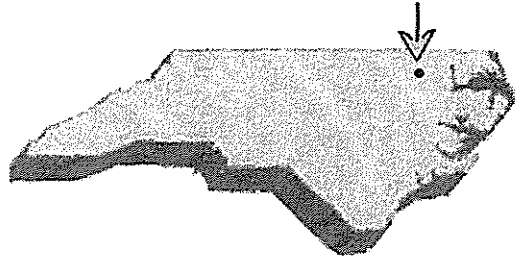


The Meherrin Tribe: *People of the Muddy Water*

Location

The headquarters of the Meherrin tribe is located in the northeast part of the state, near the mouth of the Meherrin River in Winton, Hertford County. Originally, the tribe resided near the Virginia-North Carolina border.



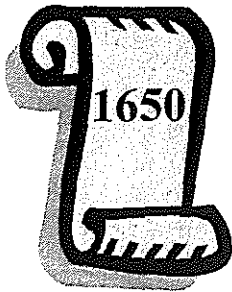
The tribe's original reservation was established in 1729 on an area of over 1.5 acres near what is now Parker's Ferry, North Carolina. A branch of the Albemarle Sound and other bodies of water surround the region.

Later, to escape from diseases and from having their land taken over by white settlers, many of the Meherrin people moved to the swamplier, more isolated areas of the county.

Today most members of the Meherrin tribe live in and around Winton, within about 30 miles from the original reservation.

History

The Meherrin Indians first came to northeastern North Carolina hundreds of years ago, along with several other tribes including the Chowan and Tuscarora. They were mainly a sedentary agricultural tribe.



The first European contact with the Meherrin occurred around 1650, when an Englishman by the name of Edward Bland wrote the first document mentioning the existence of the tribe. By 1670, many Indians had died from a smallpox epidemic.

A combination of the spread of deadly diseases and failed treaties with the newcomers forced the Meherrin to migrate south into the area that is now Hertford County, North Carolina.

Around 1720, the Susquehanna Indians, settled with the Meherrin tribe because of a peace agreement with another tribe in Pennsylvania, the Conestoga Indians.

The tribe moved back and forth along the Meherrin River until a 1929 treaty granted them reservation lands.

Due to racism and policies that limited the rights of Indians in the United States, the Meherrin Indians eventually disbanded as a tribe and became individual landowners and farmers. Most hid their identities due to the racist mood of the country.

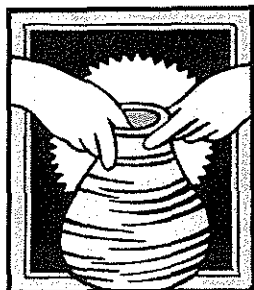
The tribe attempted to reorganize many times during the 1800s and early 1900s. Because of racial tensions in the South, many Meherrin people most likely went north with the Tuscarora Indians. The tribe was not able to reorganize until 1975 with the help of a local minister, Reverend Rueben R. Lewis.

In 1977, the Meherrin was incorporated as a nonprofit organization. With this, the positions of chief, tribal chairman, treasurer, secretary, and tribal council were established. Once incorporated, the organization's first order of business was to enroll members of the tribe, correct members' birth certificates, and enhance the Meherrin tribe's standing among the North Carolina Native American community.

In 1986, the state of North Carolina gave the Meherrin people official recognition as a tribe. The Meherrin people are still working to gain federal status as a tribe. The tribe has one of the smallest areas for a reservation, both in North Carolina as well as in the United States. Obtaining federal recognition would help the Meherrin gain more land.



Culture



To keep their traditions alive, the Meherrin tribe holds a powwow every October. During the powwow, there are dance and drum competitions and demonstrations of pottery-making, jewelry-making, beading, basket-making, and dancing. During the powwow, the Meherrin museum is open to the public.

In the spring, the tribe holds a cultural festival, during which many Meherrin members take time out to teach the other people about their culture and to display their pottery, beads, and dances.



Tribe members also meet on Thanksgiving and Christmas to spend time with their families, or just have a family day.

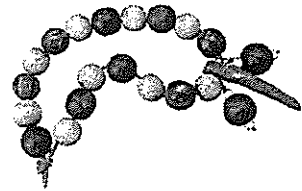
Language

Like the Cherokee, the Tuscarora, and other tribes, the Meherrin language was part of the Iroquoian family. The Iroquoian languages are also spread northward through New York and Canada, as in the Iroquoian Confederacy. It is believed that the Meherrin dialect was much like that of the Tuscarora Indians.

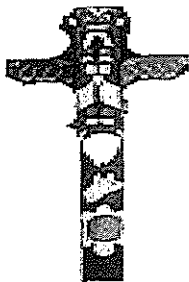
The name Meherrin means "people of the muddy water". Because it was not written down, the language of the Meherrin Indians became extinct over time. Members of the Meherrin tribe speak English as their first language.

Art

Meherrin artists and craftspeople create traditional pottery, baskets, jewelry, and beadwork. Some craftspeople are also skilled at making wampum. Many artists demonstrate their artistic knowledge by visiting school children.



The Meherrin Tribe Today



Currently, there are over 800 enrolled members of the Meherrin tribe. This may seem small, but in the past, the Meherrin never had more than 600 people in their tribe.

The tribe is governed by a Tribal Chief and a seven-member Tribal Council who are elected by tribe members. The chief and council members each hold four-year terms.

Several members of the tribe commute each day to work in the shipyards of Virginia. Other tribe members work in the fields of administration, education, agriculture, health care, and medicine.

To help illustrate the history and culture of the Meherrin, the tribe is currently constructing a permanent recreation of a traditional Meherrin village in the town of Winton.



The Meherrin Tribe Review

Answer the following:

1. The Meherrin tribe's original reservation was located near the _____ of the _____ River.
 - a. mouth, Potomac
 - b. edge, Meherrin
 - c. mouth, Yadkin
 - d. mouth, Meherrin
2. Research the Meherrin River. Write a few sentences about its location (include its origin), what cities or states the river flows through and any other information of interest.
3. True or false: The current Meherrin reservation was established in 1726 on over 15 acres of land.
4. True or false: Edward Bland was the first to document the existence of the Meherrin tribe.
5. A combination of spreading _____ and failed _____ with settlers forced the Meherrin people to migrate south into present day _____ County, North Carolina.
6. Why did the Meherrin people disband their tribe and hide their identities?
7. Who was the man who lead the Meherrin reorganization as a tribe?
8. What event does the tribe hold every October?
9. What kind of language did the Meherrin people originally speak?
10. True or false: The Meherrin tribe has always been a state-recognized tribe.