The Pee Dee Indian Nation of Upper South Carolina

**Pee Dee Today:**

The Pee Dee Indian Nation is a small American Indian tribe officially recognized by the State of South Carolina. The tribe was one of the first two American Indian tribes to receive official recognition from the state. The tribe's population consists of more than 800 enrolled members and tribal land is located in Little Rock, South Carolina, along the Little Pee Dee River.

The tribe is an active member of the South Carolina Native American Affairs Advisory Committee, and numerous tribal members are affiliated with national and regional American Indian rights groups and advocacy organizations. The tribe strives to empower its members through the continued practice of cultural traditions, economic development efforts centered around strategic business and community partnerships, as well as advocacy work aimed at educating public policy makers regarding both national and regional American Indian issues. Additionally, 100% of the tribe’s members who are eligible to vote are certified registered voters.

Farming has always been an extremely important aspect of Pee Dee existence and culture. Due to the significant and sacred position that land and nature continue to hold, most Pee Dee live predominately rural lives that are heavily intertwined within the local agriculture-based economy and community. However, in response to an ever evolving world many Pee Dee have successfully sought economic and career opportunities that fall outside of the tribe’s traditional agrarian roots. Apart from attending secondary educational institutions, today many Pee Dee proudly contribute to the local community as educators, law enforcement officers, nurses, artists, military servicemen/servicewomen, elected officials, and small business owners. Frequent cultural, religious and administrative tribal events have allowed newer generations of Pee Dee to remain connected to their identity and culture, while simultaneously allowing them to pursue an array of new opportunities.

**Pee Dee History:**

Both from a historical and modern perspective, the Pee Dee population has been heavily concentrated in the northeastern part of South Carolina. In fact, the cultural and political significance of the Pee Dee people to the area is why Europeans named the Pee Dee River and Pee Dee region of South Carolina after the tribe.

Pee Dee culture and society was politically complex. Mounds were built for the elite, elaborate ceremonial practices were observed and a large amount of territory was presided over. In both northern South Carolina and southern North Carolina, the clearest expression of South Appalachian Mississippian tradition is the Pee Dee culture. The most obvious archaeological site relating to the Pee Dee people is the Town Creek Mound, located on the Little River in Montgomery County, North Carolina.

Busk was an extremely important Pee Dee ceremony performed at Town Creek. In fact, even to this day the Pee Dee still perform an annual Busk ceremony on the tribe's current land in South Carolina.

The Pee Dee participated in a widespread trade network that stretched from Georgia to South Carolina, Tennessee, and North Carolina. By 980 AD, the Pee Dee culture had developed as a distinct culture and thrived in the Pee Dee River region of present-day North and South Carolina during the pre-Columbian era.

Early discovered Pee Dee artifacts include copper-covered wooden ear spools and rattles, pendants, sheets of copper and a copper ax. Additionally, beads, gorgets and pins were fashioned from conch shells. As evident at modern day tribal events, many Pee Dee continue to include a significant amount of copper, traditional beading and conch shells in both their regalia and daily wear.

Around the middle of the 16th Century, the Pee Dee migrated from the Lower Pee Dee River of the Atlantic Coastal Plain to the Upper Pee Dee River of the Piedmont and remained there for about a century. This migration took place in an effort to avoid Spanish slave raids along South Carolina's coast.

In 1567, Spanish 'explorers' encountered the Pee Dee village of Vehidi, located along the Pee Dee River.

In 1711, the Tuscarora War broke out in North Carolina. A year later, the Pee Dee, allied with other tribes in the region, fought alongside the British against the Tuscarora. Pee Dee warriors served in British Captain John Bull's company, and the Pee Dee and British triumphed.

In 1715, English mapmakers recorded a Pee Dee village on the west bank of the Pee Dee River's central course. The Yamasee War began that same year. It lasted until 1717 and greatly diminished the Pee Dees power and population. However, many survivors found refuge with the fellow Siouan-speaking Catawba, while others moved closer to English settlements.

In 1737, the tribe petitioned the colony of South Carolina for a tract of land to live upon. A year later, the Pee Dee were moved onto a 100-acre tract of land located in what is now Dorchester County, South Carolina, along the Edisto River.

In 1744, the Pee Dee attacked and killed several Catawba. In retaliation, the Catawba drove many of the Pee Dee further towards English settlements. In 1746, the Pee Dee are mentioned as a small tribe having a tense relationship with the Catawba. However, Governor Glen of South Carolina intervened in order to prevent further bloodshed.

In 1751, at an inter-tribal conference in Albany, New York, the Pee Dee were recorded as being a small tribe predominately living near English settlements.

In 1752, the Catawba persuaded several Pee Dee to join their tribe. Additionally, on May 9, 1755, South Carolina Governor John Glen spoke to Catawba leader King Haigler to inform him that South Carolina had convinced "some of the Pee Dee" to join the Catawba. Later that year, it was recorded that several Cherokee and Natchez killed multiple Pee Dee living near English settlements.

In 1808, it was documented that white settlers living in South Carolina remembered residing near numerous Pee Dee, who were still living in their formerly controlled territories.

Throughout the centuries, the tribe has determinedly managed to maintain a continual presence in the area. Through much of the 19th and 20th Centuries, most of the Pee Dee worked as sharecroppers for white landowners that came to own the very land the tribe had once controlled. In a continued effort to suppress the rights of the Pee Dee people, each Election Day white landowners would load every male Pee Dee sharecropper of voting age in the back of a large horse drawn wagon that would take them to the nearest polling site. The white landowners would instruct the Pee Dee men on who to vote for. If a Pee Dee man decided to vote differently, he and his entire family were ejected from the land they farmed. Blatant political, economic, judicial and cultural oppression was a constant part of everyday life during the 19th and 20th Centuries. Many of the ramifications resulting from these oppressive actions can still be felt quite profoundly throughout Pee Dee society today.

Due to segregation and Jim Crow laws, the Sardis Indian School was founded in 1885 for Pee Dee children in Dillon County. Additionally, the Leland Grove School for Indians was founded in 1934 for Pee Dee and Lumbee children living in the area. It continued to operate until 1976, shortly after South Carolina's public schools were desegregated. On the few occasions in which Pee Dee children were allowed to attend "white schools", they were forced to sit at the back of the classroom. Only after all of the white students had been served lunch were the Pee Dee students served. Additionally, the Pee Dee students had to stay in the cafeteria after lunch and clean up while the white students went back to class.

In 1892, the Pee Dee Chapel Baptist Church was founded. It, along with a few other Indian churches allowed the Pee Dee to continue holding cultural events and gatherings outside of the public eye. Under the stewardship of Pee Dee elders, churches played a significant role in not only keeping tribal members connected with one another, but also allowed tribal members to maintain their Pee Dee identity. A great many tribal members are buried at the Pee Dee Chapel Baptist Church. To this day, the Pee Dee Chapel Baptist Church still holds two weekly sermons.