

Using Native American History Sources

When the first Virginia Company adventurers arrived in Virginia, they found it already inhabited by several different Native American groups. Throughout the Tidewater area, the Algonquian-speaking tribes were confederated under the Powhatans. The confederated tribes included the Accomac, Appamattuck, Arrohatock, Chesapeake, Chiskiack, Kecoughtan, Mattaponi, Nansemond, Pamunkey, Paspahegh, Piankatank, Rappahannock, and Quiyoughcohannock. The Chickahominy was also a Tidewater Algonquian tribe, but it intermittently struggled to reject the authority of the Powhatans. For more information on the Indians the Jamestown colonists encountered, consult James Axtell, *The Rise and Fall of the Powhatan Empire: Indians that in Seventeenth-Century Virginia* (1995), and Helen C. Rountree, *The Powhatan Indians of Virginia: Their Traditional Culture* (1989), *Pocahontas's People: the Powhatan Indians of Virginia Through Four Centuries* (1990), and *Powhatan Foreign Relations, 1500–1722* (1993).

The Monacans and Mannahoacs lived at and beyond the fall line and spoke Siouian languages. In the southeastern coastal plain lived the Nottoways and the Meherrins, members of the Iroquoian language groups, as were the Massawomecks, who lived north of the Potomac River. By 1658 reservations had been allotted to the Powhatan tribes, but in the next two centuries most of the tribes were divested of their reservations and thus of their Indian identity as perceived by white society.

Further west, across the Blue Ridge and the Appalachians, lived the Cherokees to the south and the Shawnee and Iroquois to the north. The Valley of Virginia was not densely populated in the seventeenth and early-eighteenth centuries, but was used constantly as the great trading and warrior path between the southern and northern Indian tribal groups, and served as neutral hunting grounds. The Tidewater's Native American population was approximately fifteen thousand at the time of the landing at Cape Henry.

Almost no records survive of the early contacts between the English and the Native Americans other than the journals and histories penned by some of the early adventurers, notably John Smith and William Strachey. Written from the English perspective, these accounts cannot be relied on exclusively to present an accurate account of Anglo-Indian relations. Many of the early and most authoritative records are not extant in manuscript form, but some survive in printed sources, including the journals of the royal governors' councils: *Journals of the House of Burgesses* (1659–1776), *Calendar of Virginia State Papers* (1652–1869), *Henings' Statutes* (1619–1750), and *Acts of Assembly* (1776–present). For more on the contest of cultures in the colonies, see James Axtell, *The European and the Indian: Essays in the Ethnohistory of Colonial North America* (1981) and *Beyond 1492: Encounters in Colonial North America* (1992).

Thousands of references documenting the affairs of Virginia's Native Americans through three centuries survive and are available for research at the Library of Virginia. Overall, they illustrate the discrimination, to a greater or lesser degree, that was the social and legal inheritance of Virginia's Native Americans from contact to the present century, and the Native Americans' continuing attempts to manipulate the boundaries that white society set for them.

There is no central collection of all materials on Virginia's Indians, nor is there one comprehensive index to the Library's holdings. Records are not arranged by tribal affiliation. A variety of sources may be found in many different collections, such as printed materials, microfilm, and original manuscripts. A selected bibliography of printed sources on Native Americans is available from Library Reference. The online Archives and Manuscripts Catalog may be searched with the general keyword "Indian." For additional information on holdings, see "Resources on Native Americans at the Library of Virginia," a topical bibliography available in the West Reading Room and on the Library's Web site. Specific collections are described in a reference binder located in the Archives Research Room.

Virginia Colonial Records Project

Many extant early manuscripts are held in repositories in Great Britain, particularly in the Public Record Office, including records of the Colonial Office, the Admiralty, and the Board of Trade. The staff of the Colonial Records Project located and surveyed these documents. A searchable database and digital images of the survey reports are on the Library's Web site. Approximately two-thirds of the original documents have been microfilmed and are available in the West Reading Room and through interlibrary loan. Perhaps the most significant Native American document is the 1677 Treaty of Middle Plantation, signed by Virginia's governor on behalf of the British government and by several Indian chieftains. This treaty still directs Virginia's official relationship with the reservation tribes. The original is in Great Britain, but a microfilmed copy is available at the Library of Virginia on the Virginia Colonial Records Project Reel 93 (Survey Report 00661, PRO Class C.O. 1/40, folios 202–212). Other documents include discussions on trade with the Indians, reports from missionaries, letters from officials, and petitions from Native Americans to their British overlords. For additional information, see Research Note 7.

Colonial Papers

This rich and diverse collection contains varied materials relating to Native Americans. Seventeenth-century records most often relate to the Algonquian tribes of the Tidewater. The westward expansion of English settlement in the mid-eighteenth century increased the number of records relating to the tribes of the Blue Ridge and beyond the Appalachians. Among the many records in this collection are the 1706 petition of the Pamunkeys to the governor, and two depositions from 1754 concerning Indian depredations in Augusta County. Each record is now separately cataloged as a subject heading and is searchable in the online Archives and Manuscripts Catalog. The records are on miscellaneous microfilm reels 609–612.

Local Records

Information on Native Americans can also be mined from county and municipal records. Although they lived throughout the Tidewater area in 1607, the Powhatan tribes were forbidden by a 1646 treaty to live between the James and York rivers, and were temporarily guaranteed complete freedom to dwell between the Rappahannock and the York rivers on the Middle Peninsula. The counties of the Middle Peninsula, the Northern Neck, and the Eastern Shore are the richest sources of early records. Most of the reservations were located in those counties, and even when the majority of the tribes lost their lands, members often stayed in the area. Most of the Middle Peninsula counties have suffered record losses, but the Northern Neck and some of the Southside counties are valuable areas for research. The records of Amherst, Augusta, and Rockbridge counties also provide many references to Native American life.

Within the local records are numerous references to Native Americans, located most often in the order and minute books of the county court. Deed and will books occasionally contain related materials. The order books of Lancaster, Northumberland, and Old Rappahannock counties in the Northern Neck, and Southampton and Norfolk counties in the Southside, are particularly useful, as are the order books for Northampton County on the Eastern Shore. These are available on microfilm at the Library of Virginia and through interlibrary loan. See the Library's Web site for a complete listing of local records on microfilm. Some records from the lost records counties of King William (site of the two remaining reservations) and King and Queen have been transcribed, printed, and microfilmed.

Legislative Petitions

Since before the American Revolution, Virginians have petitioned the legislature for assistance, appointments, and governmental action. Petitions are filed alphabetically by county and then chronologically. Because they had been sent to Richmond, petitions survive even for lost record counties. Researchers may examine petitions for counties where Native Americans were concentrated, including Charles City County, James City County, King William County, and the Northern Neck counties. Among the notable are the petition initiated by Thomas Gregory, of King William, in 1843, requesting the sale of both remaining reservations, and a counterpetition by the Pamunkey tribe. The petitions are on microfilm and a searchable database is available on the Library's Web site.

State Records

Many references to Native Americans appear in the Executive Papers, particularly in the Office of the Governor, Letters Received, 1776–1906, and Letters Received and Sent, 1906–1998. Copies of the letters received by the governor for the period 29 June 1776–30 November 1784 are available on the Library of Virginia Web site and are fully searchable. They are also on microfilm and available from interlibrary loan. Other governors' papers are also available on microfilm or in original form. Many have been cataloged and have guides available in the online Archives and Manuscripts Catalog.

The state records collection also contains twentieth-century files from Virginia's two reservation Indian schools in the Virginia Department of Education Collection. Native Americans served in the First World War and are included in the Virginia War History Commission questionnaires, available on microfilm and on the Library's Web site. Other series of state records, such as those of the Auditor of Public Accounts, may also prove useful in researching Native Americans.

Census Records

Surviving Virginia census schedules begin in 1810 and are available through 1930 at the time of this printing. The term Indian (Native American) first appears in 1870 as a separate category for race. In the 1900 and 1910 census of King William County, Indians living on the two reservations were counted separately as Indians, rather than under the usual "people of color" designation. The list is found at the end of the "West Point District" section in each census. Indian students at Hampton Institute were likewise listed in the census with their tribal affiliations.

Personal Papers

Personal Papers collections include a variety of material relating to Native Americans, including reminiscences of the Virginia frontier during the French and Indian War, mid-twentieth-century work on Native American genealogy, and tribal organization papers from the 1980s. The James Coates Papers (Accession 31577) contain copies of many of the letters and documents generated by Bureau of Vital Statistics registrar Walter A. Plecker in his antimiscegenation campaign. Researchers can access these collections through the Archives and Manuscripts Catalog by searching the general keyword "Indian." For additional information on holdings, see "Resources on Native Americans at the Library of Virginia," a topical bibliography. Specific collections are described in a reference binder located in the Archives Research Room.

Vertical File

Archivists at the Library of Virginia have collected newspaper and journal references and miscellaneous documents on Virginia's Native Americans throughout the twentieth century. These vertical files are diverse, containing letters to Governor Colgate Darden from residents of the Pamunkey and Mattaponi reservations, handwritten copies of the Reservation Act of 1658, and early-twentieth-century requests for contributions to an Indian "home for boys" on the East Coast. Check with staff in the Archives Research Room to view these eclectic reference files.

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