closed doors. Public powwows, bake sales, dinners, garage sales and donations have paid the tab, which is close to \$500,000 and still running.

Jim Moran, a representative from Northern Virginia, submitted the first piece of legislation on the tribes' behalf in 2000.

"I just think this is an absolute travesty," Moran said, "and I feel a personal responsibility to rectify it."

Visions of Indian casinos – a possibility for federally recognized tribes – killed Moran's first attempt. His second bill included a ban on tribal gaming. So did his third bill, and his fourth. All a no-go.

Number four, submitted in 2007, left the Indians feeling particularly bad – "duped again," said Kenneth Branham, Monacan chief.

That was the year of the Jamestown 400th jubilee and a much-anticipated visit from the queen of England. The Old Country has a soft spot for the descendants of Pocahontas, and its monarch was expecting to be entertained with their traditional dances.

At last, thought the Indians: some leverage. They threatened to protest instead of perform.

Just before the Jamestown events, the House of Representatives gave Moran's fourth Indian bill the thumbs up and sent it on its way to the Senate. In the interim, the tribes put on their "leathers and feathers" and danced for the queen. Afterward, the Senate let the bill quietly expire.

"Bitter? Yeah, a lot of Indians were bitter, and I was one of them," Branham said. "It felt like a ploy by politicians to get us to participate."

A new slogan began making tribal rounds: "First to welcome. Last to be recognized."

**Opposition comes from all over**, including other Indians – huge tribes with vast reservations and treaties forged in the dusty battles of the Old West.

"They think we gave up too early," said Nansemond chief Barry Bass, "that we didn't stop what happened. They think, 'Why should they get some of the pie now?'"

Not all Virginia Indians are sold on the idea, either.

"Without that money," said Nellie Adkins, a Chickahominy, "we've become a very tough, very resilient people. No handouts."

Like-minded legislators would prefer to see a drawdown of Indian assistance, and they worry that a "yes" to Virginia tribes would open the floodgates for similar requests from the hundreds of tribes now shuffling through red tape at the BIA.

The agency itself remains officially neutral on the Virginia case but is urging lawmakers to step aside. The BIA is not a fan of interference from Congress, where politics, emotion and historical guilt sway decisions.

Up until now, the Indians say, politics have worked against them, with Moran's bills sinking largely along party lines. The tribes hope the new infusion of Democrats in Washington will help their cause. The Bush White House wanted the tribes to stick to the BIA route; the Obama administration might be more sympathetic.

Toward that end, Moran wrote up a fifth bill and the chiefs drove to the Capitol this spring, where “we’ve been so many times, I’ve lost count,” said Steve Adkins.

They went to repeat stage one, a hearing with the House Natural Resources Committee, where Indian matters are tucked between sessions on wild mustangs, coral reefs and the dangers of primates as pets.

In a marbled room, thick with flags and gilded eagles, the chiefs were easy to spot, silver ponytails trailing down the backs of their business suits.

Gov. Timothy M. Kaine was in their corner, telling the committee that Virginia bore a huge burden for years of injustice. Governor also slipped in a reminder: “There is no doubt that the Jamestown settlement would have perished” if the ancestors of today’s Indians hadn’t been of a mind to share their food.

Chief Adkins’ speech amended that centuries-old debt: “I and those chiefs here with me stand on the shoulders of many others besides Pocahontas and Powhatan.”

After hours of testimony and weeks of pondering, the committee voted to send Moran’s latest bill on to the full House. On Wednesday, it was approved. Once again, all eyes are on the Senate, where Virginia Sen. Jim Webb has submitted similar legislation.

In the meantime, the Indians try to walk softly and hold their tongues. Ruffling the wrong person now could spoil this chance.

Silence can be hard, though, even for a people long schooled at lying low.

“We were here first,” said Branham, the Monacan chief. “We should be holding meetings to decide whether to recognize the European races here – not the other way around. It just really galls you.”

Facing off with outsiders is only part of today’s Indian war.

Another battle is being waged within.

### **Tribes pay rent to Virginia for 3 centuries**

**One of the nation’s oldest** – and perhaps oddest – rituals takes place in Richmond each autumn when the Pamunkey and Mattaponi pay their reservation rent to the governor.

No money exchanges hands. Instead, the governor is presented with game – a fresh deer kill, a string of fish or a wild turkey hung by its ankles. As far as anyone can recall, the tribes have never missed a payment – for 331 years.

The annual “tribute,” as it’s called, is outlined in a 1677 treaty that’s technically still in effect. Specifics have evolved over the centuries, but the basics remain the same: “That every Indian King and Queen in the month of March every yeare with some of their great men tender their obedience to the R’t Honourable his Majesties Govern’r at the place of his residence, wherever it shall be, and then and there pay the accustomed rent of twentie beaver skinns, to the Govern’r ...”

That was not an unusual demand in those days. Pacts between colonials and Indians often included some form of payment from the natives. As the settlement grew stronger, tributes became more symbolic – a sign of a tribe’s submission to the new government. After a while, there was no need for that, either. The tribes were broken, no longer a concern.

There’s every chance the annual tribute would have ended long ago if it weren’t for the Indians themselves. They kept delivering. Year after year. Somewhere along the way, tribute time moved to “at the going away of Geese” – the terms of an even older treaty. When beaver grew scarce, game was substituted for pelts.

But still, they came. Determined not to be forgotten. Adamant that no one be able to say they didn’t hold up their end of the deal.

Brown-hued photos capture the last century or so of tribute – a ceremonial moment recorded on granite steps. There are Indians in buckskin, on horseback, in suits and ties, and pained-looking governor’s wives contemplating the latest carcasses.

The tradition shows no sign of falling by the wayside. These days, the tribute is almost always deer. In the Pamunkey tribe, hunters set out a few days before Thanksgiving to bag a whitetail.

The kill waits in cold storage, gutted but not butchered. On the Wednesday before the holiday, it’s hoisted into the bed of a pickup and driven to the governor’s mansion.

After a brunch – which gives Indians the governor’s ear – everyone steps outside for the ceremony. Then the carcass heads to a homeless shelter or food bank.

**Bureaucrat ripped hole in tapestry of Indian history**

**Tall and thin**, with a neat mustache and white hair, Plecker was Virginia's registrar of vital statistics from 1912 to 1946. He was the gatekeeper of birth, marriage and death records during the era of eugenics – a movement that combined bans on interracial marriage with the mandatory sterilization of the mentally ill.

The plan was to improve the human race by reducing what was viewed as defective breeding. Virginia was far from alone in its support of the “science”: In the early 1900s, interracial marriage was illegal in 30 of the then 48 states. Nazi Germany's lethal persecution policies had roots in eugenics.

Virginia, however, had the distinction of being the first to outlaw interracial marriage – a law enacted in 1691 forbidding blacks and whites to marry.

The state's 1924 Racial Integrity Act reinforced the old prohibitions and sought to clarify the dividing line. Anyone not matching the act's definition of “white,” with “no trace whatsoever of any blood other than Caucasian,” was classified as “colored” – including the Indians.

Plecker, an icily efficient man who rarely smiled, carried out a campaign to make sure the vital records of Indians across the state reflected their new racial category.

Indians who refused the change risked a year in jail. Hospitals detained native newborns until parents signed birth certificates designating their child as black.

Natives say Plecker's “paper genocide” created a gap in their history that makes it nearly impossible for them to prove that their tribes have existed “continuously” – one of the requirements of federal recognition.

But R. Lee Fleming, a director at the Bureau of Indian Affairs, says Virginia tribes aren't as short on records as they say. Contrary to popular belief, Fleming says, Plecker did not entirely obliterate their bloodline.

Fleming has a file that contains 16 Indian birth, death or marriage certificates from the Plecker era where the race was not altered.

“I just scratched the surface and found these,” he said. “I was certainly surprised. That's not at all what I'd been hearing.”

Steve Adkins, chief of the Chickahominy, wasn't shocked to hear that some records escaped Plecker's purge, but he doesn't think there are enough to clear federal hurdles: “You can find 16 vital records in any tribe that weren't changed, but you'll find 150 to 200 that had the wrong documentation.”

## **Controversy over Indian names, mascots in sports**

### **Indians. Braves. Chiefs. Redskins.**

Sports has a thing for native names and mascots. More than 900 high school, college or pro teams use American-Indian-related images to pump up players, fire up crowds and sell T-shirts. Teams say the images convey courage and spirit, and their use honors the people they represent.

Critics say such images are racist and insulting. Since 1969, pressure from Indian activists and athletic associations has persuaded 600 teams to shed the native connection.

Some have refused – with Indian backing. When the NCAA ordered Florida State University to lose “Seminoles,” the real Seminoles objected so strongly that the university won a reprieve.

At the College of William and Mary, the NCAA ruled that the “Tribe” could keep its name, but two iconic feathers in its emblem had to go. The college appealed, lost, and plucked the Tribe’s feathers.

Professional teams – with millions of dollars tied up in marketing and merchandise – have been harder to budge. The Washington Redskins have been in and out of court over their trademark since 1992.

Activists say the football team’s name is a racial slur on par with the N-word and that it violates a federal law against offensive trademarks. They say “redskin” has roots in a time when Indians had bounties on their heads, and a bloody scalp was proof of a kill.

Those who side with the team say that’s not true. They point to historical descriptions of Indians wearing red paint and to old writings that quote natives referring to their own people as “the red men.” A Sports Illustrated poll conducted a few years back is often cited: It indicated that most Indians are not offended when teams adopt native nicknames.

As for the Redskins, the team was originally based in Boston and called the Braves. According to its Web site, the name change occurred in 1933, four years before the move to Washington.

The site doesn't say what prompted the new name, but according to Mike Richman, author of "The Redskins Encyclopedia," it coincided with the hiring of a new coach, an Indian named Lone Star Dietz.

Dietz had once played with the legendary Jim Thorpe at an Indian school in Kansas. When Dietz joined the Redskins, he brought along half a dozen native players. For their 1933 season opener, the entire team posed in war paint and headdresses.

For now, the Redskins are ahead in court, having won a skirmish last month on what was largely a technicality. But a new batch of activists has filed a fresh complaint with the trademark office.

## State vs. federal recognition for Indian tribes

### HOW VIRGINIA TRIBES GOT LEFT OUT



**'Recognition' comes in two types, with very different payoffs:**

### FEDERAL RECOGNITION

Provides financial aid and other benefits

562 tribes have it

Most got it through old treaties, Congress or the Bureau of Indian Affairs

### Through the BIA

Process takes an average of 13 years

Petitions run 10,000 to 45,000 pages and can cost \$1 million to research

**In line** 332 tribes

**Longest wait** North Carolina's Lumbee have been asking since 1888

**Complaints** Since the BIA took the job in 1978, only 47 applications have been fully processed

**Response** With money at stake, the BIA says it must be thorough

## **STATE RECOGNITION**

Few financial benefits

Viewed as a stepping stone to federal recognition

General Assembly awarded status to eight tribes in 1980s

Applications now go through Virginia Council on Indians

### **At the VCI**

Chiefs from state-recognized tribes fill most seats

Board sets standards and advises legislators to give requests a ye or nay

**In line** 6 tribes

**Longest wait** A branch of the Nottoway, whose application was rejected last month, was in the pipeline for three years

**Complaints** Critics say the council moves too slowly and that its chiefs have set standards that are too tough

**Response** The all-volunteer council says it's doing the best it can

### **Others tribes trying for state recognition**

Cheroenhaka (Southampton County)

Appalachian Intertribal Heritage Association

United Cherokee (Lynchburg area)

Blue Ridge Cherokee

Tauxenent Indian Nation (Northern Virginia)

Bear Saponi Tribe of Clinch Mountain (Southwest Virginia)

## **SPECIAL REPORT: Virginia's Indians, Three-part series (Part 3)**

Published on HamptonRoads.com | PilotOnline.com (<http://hamptonroads.com>)

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### **Some Va. Indians follow ancient beat to renewed pride**

**Cars pull up** to the Chickahominy Tribal Center, an outpost of light in the dusk of the Charles City countryside. Windows rattle with the bass of rap as teenagers pour out onto the gravel parking lot.

Inside the concrete-block building, six men pound a large elk-skin drum, voices raised in age-old chants they barely understand.

Nights like this are a crossroads: a people of the present trying to cling to those of the past.

Out on the linoleum, a back stiff with arthritis stands next to one limber with youth. Glenn Canaday, 58, is coaching 16-year-old Evan Adkins in the art of tribal dance.

“We don’t get as many kids as we used to,” Canaday says. “What with TV and computers, there’s just so much else for them to do.”

Evan, dressed in a Dallas Cowboys T-shirt, gives up one evening a month to learn the shuffling steps of his ancestors. It helps that some of his friends come, too, and that Canaday doesn’t mind much when they goof around. There’s also the tribe’s annual powwow, where they’ll get to dress in full regalia and perform in public.

But there’s more: “Every time I hear a drum beat, I feel it right here,” Evan says, touching his chest. “I have to move.”

Conforming to the old ways can be difficult. With their own language long forgotten, the drummers must pound rhythms and sing lyrics borrowed from tribes with related roots in other states – Indians whose cultures weren’t erased hundreds of years ago.

Those old-style dances pose another challenge. At a powwow a few years back, the young Chickahominy dancers let loose with some hip-hop moves. The audience smiled, but someone posted a video on YouTube. Some natives who saw it were outraged.

“The kids got carried away,” Canaday says with a shrug. “They went too far.”

Evan is still stung: “They called it a ghetto powwow and said it was a disgrace to our culture. We were only having some fun.”

**With Indians largely ignored** by outsiders these days, the toughest critics can come from within. A number of Virginia tribes are asking for federal benefits, but questions of ancestry and authenticity dog more than just those campaigns. They cause internal strife as well.

In Southampton County, descendants of the scattered Nottoway tribe attempted to reorganize a few years ago. They wound up in a bitter dispute over philosophy and leadership and broke into two different groups, each with its own chief.

Now, both want state recognition – an official stamp awarded by the General Assembly. To get it, they first need approval of the Virginia Council on Indians, a board made up of other natives whose tribes already have the title.

So far, neither Nottoway branch has fared well with the VCI. One has been officially turned down and is complaining to the governor, accusing a number of council members of being biased, elitist and unreasonable.

The identity crisis bubbles up inside established tribes as well.

“There’s a huge issue of who’s Indian and who’s not,” says Ashley Atkins, a 24-year-old member of the Pamunkey. “Most of it comes from having to decide where to draw the line for benefits, but it’s created a monster.”

DNA is at the core: how much Indian and how much other.

“We’ve been intermarrying for centuries,” Ashley says. “I’ve got 11 first cousins, and we’re all one-quarter Pamunkey. Does everyone consider that enough? It’s a complicated question.”

Nellie Adkins, a Chickahominy and national consultant on Indian issues, says natives suffer from “lateral oppression.”

“You see it universally in Indian Country,” she says, “where the greatest obstacles come not from the people outside your circle, but someone inside. ... There are all of these little altars that have to be bowed down to before everyone is willing to agree.

“That’s just part of our history and who we are. There are 500-plus Indian nations in this country. If everyone was able to agree, the history books would tell you a different story, now wouldn’t they?”

Other problems stem from years of racism, a legacy still being inherited today.

Anne Richardson is chief of the Rappahannock and the first woman to lead a Virginia tribe since the 1700s. She says Virginia Indians don't have the widespread social ills that plague some Western tribes, "but we do have alcoholism, drug addiction, a lack of self-esteem, a self-paralyzation."

Richardson runs an employment and training office for natives.

"I see a lot of people who don't feel or believe that they can 'have' or 'do' or 'obtain.' It's like an intergenerational post-traumatic stress disorder, a mindset that has to be changed."

Nellie Adkins agrees: "Whether they've experienced it or heard it at their grandmother's knee, native people have a lot of deep fissures that need to be cauterized and healed. They all have it within them to rise. They are survivors. They just need to be encouraged – to be reminded of that now and then."

**The ponytails** are a tangible sign. Ken Adams, 61 and leader of the Upper Mattaponi, wears his in a long silver braid. He kept his hair short for most of his life, as a dusky-skinned kid trying to blend in with a white world, as a career man in the Air Force.

Natives admire a warrior spirit, and military service is respected. Patriotism runs deep, but it's a devotion focused more on the land than its government. For Adams, the Air Force offered college tuition and a shot at a fair shake.

"I was surprised to find that everybody is treated pretty much the same in the military," he says. "It was very different, to feel like you have the same opportunity as everyone else." Adams stopped cutting his hair about seven years ago.

"It's hard to put my fingers on why. I'd been thinking about it for a long time. It's probably some subconscious thing. I'd downplayed being an Indian for years. No more."

He rubs his head and grins: "But there's not much left on top now, so I can't win."

Adams can find humor almost anywhere.

"White people always expect Indians to look stoic. Sometimes I go along with it."

He leans back, crosses his arms and assumes a far-away look.

"How's this?" he asks before cracking up.

Adams is well-read, knowledgeable about history and the bloodshed committed on both sides. Holding a grudge over a centuries-old defeat wouldn't make much sense. It's what has happened since, as outright persecution gave way to years of poverty and being pushed to the side. In a country that was once all theirs, Indians didn't get full citizenship rights until 1924.

The Upper Mattaponi, like most Virginia tribes, has little land to call its own these days. In the 1980s, the tribe took out a loan to buy 30 acres for a home base. Tribal dues and fund raising made the payments.

Visits to wind-swept reservations out West convinced Adams that while land is important for a sense of community, the reservation system "is both good and bad. They're typically located in out-of-the-way places on land that's not productive so you can't make a decent living. In order to do well, you have to leave your people and your homeland behind, which causes a brain drain. It's a sad system, really."

With few reservations to cling to, Virginia Indians had no choice but to enter the mainstream – once they were allowed in.

"We're better off as a whole than what you find west of the Mississippi," Adams says, "but it wasn't always so. That's a transformation that has taken place over the last 50 years."

It hasn't been enough time to build family nest eggs. Few Virginia Indians can afford to send their children to college or pay for health insurance – the two benefits most cite as the main reasons they want federal recognition.

Adams has heard from people who don't think Indians deserve an extra leg up.

"They say, 'We're all the same. Shouldn't we be treated all the same?' Well, yes, but when you've been treated differently for 400 years, why change that now?"

He chuckles at the small things that may never change. Adams is "100 percent Indian – as far as I know, anyway," but outsiders can't seem to resist shaking his family tree.

"Has anyone ever asked you how white you are? Or how black? Or how Chinese? We're the only ones in the world who get asked that time and time again. 'What part of you is Indian?' Um, my thumb? My leg? 'Are you full-blooded?' Well, I just gave a pint at the blood bank so I'm running a little low right now. ..."

**Fascination** – instead of discrimination – prompts most of the questions now.

At the tiny Mattaponi reservation outside West Point, Chief Carl Custalow receives regular letters from people in far-flung states who want to know whether they're related to the tribe.

“People are coming out of the woodwork wanting to be Indian,” he says. “I have to tell them all the time, 'I'm not a genealogist!'”

In South Hampton Roads, Barry Bass leads the Nansemond tribe, and says he's grateful that attitudes have come so far.

“I just wish some of the older ones could have seen it,” he says. “I can still remember the hurt in their eyes. My grandfather. My father. It's so different for my son. People want to know more about it and be around him. They think it's cool. It's really amazing.”

Jesse Bass, 26, says all that native pride got to be too much in his teens.

“My family always pushed it in my head: 'You're Indian. You're a Nansemond.' I got tired of it when I was 14 or 15. I walked away. But then I came back about seven or eight years ago.”

Now, he brings his own children to tribal meetings.

“I mean, it's the best feeling in the world and the worst feeling. It's good to always know who you are and where you came from. But it's also bad. People think you get all this stuff for free, and then you get these politicians who will tell you one thing and do another.”

This year could turn out to be the best one for Virginia Indians in centuries . Legislation that would grant six tribes federal benefits is moving along in Congress. In Richmond, legislators have given the OK to erect a monument outside the Capitol honoring Indian contributions; inside the building is a year long native exhibit.

A long-awaited memorial park could materialize in Richmond, too. A developer carving out the plush Tree Hill subdivision has promised to deed 7 acres to the state's tribes. The site overlooks the James River and is believed to be the birthplace of legendary Chief Powhatan.

Efforts are also under way to get things written down. Tribal stories are being committed to paper, school books are being revised. Virginia history lessons will no

longer start with 1607 but will include the culture that took root here back in the Ice Age. And no longer will Pocahontas be the end of Virginia's Indian story; students will discover a flesh-and-blood tale that's still unfolding.

Spreading the word a little further won't be easy. A recent five-part PBS series on American Indians didn't mention Virginia. The series opened with the arrival of the Mayflower at Plymouth Rock – nearly 14 years after English boots hit the shore at Jamestown.

It has been a long time since Virginia Indians had the nerve to raise their heads.

“After 400 years, we've come to understand that if our stories are to be told, we have to tell them,” says Chickahominy Chief Steve Adkins. Ken Adams says it's a matter of respect:

“My hope is that the people who read this will realize that our culture and our existence are just as important as anyone else's. And that they'll realize that thousands of years ago, God truly placed us here as gatekeepers of this land.

“The last 400 years are a mere speck on that clock.”

### **Virginia's Indians: Regalia regains place as point of pride**

**Glenn Canaday** opens the lid to a small cedar box. Outside his bedroom window, the swamps of Chickahominy Ridge give up their evening song, a symphony of frogs and insects.

The box holds a long braid of sweet grass and a small red pouch of tobacco, placed inside to keep “bad medicine” away from his prize: the head of a bald eagle.

Dried, stuffed and fully feathered, the eagle head was a gift from an Indian friend up north. When not in the box, it occupies a place of honor on top of Canaday's dance staff.

Now 58, Canaday has been part of the Chickahominy dance group for more than 45 years. The soles of his moccasins are worn through. He has no interest in a new pair.

Carefully, he lays out the rest of his “regalia,” the outfit he wears when dancing. Don't call it a costume and don't touch without permission – though Canaday isn't as sensitive about that as some.

“Regalia is personal and precious,” he says. “It makes you remember. It feels like who you really are.”

It’s also a source of great pride. Not so long ago, regalia – the authentic kind – had all but vanished in Virginia, a custom lost as the native culture dimmed.

For a time, ceremonies saw local Indians dressed in Western-style war bonnets, the type Hollywood said natives were expected to wear.

Now, their own traditions are being rekindled. Once again, Virginia chiefs wear “stovepipe” headdresses – tall, narrow and fashioned of turkey feathers. And tribal members, young and old, are pulling together their own regalia.

Outfits are hand made. Men usually wear chaplike leggings, a buckskin shirt and a leather breechcloth, which hangs like a short, two-sided apron. Women wear dresses or skirts made from animal skin or a “trade cloth” like silk, and carry blanket-type shawls over one arm.

Regalia is customized and accessorized with beadwork, porcupine quills, pieces of antler, bone, tooth and hide, bits of metal and dried deer toes that rattle together with a hollow clank.

Feathers are especially coveted – particularly those from birds of prey. They can be hard to come by: Eagles, hawks and owls are protected by law.

Trade is allowed between Indians, though, and walks through the woods yield finds.

Once owned, feathers are treated with respect. A dancer careless enough to drop an eagle feather is not permitted to simply retrieve it. That requires a special song, dance and the assistance of tribal members who have distinguished themselves by serving in the military. Only they are allowed to touch the fallen feather, and it’s up to them to decide whether the owner deserves it back.

### **Werowocomoco: Researchers hunt for secrets under ruins**

**Wer-o-wo-co-mo-co.** It’s a mouthful – and the most significant native archeological site in the Chesapeake Bay region.

This is where Powhatan lived and met with John Smith and, where legend has it, Pocahontas changed the course of history by saving the English captain’s life.

It's a haunting place, edged by high bluffs, thick with ancient trees that moan in the wind off Purtan Bay, a pocket of the York River in Gloucester County.

For a time, folklore labeled the Indian chief's capital city as "lost" – deserted centuries ago, its footprint erased by those who came after. A handful of scholars, however, had a bead on Werowocomoco's whereabouts. Colonial maps marked the spot, a 300-acre property now owned by Bob Ripley, a Williamsburg-area developer, and his wife, Lynn.

The Ripleys live down a long gravel driveway in a stately home with secluded views. When they bought the property in 1996, they had no idea they would become caretakers of history.

More than 400 years before the first settler's footfall, an Indian town thrived here, the seat of a complex confederacy encompassing about 7,000 square miles. The town itself covered 50 acres and hummed with the activity of a hundred residents – huge by native standards of the day.

John Smith first saw Werowocomoco in 1607, brought there as a captive to meet his fate before Chief Powhatan. With his life spared, Smith visited at least two more times, jotting descriptions in his reports and noting the town's location on rough maps.

It was a more sinister map, though, that helped archaeologists verify the site four centuries later. Sketched by a Spanish spy in 1608 – a time when England and Spain were wrestling for new territory – the map pinpointed the Jamestown fort as a target to be destroyed. The lay of the land included Werowocomoco, marked by a curious drawing that resembled the letter "D."

The symbol remained a mystery until recently, when excavations discovered two parallel trenches more than 700 feet long. Two feet deep and three feet wide, they turn at one end, forming what looks like the bottom left corner of a "D."

"That was one exciting moment," says Randall Turner, an archaeologist with the Virginia Department of Historic Resources, which, along with the College of William and Mary, is a major player in the dig.

Field work started six years ago, after the Ripleys made sure local tribes approved. Most of the dirt has been turned by students, sweating in the summer sun. So far, only 5 percent of the site has been combed.

No one knows the purpose of the D-shaped trenches. Smith didn't mention them in his reports, but Turner believes they enclosed a sacred section of town.

Powhatan abandoned Werowocomoco in 1609, uncomfortable with so many English neighbors. It wasn't long before the place seemed to vanish.

Now, it's being divvied up into numbered plots and carefully sifted. But even to the most veteran researchers, it's more than just science.

"Very rarely do I get a romantic feeling on an archaeological site," Turner says, eyes sweeping from green fields to shimmering river.

"Here, you're walking where John Smith and Powhatan and Pocahontas walked. It really does get to you."

### **Lost Indian language reconstructed for movie**

**Hollywood** has done one thing for Virginia Indians: restored their language – at least in part.

Director Terrence Malick gets the credit. A stickler for details, Malick wanted authentic native dialogue for "The New World," his 2006 film about the founding of Jamestown, starring Colin Farrell.

Trouble was, that particular dialect of Algonquian has been extinct since the end of the 1700s. When Malick's search for a native speaker came up empty-handed, the director hired Blair Rudes, a linguist at the University of North Carolina at Charlotte, to resurrect words that hadn't been spoken in more than 200 years.

Native languages were Rudes' specialty, but in this case, he had little to work with. The only vocabulary available was a list of about 600 words written down by a colonist in 1609, and about 50 more left behind by John Smith.

For perspective: A typical Webster's contains about 12,000 words.

Recreating a lost language requires a blend of scholarly methods and guess work. Rudes began with the old lists, consulted related languages that still exist or were better recorded, and factored in the evolution of pronunciation and syntax, the order in which words fall within a sentence.

In the end, Malick was so impressed with Rudes' results, the language he initially envisioned for two scenes wound up being used in about a third of "The New World."

Rudes, who died last year, asked the movie studio to share his research with the Virginia tribes. It could help leaders like Kevin Brown, chief of the Pamunkey, who hopes to someday hold tribal language classes and hear the old words once again.

Unfortunately, Brown missed his chance to hear Virginia Algonquian during the movie.

“I feel asleep during it,” he says sheepishly.

Don’t feel bad, chief. Apparently, a lot of people did. “The New World” tanked at the box office.