**BEAVER CREEK INDIANS**

**A STATE RECOGNIZED TRIBE THEN AND NOW**

(Using historical citations and information from the South Carolina State Recognition Submission to the SC Commission of Minority Affairs)

**PART ONE: OUR HISTORICAL HERITAGE**

Our historical forbears lived as did other Indian tribes along the Eastern Seaboard of the United States. These Indians were the remnants of the first inhabitants of North America who crossed from Asia to North America by way of a land bridge. These bands of people spread out across what we know as the United States looking for the prehistoric large game such as bison, mammoths and saber-toothed tigers. As the numbers of these large game became less plentiful, the Indians began hunting, fishing and gathering plants and berries for food. The Indian population increased when they began to migrate less and hunt smaller game. With the development of pottery making, Indians had a way to store and preserve their foods. The use of pottery was widespread among all Indians. Semi-permanent villages were formed for Indians who lived in the Southeast. Indians planted crops and made tools, jewelry and objects to be used in their ceremonies. The tribes traded with each other.

Before our historic ancestors had contact with Europeans, they lived in the forests and woodlands along the eastern coast. Earliest dealings Indians had with Europeans were friendly; our ancestors helped the Europeans to adapt to the new way of life in what we call North America. This relationship changed over time as Indians became involved in the warfare between the European factions. Indians took sides in these battles and many times ended up fighting other Indians who might have chosen a different faction to support. Because of the poor treatment of Indians by the Europeans, tribes merged with each other to form stronger fronts against these Europeans, many of them English traders. All Indian tribes suffered from the diseases brought to our homelands by the Europeans. Measles and smallpox decimated Indian tribes. As white settlers encroached on Indian lands, more and more land was lost to the invaders. The Indian Removal Act of 1830 affected not only the Cherokees, but other tribes who were forced from the areas and lands that they had lived on for hundreds of years.

The Southeast Indians were fortunate in that there was generally an abundant supply of food. Men cleared the land for planting and were the hunters and fishers of the tribes. Women farmed the land and gathered nuts and berries and wild plants for their use. Planting was done by use of the "three sisters" method. The three sisters were corn, beans and squash, the staple foods of our ancestors. The three loving sisters had to live together to grow and flourish. The planting was done in mounds. The eldest sister, corn, grew tall and strong. The next eldest sister, bean, grew along the tall corn stalks, leaning on her elder sister for support. The younger sister, squash, grew under the feet of her sisters, protecting them and keeping the needed moisture for them.

Our ancestors, then and now, revere Mother Earth and the story of the three sisters shows how our ancestors honor Mother Earth and Father Sun for what we are given. Even today, Indians have great respect for the fruits of the Earth by not killing the animals on the land, the fish of the rivers or the birds of the sky and water for any reason other than for food.

**PART TWO: OUR DISTANT PAST**

Our ancestors settled along the north and south branches of the Edisto River in the Big and Little Beaver Creek area, hence the name of our tribe, Beaver Creek Indians. This name denotes from whence we came. From our state recognition submission we claim that the Beaver Creek Indians are the descendents of several small mixed-blood South Carolina tribes. As noted above, Southeastern tribes merged with each other for reasons of protection against invading Europeans, because of intermarriage or for other economic reasons. We have been a presence in and along the Beaver Creek area in Neeses and Orangeburg County for over 200 years (section 6.1 of state submission document). We were viewed by the rest of the population of this area of South Carolina to be different and to be set apart from the population. Our people existed as a separated community. Our people were called derogatory names due to our color and ancestry (6-B of recognition submission) names such as Red Legs, Smiling Indians, Croatans, Brass Ankles and Mulattos were some of these names. In a 1948 article by Brewton Berry (and cited in our submission document) entitled "The Mestizos of South Carolina" these unflattering names are used to denote what he calls "outcasts." They were not white, he says, and further, do not fit into the biracial caste system. Thus comes our claim of mixed race ethnicity. As groups formed, merged and reformed, it became more difficult to remain a cohesive tribe. Our submission document states that by the middle of the eighteenth century, many of our tribal members were living on the fringes of towns.

Intermarriage with other tribes, Europeans and African Americans further resulted in the loss of our culture. After the Indian Removal Act of 1830, whites in the South grouped anyone who was not white in a group called "colored.” If a group was not recognized by a treaty (such as the Cherokee tribe), it was especially true. For a tribe like ours, the Beaver Creek, we lost much of our culture and it became very easy for whites to classify us as "colored."

Our state recognition submission (section 3.1) states that our people stem from the thirty odd small, indigenous tribes of the coastal region of South Carolina. Over time the "Indian-ness" was stripped from our people and our culture and our sense of tribal belonging was lost. Our forebears lived in isolation in the swamps and piney woods of the area.

Our people were farmers and in more recent times were carpenters. Because of the lush first growth of wood in the Southeast, our ancestors cut timber and floated the wood down the coast for sale and trade with other tribes and peoples. We were hunters and gatherers. Food hunted by our ancestors was deer, wild boar, raccoon and squirrel. We fished and hunted wild game by season. We made arrowheads and pottery for our own use and for trade. We buried our dead ritually in mounds that can still be found in our area.

The Beaver Creek Indians were matrilineal. By this we mean that the family ties are traced through the mother’s family lines. The families, related to each other through the mother, formed the basic social unit of the tribe. A child followed the ethnicity of his mother. Even today we venerate our tribal mothers.

There are very few documents to substantiate the Native American heritage of the Beaver Creek Indians. Adding to the difficulty of research is that public documents often classified us as white or mulatto. Our earliest known ancestor is Lazarus Chavis. Using citations from our state recognition submission we say that he was born in South Carolina circa 1759. He was in the Revolutionary War and received a pension from that war. He is listed on the first Federal Census of 1790 and every census up to 1830. Our submission states that The South Caroliniana Library in Columbia has hand written documentation from a manuscript Bessie Garvin wrote that states that Lazarus was Indian and so were Richard, William, Phillip and James "Jim" Chavis. It also lists Lazarus as William's grandfather (Ex. 4-A of petition). Lazarus was the father of Frederick, James and Nancy Chavis, Our entire genealogy begins with Lazarus Chavis and his children. Because of the noted scarcity of Indian records, there are no birth, death or marriage certificates. They did not have first, middle or last names as did Europeans. However, there are some land deeds to prove that our ancestors lived in the Orangeburg area. Family names that continue through to present day in our tribe are Chavis, Hutto, Bolin, Hoover, Williams, Huffman/Hoffman and Gleaton. Frederick Chavis petitioned the state of South Carolina in 1839 to be known as Indian. Some of the death certificates of our ancestors have the designation "Croatan" on their death certificates. This term was often used to denote a person of mixed breed Indian. Our ancestors knew that they were Indian but due to the mixed tribal heritage, they did not know what kind of Indian they were.

Our ancestors have served in the Revolutionary War, Civil War, Spanish American War, World War I and in World War II. In modern time, our members have served and now serve in the Korean War, Vietnam, in the Persian Gulf and in Iraq. Then, as now, Beaver Creek Indians were proud to be Americans even in a time that Americans were not proud to include them as first class citizens.

Elders of our tribe say (Ex 4-F of recognition submission) that they did not know their tribal identity and were ashamed to call themselves Indian. Their families told them that they were Indian but were secretive about discussing it. Usually, children were forbidden to speak about their Indian heritage, further aiding the loss of our culture by not having our oral history passed down from parent to child and ongoing.

**PART THREE: BEAVER CREEK INDIANS TODAY**

The Beaver Creek Indian Tribe today has its office in the town of Salley, South Carolina at 220 Pine Street. Many of our tribal members live in Aiken, Lexington, and Orangeburg counties although we have members who live in various parts of the United States. Our tribal rolls are currently closed. This was one of the requirements for being considered for state recognition. Our membership numbers about 2,000.

The mission of the Beaver Creek Indian Tribe is: "We, the descendants of the Beaver Creek Indian People desiring to follow in the ways of our ancestors, aim to provide our people with freedom of worship, to promote the achievement of self-government, and thereby to preserve, promote, protect, and respect the heritage, culture, traditions and rights of our people as tribal members of the Beaver Creek Indian Tribe for us in the present and for the unborn tribal members of the next seven generations to come."

We understand that the perception of the Indian in today's society is in the state of change. Today, we are proud to claim our rightful heritage. This has not always been the way that we were viewed by white society. In this century, our people were segregated by being required to attend schools that taught only Indians. The Four Pines School in the Orangeburg area is an example of this. Students were separated by design and by plan. When our children left the Indian schools and attended the "white" school they were ridiculed and taunted for their difference. Most did not graduate.

Records show that our ancestors gave land to be used for a school, for churches and for cemeteries. Many of our forefathers are buried in these cemeteries; some are ritually buried. We have been here for many years and continue to be a presence in this area.

Even though our Beaver Creek men honored their country by serving in the military, they still were held apart and separated from society. Often, as in the Civil War, our men were recruited into regiments that were Indian in origin.

Only in the past twenty-five years has it been a recognized and honored (to limited extent) place in society to be considered an Indian. Although the descendants of Lazarus Chavis have been a presence throughout the twentieth century in the Beaver Creek area, we are only now receiving our rightful respect for our Indian lineage.

Today, we are guided by a Tribal Council that is elected for set terms of office. We have a tribal chief and tribal elders. In 1998 we formally organized into what is known now as Beaver Creek Indians. We are a non- profit organization with bylaws and a constitution. We have a tribal office in the town of Salley, South Carolina. Possibly the most significant event is that on August 29, 2006, the South Carolina Commission for Minority Affairs presented us with our State Recognition Document. This affirms that we are who we say that we are; indigenous people who are recognized by South Carolina as an Indian tribe.

We are still set apart today from the community of people with whom we live, but today it is by choice. Our behaviors, characteristics and interests set us apart. Some of the practices that have been handed down to us by our ancestors and that are still in use or are recognized by our tribe are:

* Sea Shells being used for arts and crafts and for ritually decorating our graves. This is a traditionally native practice.
* Our Elders being respected by our tribe. They are part of our Council and part of our leadership. They have a part of our tribal government.
* Preserving vegetables for use in the winter months. Giving tobacco as an offer of friendship. Tobacco is revered as a sacred herb.
* Reverence to the earth and its wildlife. We take life only to preserve life. We thank the Creator for providing for our needs. We do not kill for sport. We do not waste the gifts of the Creator.
* Governing ourselves by our chief, vice-chief, elders and tribal council. We live by the tribal laws and constitution. Our tribal council is our governing body.
* Reverence of wild turkeys- the feathers are used in ceremonies. We use the feathers as fans for blessing meeting rooms with sacred herbs such as sweet grass, tobacco and cedar. We fan the smoke with a feather to cleanse the room.
* Use of a talking stick in our meetings. Only the person holding the stick may speak.
* Use of sacred herbs and smudging is utilized at all of our meetings and ceremonies. The sacred herbs (listed above) are fanned, or smudged, throughout the room.
* Generosity is a trait of our members. We use our own money to take care of our own. We honor our guests by giving them the best that we own.

**PART FOUR: THE FUTURE OF BEAVER CREEK INDIANS**

Today, we are recognized by the State of South Carolina as an indigenous Indian Tribe. We are recognized as a mixed race tribe. Since there were remnants of several tribes in the coastal area of the South, the merging of these tribes was inevitable. It has also meant that it is impossible to separate the individual remnants. The state, the historians, the archeologists and the social and cultural anthropologists who advise the Commission for Minority Affairs recognize this. The state recognizes that our ancestor, Lazarus Chavis, is the common ancestor for the members of our tribe. Each member has proven a common relationship.

What we see for the future is the development of programs and opportunities for the betterment of our tribe. These opportunities will be explored and pursued in the near future. Our next important step as a tribe is pursuing Federal Recognition through the United States Bureau of Indian Affairs. This will be a lengthy and difficult process. However, the efforts of the past few years show that we do not step back from the difficult. Our state recognition submission states that "We are an old and proud people who want to be recognized by our State and by our Country". We have achieved part of this goal by receiving state recognition.

We are the Beaver Creek Indians. We will prevail.

By: Chief Louie Chavis of the Beaver Creek Indians of Orangeburg County SC.