**The Waccamaw Indian People**

The Waccamaw Indian People of Conway, South Carolina, are the descendants of a group of people who lived and farmed in the area of South Carolina now known as Dog Bluff. Although the inhabitants of the Dimery settlement conducted business and existed as a separate community throughout the years, it wasn’t until 1992 that a formal organization was formed to protect the history and traditions of our people.  
  
The tribe was chartered as a non-profit organization in October of 1992, with the initial organizational meeting held on October 17, 1992. At this meeting, the original founders relinquished all control to the tribal council. The word “Chicora” was added in January 1993 by a majority vote of the governing council. This addition was intended to define the area of our people and to establish the boundaries of the Waccamaw. In January of 2002, the tribal community voted to eliminate the term “Chicora” from its name in order to avoid confusion with another group in the area using the word to denote their people.

**THE ANCIENT WACCAMAW**

The ancient Waccamaw were river dwellers who lived along the Waccamaw River covering an area that reached from North Carolina’s Lake Waccamaw to Winyah Bay near Georgetown, South Carolina. If the conclusions of Dr. John R. Swanton are correct, the Waccamaw People may have been one of the first mainland groups of Natives visited by the Europeans. The Spanish, under Francisco Gordillo and Pedro de Quexos (ca. 1521), took several ships loaded with Indian people and carried them off into slavery. One of those enslaved was a man who became known as “Francisco de Chicora.” Francisco identified more than twenty tribes who lived in this area. The greatest importance, however, seems to attach to “Chicora” and “Duhare,” the northern most provinces on Francisco’s list. Considering Dr. Swanton’s findings, it appears that these nations were the Waccamaw and the Cape Fear respectively.  
  
The Waccamaw were adept at the domestication of animals, including deer. They manufactured cheese from does’ milk. Additionally, they kept a variety of chickens, ducks, geese, and other domestic fowl. There were gardens to tend, both private and communal. Everyone worked in the community garden, including the chiefs, who were seen planting and gathering the crops along with their tribe. Among their crops were corn, pumpkins, kidney beans, lima beans, squash, melons, gourds and tobacco.  
  
European contact nearly wiped out the Waccamaw. Because we had no defense for the diseases they brought, our people died by the hundreds. When the Europeans needed labor, our people were forced into slavery. The king ordered all owners to free their Indian slaves (ca. 1752). The loss of their slaves, however, would have devastated the plantations, and so the owners simply tried to turn us Black. After the Emancipation Proclamation, thousands of Indians walked off the cotton fields along with the Blacks.

**POLITICAL IMPLICATIONS**

The relationship between the Indian people and the local and federal governments has always been an adversarial one. Fear of land lawsuits (and recently gambling) has caused many elected officials to deny our existence. The federal and state laws were amended to guarantee Blacks the same freedoms as Whites. This has never been done for Indians. We are the only race in this country that must prove who we are, and we are the most regulated people in America today! We were not even allowed to become citizens until 1924, and worse still, Indian graveyards were not protected until 1987.  
  
The omission of protection allows those who see our heritage as a money-making opportunity to take advantage of us. Recently in Virginia there was a market that sold Indian artifacts, and in one case had a pair of moccasins on display and for sale with the skeletal feet still inside! In another case a person bought a graveyard and bulldozed 36 of 40 tombstones before our efforts with local media caused him to stop.  
  
The leadership of the Waccamaw has been instrumental in achieving some level of equality for Natives in this country and especially in the state of South Carolina. Our Chief, Harold D. Hatcher, worked to address the issues that separated Indians from those of the general populace and from each other. In 1994, working with President Bill Clinton and the White House staff, he was able to achieve several concessions from the United States government, which brought a more nearly level playing field to American Indians across the country.  
  
In the state of South Carolina, our leaders have worked with Governors Campbell, Beasley, Hodges, and Sanford in addressing state level inequities. In July 2003, the state enacted a bill which was signed by Governor Sanford allowing the state’s American Indians the same protections that had been afforded to Blacks as early as 1976. However, the job is not done. Still today, there are over 600 sets of human remains stored on shelves in the state’s museums. The Waccamaw, among other tribes and Native American groups in our state, are spearheading efforts to repatriate our ancestors’ remains, thereby providing for them the dignity they deserve in their eternal rest.

**THE WACCAMAW TODAY**

The Waccamaw today are a proud people. We are striving to retain what remains of our history, arts, and crafts, and to regain the heritage afforded us by our ancestors. We are the first tribe in the State of South Carolina to obtain official recognition from the South Carolina Office of Vital Statistics. Additionally, the Waccamaw gained approval from the Governor’s Minority Affairs Ad Hoc Committee on Indian Recognition as an Indian Tribe as defined in the State of South Carolina.  
  
At the South Carolina Commission of Minority Affairs meeting on February 17, 2005, the Waccamaw Indian People made history by becoming the first of two state recognized tribes in the history of the state of South Carolina.