



The Sappony Tribe



In the northern reaches of North Carolina's central Piedmont region, there is a well-established and thriving Native American community called the Sappony tribe, one of the three bands of Saponi Indians in the state.

Location

Known to 17th century European explorers and traders by their traditional name of **Monassukapanough** and in the 20th century as the Indians of Person County, today the **Sappony tribe** is based in its ancestral homeland along the North Carolina-Virginia border. There are over 800 families represented in the nation, although only about half of them actually live in the Halifax-Person region, in Virginia and North Carolina, respectively.

Food and Agriculture



In the beginning, the Sappony hunted deer and wild turkey before eventually settling in one area and taking up a more sedentary agricultural lifestyle. For years, tobacco was the main crop along with corn, wheat, beans, and squash.

Language

The Sappony language is no longer spoken and, therefore, has been lost. Linguists today are working to determine whether the language was based on one of two language families. If the language was based on the coastal Algonquian language family, the tribe's ties to the Lost Colony may be possible. On the other hand, if the language was based on Siouan, this would put their origins inland.

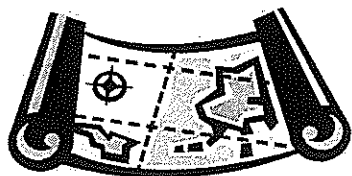
History

One of the most interesting stories surrounding the Sappony tribe is a possible connection to the so-called Lost Colony, a British colony that was mysteriously abandoned between 1587 and 1590. Some people believe that, because the British inhabitants in the **Roanoke Island colony** could not support themselves without aide from England, the colonists eventually went to live with local Native Americans.

It has also been suggested that the Native Americans attacked and killed all the colonists, though, again, the colonists were never found.

However, there is a tradition that says the Sappony tribe of today is descended from the natives who met the members of the Lost Colony when they first arrived.

What is even more interesting is that it has been suggested that the colonists may have merged with the Sappony, as many Sappony have physical features more common with Europeans than with Native Americans (hair color, for example). In addition, some of the tribe's families have names that nearly match the names of the lost colonists.



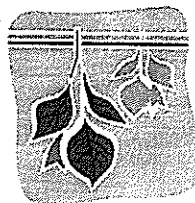
The first record of European contact with the Sappony people came between 1607 and 1612 when they were noted on a map made by English colonist John Smith.

Relations between the Sappony and the English colonists seem to have been relatively peaceful through the years. The two groups acted as beneficial trade partners and some Sappony children attended a British-run school for Indians in the Piedmont.

In 1676, the Sappony people and other Native peoples were caught in the middle of a colonial conflict known as Bacon's Rebellion. Following the rebellion, the colonial government of Virginia wanted to renew friendships with Native peoples. In 1677, the Sappony signed the Treaty of Middle Plantation and were granted homeland and protection in exchange for keeping peace with the English and paying a tribute in skins and furs.

Still feeling uneasy about the conflict, the Sappony tribe eventually disbanded when many members relocated to the north and merged with the mighty Iroquois nation in present day New York. Other Sappony people migrated south to join the Catawba nation in South Carolina.

Despite the tribe fractionizing, enough Sappony remained in their homeland to carry on the community's traditional lifestyle. Those who stayed and made the area their home now known as the High Plains Community, grew tobacco, corn, and wheat crops, allowing the community to maintain itself and be self-reliant.





During the Revolutionary War, the Sappony fought against the British. They also fought on the side of the United States during the War of 1812, and did so in each subsequent war the United States was involved.

In 1830, the High Plains Indian Church was founded, making it the first Native American church. In the late 1880s, the first Native American school, the High Plains Indian School, was established. In 1911, the Sappony received tribal recognition from the State of North Carolina as the Indians of Person County. This allowed the tribe to receive state funding for education.

In 1997, the Sappony gained a seat on the North Carolina Commission for Indian Affairs. In 2003, the tribe received authorization from the state of North Carolina to officially change its name to Sappony.

Sappony Tribal Government

The Sappony have a Tribal Council that meets to make policies for the tribe. Each of the seven Sappony families selects a representative, who then speaks for that family in the Council. The elected leaders of the Council are the Tribal Chair, Tribal Chief, and an executive director. Their responsibilities are to lead the council and to make sure policies are carried out. There is also a Tribal treasurer and committees that help organize funding for tribal events and initiatives.



The Tribal Insignia consists of (from top to bottom) seven stars that represent faith; three arrowheads that represent the tribe itself; an ear of corn, a tobacco leaf, and a sprig of wheat that represent the tribe's three main crops; and seven feathers representing the tribe's seven families.

Sappony Tribe Today

While the Sappony people once made a living by farming, sharecropping tobacco, and working in sawmills, today they work in such areas as education, law enforcement, business, medicine, and technology.

Today the Person County Museum of History features a Native American Room which houses documents, maps, photos, and drawings that represent over 400 years of Sappony history. Each year the tribe holds a Labor Day homecoming, a spring festival, and the Sappony Heritage and Youth Camp to celebrate and pass on Sappony culture and traditions.

The Sappony Tribe Review

Answer the following:

1. The traditional name of the Sappony tribe was _____.
2. The Sappony tribe is one of the _____ bands of _____ Indians in the state of North Carolina.
 - a. three, Saponi
 - b. three, Cherokee
 - c. four, Saponi
 - d. two, Cherokee
3. Historians believe that the Sappony tribe has a connection with the Lost Colony of Roanoke Island. Using the information in the Sappony article, why was this British colony considered lost?
4. In 1676, the Sappony people were caught in the middle of a _____ conflict known as _____.
 - a. colonial, Ham's, Revolt
 - b. tribal, Bacon's, Rebellion
 - c. colonial, Bacon's, Rebellion
 - d. tribal, Ham's, Revolt
5. Why did the Sappony tribe disband in the late 1600s?
6. The Sappony tribal homeland is also known as the _____ Community.
7. True or false: The main crops of the Sappony tribe were tobacco, corn, wheat, beans, squash, and potatoes.
8. In what year did the Sappony tribe receive recognition from the State of North Carolina?
9. In 2003, the tribe officially changed its name from the _____ of _____ to Sappony.
10. What events are held each year to pass on Sappony culture and traditions?