



LIBRARY OF VIRGINIA

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***Indigenous Perspectives*, a new exhibition at the Library of Virginia, will highlight Virginia's Indigenous history and reflections from tribal citizens**

RICHMOND, VIRGINIA – A new, free multimedia exhibition at the Library of Virginia will highlight the commonwealth's Indigenous history and how the tribes remain a vital part of Virginia's culture today. *Indigenous Perspectives*, which runs Dec. 5, 2023, through Aug. 17, 2024, will explore voices and experiences of Virginia's tribal communities, as well as related items from the Library's collections.

The exhibition features excerpts from video interviews with citizens of Virginia's tribes, archival records from the Library's collections, and objects contributed by the tribes — such as eel pots, regalia and quilts — that reflect their traditions and culture. Indigenous peoples have traditionally been introduced in Virginia history at the point of contact with European colonists, and subsequently they disappear, leading to assumptions that they became extinct or played no further role. Through this exhibition, their voices and experiences will be at the center of an examination of the Library's holdings, which include maps, treaties, land records and other governing documents.

"We have a generation coming up starting to show interest in the background, where we came from. [They] want to learn the history," said Chief Gerald Stewart of the Chickahominy, Eastern Division.

Many historic items in the Library's collections document the colonization, land dispossession and sometimes eradication of Indigenous peoples. However, Library staff learned from tribal leaders and citizens that these same records contained the history of the tribes if one read between the lines.

"Indigenous peoples pass on their history through oral tradition, so there are no written records," said Chief Lynette Allston of the Nottoway Indian Tribe of Virginia. "So, if we can take a European record and analyze it from a different perspective, we can make sense of our story. And we can adjust [it] to give it our perspective."

The tribes and the Library's staff collaboratively selected examples of archival records from the Library's holdings for inclusion in the exhibition. Tribal citizens shared how they have reinterpreted these materials and issues of importance to them, such as the environment, what it means to be a sovereign nation, and what they hope for the future.

“We have coined a term that clearly describes what we’re doing, and we are re-matriating our Mother Earth, because that was the core of our spiritual beliefs,” said Chief Anne G. Richardson of the Rappahannock Indian Tribe. “And that’s the reason that place is so important to us.”

Work to develop the exhibition began in 2022, when the Library embarked on an ambitious initiative to develop an ongoing partnership with the 11 federally and state-recognized tribes in Virginia.

“As the official record keeper for Virginia, the Library is committed to collecting and sharing the stories of Virginia’s first people,” said Librarian of Virginia Sandra G. Treadway. “This exhibition reflects our ongoing effort to preserve Virginia Indian history and to foster a deeper understanding of that history by incorporating the oral traditions as well as the lived experiences of Indigenous Virginians today.”

Indigenous Perspectives is presented by Amazon, with additional support from the Community Foundation for a greater Richmond, Virginia Humanities, and the Anne Carter Robins and Walter R. Robins Jr. Foundation. The Library of Virginia’s exhibition program is also supported by individual donors through the Library of Virginia Foundation.

A series of Library of Virginia events and programs related to the exhibition will be announced soon.

Related images are available here:

<https://www.dropbox.com/sh/auriato0de15opr/AABCprdsr6RRfk9SomWNvymva?dl=0>

ABOUT THE LIBRARY OF VIRGINIA

The Library of Virginia is the state’s oldest institution dedicated to the preservation of Virginia’s history and culture. Our online offerings attract nearly 4 million website visits per year, and our resources, exhibitions and events bring in nearly 100,000 visitors each year. The Library’s collections, containing more than 130 million items, document and illustrate the lives of both famous Virginians and ordinary citizens. The Library is located in downtown Richmond near Capitol Square at 800 East Broad Street, Richmond, VA 23219. Learn more at www.lva.virginia.gov.

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