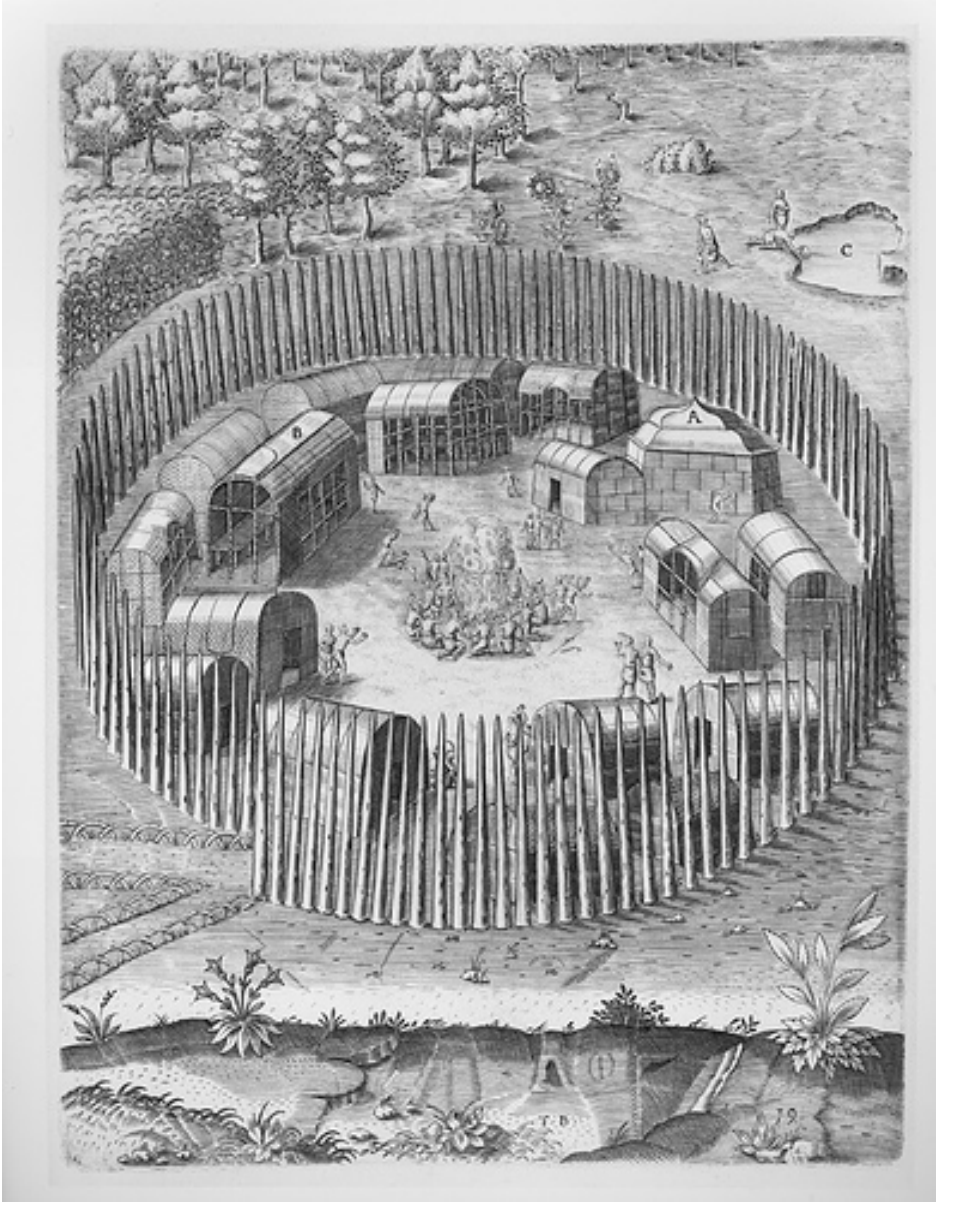


Early Native Americans In Our Area

Written & Published by the
Waynesboro Historical Commission
Founded 1971
Waynesboro, Virginia 22980

Dedication

The Historic Commission of Waynesboro dedicates this publication to the earliest settlers of the North American Continent and in particular Virginia and our immediate region. Their relentless push through an unmarked environment exemplifies the quest of the human spirit to reach the horizon and make it its own.

Until relatively recently, a history of America would devote a slight section to the Indian tribes discovered by the colonists who landed on the North American continent. The subsequent text would detail the claiming of the land, the creation of towns and villages, and the conquering of the forces that would halt the relentless move to the West. That view of history has been challenged by the work of archeologists who have used the advances in science and the skills of excavation to reveal a past that had been forgotten or deliberatively ignored. This publication seeks to present a concise chronicle of the prehistory of our country and our region with attention to one of the forgotten and marginalized civilizations, the Monacans who existed and prospered in Central Virginia and the areas immediate to Waynesboro.

Migration to North America

Well before the Romans, the Greeks, or the Egyptians created the culture we call Western Civilization, an ethnic group known as the "First People" began its colonization of the North American continent. There are a number of theories of how the original settlers came to the continent. Some thought they were the "Lost Tribes" of the Old Testament. Others fancifully speculated they were Trojans, Atlantians, or were early travelers from Europe and the Mideast. The most supportable claim is they migrated over a land bridge formed by the last ice age.

Historians have calculated the Bering Sea was lowered by more than 300 feet because of the growth of the glaciers that covered a large expanse of the North American continent. This created not a narrow bridge, but a thousand mile wide tundra

stretching from Siberia to Alaska. This land mass was called 'Beringia'. First, animals moved over the land mass: bison, moose, mammoths, caribous and musk oxen from Asia; fox, woodchucks, the ancestors of the horse, camels and wolves from North America. Next, nomadic hunters followed the game that moved across the bridge. These small groups called Paleoindians by anthropologists, moved steadily southward. Evidence from a site in Canada's Yukon Territory dates habitation by the Paleoindians some 27,000 years ago. Another in southern California dates a man-made hearth at 29,000 years ago. Other pockets of evidence of human activity are spread across the continent. Although the individual discoveries cannot conclusively date the migration into North America, together they support a case for man's arrival in the New World more than 25,000 years ago.

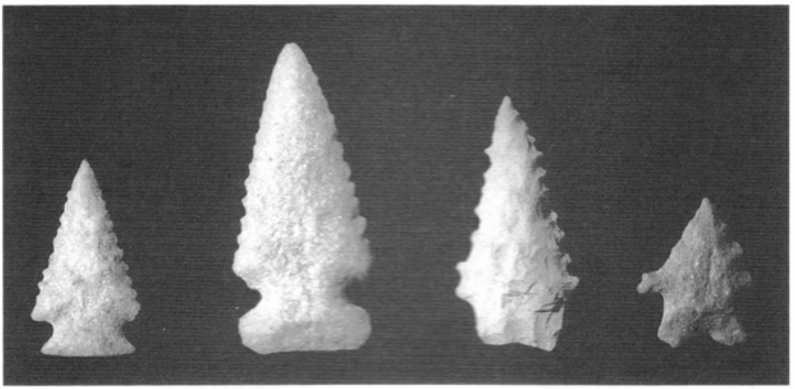
The speed at which the Paleoindians migrated throughout North America leads some to believe that they did not walk across the exposed tundra, but traveled by boat at the edge of Beringia and then along the coast line all the way to South America. In this theory they would then set out on foot into the interiors of the continents.

Whatever the facts of this migration are, scholars believe the Paleoindians reached Virginia approximately 17,000 years ago. This means they arrived before the Chesapeake Bay was formed. With the harsh climate limiting the vegetation to grasslands and forests of conifers, the first settlers were nomadic hunters, called by some scientists Big Game Hunters. Although mastodons, mammoths, musk oxen, and other big game were available, predominate food supply was deer, elk, bear and moose. To kill these animals, the Paleoindians fashioned relatively crude stone weapons. The Thunderbird Quarry, an archeological site in the Northern Shenandoah Valley along the Shenandoah River in Warren County, provided these first people with a source of yellow jasper which could be hammered by river rocks into knives, drills, scrapers and other tools as well as arrowheads and spear points. There is evidence that the site was used by the Paleoindians for some two thousand years.

Archaic Period

8000 BCE to 6000 BCE

The end of the Ice Age and the gradual receding of the glaciers dramatically altered the Virginia environment. The sea level rose and spread across the coastal areas forming the Chesapeake Bay. The grasslands became forests of pine and oak. This altered environment forced a cultural shift from a nomadic hunter's society to a hunter/gatherers' in which nuts and fruits and small game provided the food supply. Adapting to this new environment created the need for the hunters to alter the form of the tools and weapons as well as the development of new ones.



The fashioning of leather and stone tools and the development of smaller weapons such as the javelin allowed the natives to adapt to the new tasks associated with the developing society.

The more hospitable environment also resulted in an expansion of the population. Small family groups of hunter/gatherers formed. Although the bands remained mobile, the more fertile environment meant they could restrict their movement to a more limited area. Within this more defined territory, they established permanent shelters that could be used repeatedly. An archeological dig in Russell County uncovered a site established

about 8000 BCE and used until the arrival of the Colonists. The shelters were built of sandstone and limestone.

6000 BCE to 2500 BCE

As the climate became more and more hospitable, the Indians of Virginia became more sophisticated and effective in use of their environment. One of the major developments was the creation of the Atlatl or spear thrower. The weapon extended the length of the thrower's arm and because it placed the spear farther from the hunter's shoulder it increased the spear's force and velocity. A hook held the butt end of the spear. A polished and decorated stone was attached below the hook to provide balance and to steady the spear when it was launched. Archaeologists conjecture that the carving on the stone was of significance to the thrower, perhaps an appeal for success in the hunt. Besides increasing the power and impact of the spear, the Atlatl allowed the hunter to throw his spear with deadly force from a safe distance instead of having to creep up to and stab his prey.

The discovery of mortars and pestles dating from this period indicate that the gatherers had the means to grind nuts and seeds. This process made the food sources were more easily digested and gave variety to the Indian's diet.

Another innovation was an early form of the ax. The early axes from about 5000 BCE were formed by notching and chipping a single tough resilient stone such as basalt or quartzite. By 3000 BCE, the form was flaked, pecked, and smoothed to create a more efficient grooved ax that could be more easily attached to a wooden handle. Thus the people of the Middle Archaic period became more efficient in clearing the forests and cutting wood for fires and shelter.

The cutting of the forests would have radically changed the environment. Foraging animals such as deer, bear, and smaller animals would now come to the clearings to eat the leaves of the low lying shrubs and small trees. This created a more reliable hunting ground. The openings also encouraged the growth of plants and trees that were beneficial to the Indians both for food and raw materials. According to some anthropologists, this was an early example of human beings altering the environment to directly benefit themselves.

2500 BCE to 1200 BCE

By the Late Archaic period, the Indian population was estimated to have grown to tens of thousands. This generated a need for more predictable supplies of food and materials which was met by what some scholars called the "Supermarket of the Pre-Historic World." The expanding waterways, the rich ground of the flood

plains and the evolving clearing of the forests produced an abundant animal and aquatic life and a diversity of plants that provided seeds, shoots, tender leaves, roots and berries. As a result of this stabilization, small units formed through bonds of marriage and trade. The new grouping established small settlements or hamlets of 25 to 50 members. This fostered the development of a tribal identity. The grouping shifted from a group of equals to a hierarchy led by an elder and those who had skills in the execution of tasks that were necessary for the tribes' survival.

Archaeologists believe that the people of this period practiced a type of animism in which Nature controlled the lives of human beings. It is likely that they used prayers, stories, and legends to make sense of what they perceived as the superhuman abilities of the natural forces. The cycles of time and of life (birth, childhood, adulthood, and death) became ritualized customs that formed a shared vision of the universe and the place of the tribe and its members within it.

The archaeological digs of riverside sites from this period reveal large hearths of fire-cracked rock which indicates the people of the period cooked large quantities of food. The food supply now included native plants such as sunflowers, sump weed, may grass, lambs quarter, smartweed and even the giant ragweed. By 2500 BCE a variety of gourds and squash were raised for both food and storage containers.

The Indians also dug large pits not unlike the root cellars the colonists created in the floor of their dwellings. The pits provide evidence of processing food for later use. Among these were smoked fish, dried deer meat and nuts.

The increasing domestication of this period was most evident in the discovery of soapstone as a material for cooking vessels. Large mushroom shaped pieces of the rock were quarried from one of the many sites along the eastern foothills of the Blue Ridge from Fairfax to Floyd County. The pieces were easily hollowed out with stone and bone tools and formed into bowls. Because the pots could be placed on the cooking fire without breaking, they

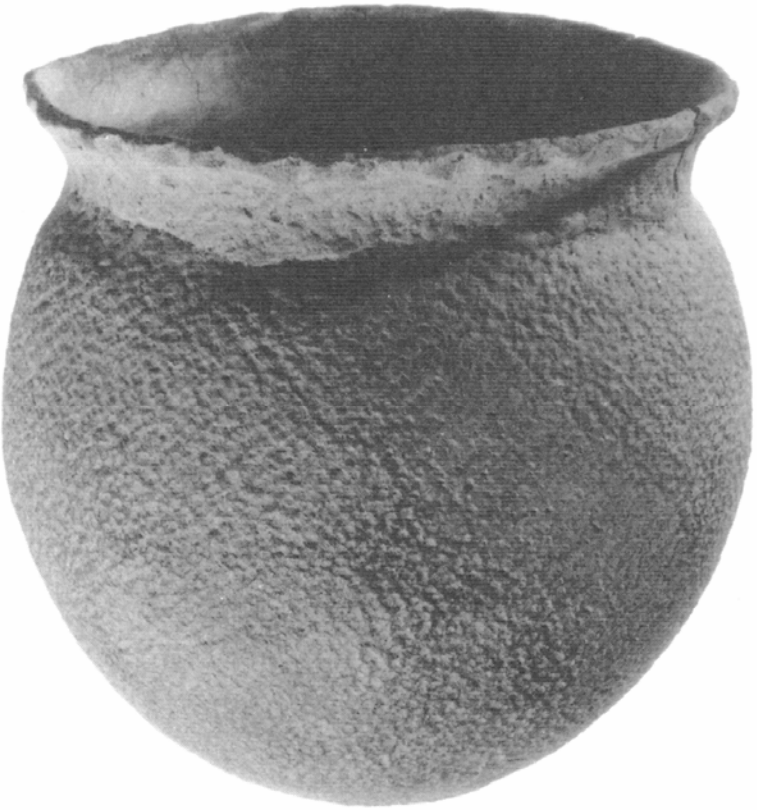
became a valuable product. Soapstone pots as well as fragments of soapstone were found across the regions of Virginia. There is wide belief that this confirms wide-spread trading between the settlements on the coast and those in the mountains. Another interesting piece of evidence from the archaeological digs of this period was the bones of the Indians' only domesticated animal, the dog. It served as a companion, scavenger to clean up the hamlet and food.

The Woodland Period

Early Woodland 1200 BCE-500BCE

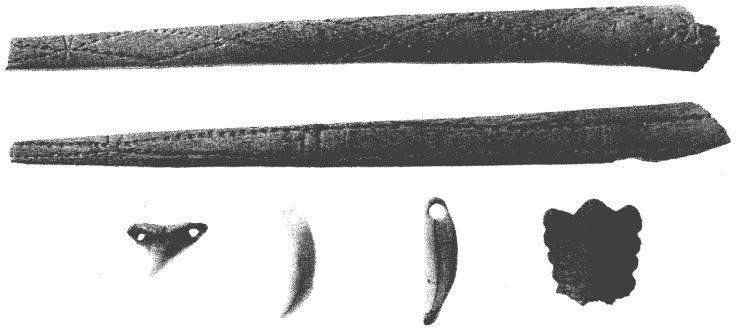
The term "Woodland Period" was coined in 1932 to describe the prehistoric culture that developed between the Archaic period and the arrival of the Colonists and the development of a written language by the Cherokees. The key technological advancement of this period was pottery, most likely created by the women. Instead of the heavy stone pots, clay vessels became the norm. They were lighter, easier to shape and simpler to replace when broken. The early pottery was of simpler rudimentary shapes formed from a lump of clay with a tempering agent added to it to prevent cracking during the firing process. These shallow pots were decorated by pressing shells and fibers on the wet surface. Later potters learned to build coil pots which allowed for higher sides. The interior of the pot was scraped to smooth the walls. A wooden paddle wrapped with cord was used to shape the exterior. This left evidence of the textiles used in the period. The pot was air dried and then baked in an open fire. The shape, size, and surface treatment of the shards found by archaeologists provide evidence of the growing sophistication of the potters during this period.

Other developments in the early Woodland Period were the appearance of more permanent settlements and erections of earth works of various sizes and usages. Although some Europeans romanticized the Mound Builders as a race separate from the Indians, the evidence suggests that a number of Indian groups (Adena and Hopewell cultures) began to construct these wonders during the Woodland Period.



Middle Woodland Period
500 BCE to 900 CE

By the middle of the Woodland Period, Virginia had a diverse Indian population. Most settled in small hamlets which were established along the major rivers that ran through the region. In the northern Shenandoah Valley, a group called the Stone Mound Burial people dated from 400 BCE to 200 CE. Related closely to the Adena culture of the Ohio Valley, the Stone Mound Burial culture clustered hundreds of low stone mounds on a flat river terrace for the burial of their dead.



Archaeologists surmise that given the size of the mounds, the Stone Mound Burial people reserved this ritual for the higher-ranking members of the culture. The objects buried within the mounds suggest the group was part of the large trading network that developed during this period throughout the Eastern United States. It has been suggested that the subsequent interaction among the diverse cultures promoted the sharing of ideas of social organizations, views of the natural world and information about technology and agriculture.

Another crucial change in this period was the introduction of maize. The productive plant easily adapted to the environment and provided a more sustainable food source than the local plants

and trees. Corn together with beans and squash became the staples of the Woodland diet. They are often referred to as the "Three Sisters." To insure the stability of the crop, elaborate ceremonies were developed around the planting and harvesting of the corn.

Indian corn

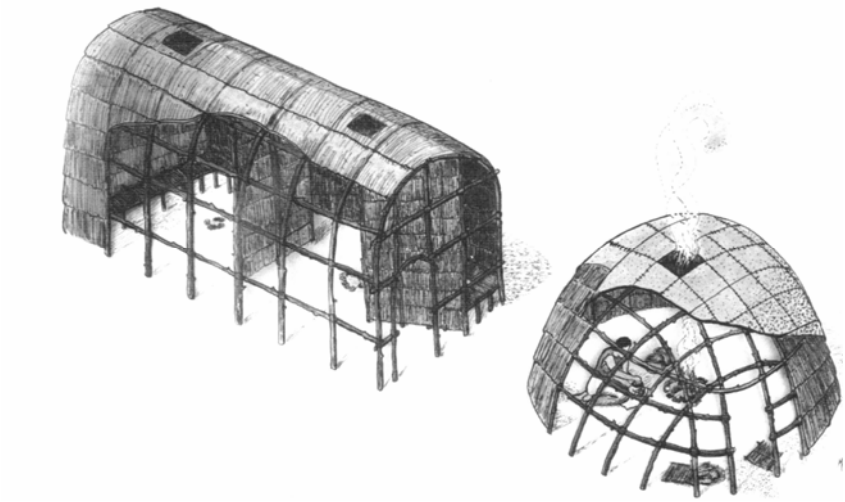
Because the food sources were shifting from hunting to agriculture, the spear was superseded by the bow and arrow. The triangular projectile points (commonly called 'arrow heads') became smaller and were attached to the shaft with sinews and glue made from animal hooves. The accuracy of the woodland arrow was improved by addition of turkey feathers at the end of the shaft. Another innovation was the Celt, a redesign of the grooved ax. The curved and polished ungrooved head of the Celt increased the efficiency of the tool. The hollowed-out socket of the Celt's handle secured the stone head while allowing for easy removal for sharpening.

Whether it was, as some anthropologists speculate, caused by the ceremonies surrounding the planting and harvesting of the corn or by information gained through the trading network or the

increased specialization of tasks within an Indian group, the Indian settlements became more complex social units with status bestowed on certain individuals and families. In some Indian cultures those of higher rank were given housing on an elevated area within the village. In some like the Stone Mound Burial Indians, they were buried with rare and sacred items and other articles to be used in the after life. The complex social order also led to intricate marriage alignments that preserved the tribal identity and insured the continuation of the power bases.

Late Woodland Period
900 CE to 1000 CE

Some scholars end the Late Woodland Period in 1000 CE. However, the characteristics of the period were still dominant in many tribes until the appearance of the Europeans. The Late Woodland Period is marked by a transition to distinct cultures or tribes. Although the total population did not appear to decrease, there is evidence that the Indians moved into smaller permanent communities spread across regions. These somewhat isolated settlements gave rise to small-scale cultures that were distinctive to the areas in which they existed and were later given specific names to note a distinct tribe or culture.



In the Shenandoah Valley, the Earthen Mound Burial culture dominated. Its characteristic feature was the burial mound which was at least 20 feet high. The mounds were the final resting place of hundreds, and in some cases, thousands of Indians. It is thought that the first mounds were for individuals, perhaps chiefs or other important individuals. Later, the mounds were used for the ritualistic reburial of the community's dead. The mounds are labeled "accretion mounds" because each successive burial was done on top of the previous one. The mounds became a visible monument to the culture. The staying power of the ritual is noted by Thomas Jefferson. In 1784, he excavated a burial mound near Charlottesville and recorded the ritual visitation by a band of Indians "with expressions which were construed to be those of sorrow."

The earthen mound builders lived in permanent settlements along the major rivers. Evidence of most if not all of these has been destroyed by flooding and the agricultural practices of the colonists. Like the other Indians in the region they combined agriculture with hunting and gathering. The Shenandoah Indians crafted their stone tools from the high quality chert and jasper that was found in the area.

These stones were traded along with soapstone and copper.

The pottery of this people was like that created by other groups in the region, but differed in the tempering agent. In this case, quartz and sand were used. Fabric, nets, and cords were used to create and to decorate the pots.

There seems to be general agreement that the Earthen Mound Burial people were the ancestors of the Monacans who dominated the area when the Colonists arrived and John Smith made his trip to the interior of Virginia.

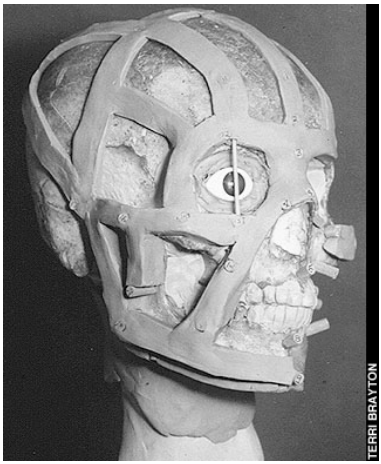
The Monacans

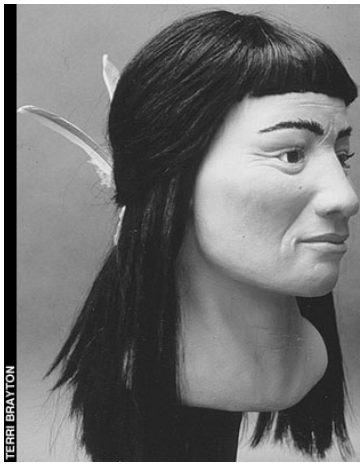
Monacans were part of a confederacy of Siouan speakers, traced by language to the Ohio Valley and the Mound Builders culture that was unique to that area. The other group related to them was the Manahoacs of the northern Piedmont. Together they formed one of the three distinct groups in Virginia. The others were the Powhatan and the Cherokee. At the time of the arrival of the British, the Siouan Indians numbered in access of 10,000.

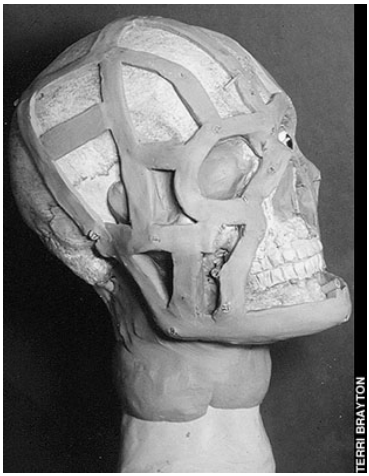
The Monacans lived in small villages or hamlets which were protected by a high palisade made of wood poles. The individual houses were dome-shaped structures of bark and reed mats. Although the Monacans were an agricultural people, they would leave these settlements to visit their temporary hunting camps, most likely in the Shenandoah Valley, to seek deer, elk and small game. The Valley is thought not to have had permanent settlements but was used by various tribes as a hunting ground and trade route. The warfare between the French and British in the French and Indian War caused this neutral area to become one of conflict.

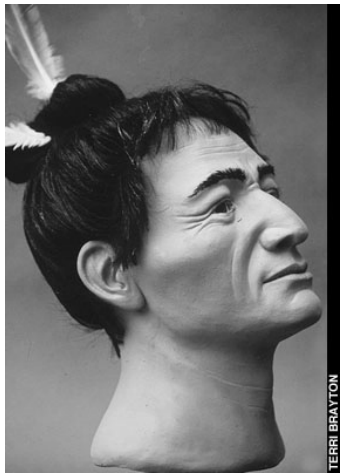
The Monacans mined copper and fashioned it into jewelry. These they traded with the Powhatans who set great store by the decorations. Their other trading partner was the Iroquois.

It is likely that the Indians that Jefferson noted as visiting the mound he was excavating in Charlottesville were Monacans. Like their ancestors they continued the practice of mound burial late into the Common Era. A Monacan burial site at Lewis Creek near Verona contained the remains of 159 individuals as well as









stone, shell, clay and bone artifacts. A large Monacan burial site near Hayes Creek was excavated in 1901 by E. P Valentine. It contained hundreds of skeletal remains. In 2008, a forensic artist used skulls from that excavation to reconstruct the faces of a male and female Monacan who lived between 1000 CE and 1400 CE. Unlike the Powhatans, the Monacans shunned interaction with the Colonists. Captain John Smith first encountered the Monacans in 1608 during his exploration of the upper reaches of the Rappahannock River. During the hostilities, the English captured a wounded Indian named Amorolek. When asked by his captors

The 1607-9 Jamestown Settlement map by John Smith, published in 1612, is regarded as the most important map of early English settlement in America. Drafted during the first years of the 1607 Jamestown settlement, it continued to be the definitive Virginia map for more than half a century.

why the tribe was hostile towards the English, he was said to reply, "We heard that you were a people come from under the world to take our world from us." There is no record of how Amorolek managed to communicate this. Although some English explorers visited the Monacans, none learned the language or recorded more than the briefest of descriptions. Smith's map of 1608 designates the area controlled by the Monacans.

In response to the intrusions of the Europeans, many of the Monacans withdrew from Virginia, moving westward. Some of those who remained proved troublesome. In 1758, a Quaker settlement in Bedford County was abandoned for two years because of the belligerency of the Monacans. One source suggested that the problem was that the Quakers had chosen to settle at a major trail crossing of the Monacans and near the site of one of their large burial mounds.

The Monacans who survived in Virginia were small in number and burdened by the racial laws. In 1823 Virginia declared that all children born to Indians were to be recorded at "mulatto." No provision was made for the schooling of the Indians although there was for both Whites and African-Americans after the Civil War. In 1868 a mission school was established for Monacans in Amherst County.

Photo ca. 1912

In 1924, Virginia passed the Racial Integrity Law which prohibited intermarriage between those deemed White and those having any mixture of "colored blood" more than one-sixteenth. The law in effect disenfranchised the Monacans and limited their ability to marry and denied their right to be registered as Indians. Many records were changed by state officials to remove any record of the Monacans as Indians. In 1942, a few members of the tribe mounted a legal challenge and forced the head of the state Bureau of Vital Statistics to admit that there was no scientific evidence to support the racial designation used for the Indians. In 1943, another action forced a local draft board to remove the incorrect classification. In 1963, agitation over the lack of secondary education moved officials in Amherst County to propose a bond issue for an Indian high school. When the proposal was defeated, the state of Virginia approved the application of twenty-three Monacan students to attend the local public school. The mission school was closed. The Monacan children were allowed to attend publicly financed schools for the first time. In 1989, the Monacans were recognized as one of the eight indigenous tribes in Virginia. In 1997, the tribe lobbied for legislation to correct the birth certificates and other official documents at no cost to the tribal members. With the passing of the bill, the state-sanctioned racial discrimination ended.

Currently the tribe is centered at Bear Mountain in Amherst County. They number about 1400. The original mission school on Bear Mountain is a historic site and the Monacan Museum at Natural Bridge records their history. The tribe has an annual powwow in Bedford County in May of each year and celebrates a homecoming event on the first Saturday in October.

The history of our continent and our country is far older than had previously been realized. The small band of the earliest settlers who followed their food source across the tundra that connected Asia and North America began a migration that shaped the New World. In the more than 20,000 years since they inhabited our environment, they evolved into a series of individual tribes with distinct cultures. When the Europeans "discovered" America, those cultures were overwhelmed. In the last one hundred years, the evolution in the science of archaeology has opened a new chapter in the history of our land. The systematic excavation of the remains of settlements, mounds, and camping grounds is revealing new evidence that expands our knowledge of these first people. The Monacans who were dominant in our area are using that expansion to recapture their lost history and exert their right to be recognized as a distinct tribe. In the years to come, archaeologists will build a more detailed and complete record of the prehistory of our state and our immediate area.

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Places to Visit

Native American Village at Natural Bridge, VA
www.naturalbridgeva.com/native_american_village.htm
15 Apple Dore Lane, Natural Bridge, VA 24578
800.533.1410 540.291.2121
10 AM to 5 PM Daily

Monacan Indian Nation Museum and Powwow
www.monacannation.com
Amherst, VA 24521
434.946.0389

POWHATAN
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