The Piedmont American Indian Association (PAIA)

Lower Eastern Cherokee Nation of South Carolina

The Cherokees of the 1600s, 1700s, and 1800s, the Stewarts, Crowes, Dodsons, Brocks, Bryants, Locklears, Lockees, Longs, Vaughns, Vinsons, Carpenters, were our grandparents. Not all of these folks were swept away by the years of war in the 1700s. They laid down their weapons in the 1800s after signing treaty after treaty until they had nothing else to give. They picked up the plow; they banded together to save what was left of a once great Cherokee Nation. These folks stepped forward into the 1800s and embraced the challenge that lay before them. Mimicking their white neighbors, our grandparents gathered in the Upstate of South Carolina. In Walhalla, Pickens, Greenville, Spartanburg, and Laurens, they worked their farms while hiding in plain sight.

Not all were on the Trail of Tears, not all left the area. They stayed and worked through the 1800s passing along the culture of their forebears as best they could while learning to survive in the White world. They sent their children off to the American Civil War and wars in Europe and Asia in the 1900s. As a people we have fought in every war the United States has ever fought in.

The 1980s found our families working together for the betterment of all Indian People in South Carolina. Uniting together as the Piedmont American Indian Association, along with the Council of Native Americans, to help foster a better understanding of Indian people, to share Native American legacy and culture, to keep traditions alive to pass on to future generations, and to bring recognition of Indian People in the state of South Carolina. Those great-great-great-grandchildren became chartered in the State as PAIA in 1984 and were recognized by Governor Richard Riley in 1985. In 2000 the PAIA became the Piedmont American Indian Association Lower Eastern Cherokee Nation of South Carolina in order to gain legal status for the tribal part of the organization.

The PAIA Lower Eastern Cherokee Nation became a South Carolina State Recognized Group on August 21, 2008 and then a South Carolina State Recognized Tribe on June 19, 2015.