

Powhatan Renape Nation

The Nations of the Powhatan Confederation had treaties with the English as early as 1614.

They first met the Europeans in the 1500's, and by the end of the 1600's, the Powhatan population was halved by disease. Many of the early survivors were further decimated by war and starvation; yet, against all odds the Renape (meaning human beings) had survived.



Early History

It is estimated, that there were about 14,000–21,000 Powhatan people in eastern Virginia, when the English colonized Jamestown in 1607.

By the mid-17th century, the leaders of the colony were desperate for labor to develop the land. Almost half of the English and European immigrants arrived as indentured servants. As settlement continued, the colonists imported growing numbers of enslaved Africans for labor and by 1676 the colony had enslaved Indians for control.

By 1700, the colonies had about 6,000 black slaves, one-twelfth of the population. It was common for black slaves to escape and join the surrounding Powhatan; some white servants were also noted to have joined the Indians. Africans and whites worked and lived together; some natives also intermarried with them.

In 1691, the House of Burgesses abolished Indian slavery; however, many Powhatan were held in servitude well into the 18th century.

Powhatan Renape Nation Today The forefathers of New Jersey's Powhatan Renape community were mostly Rappahannocks from Virginia and Nanticokes from Delaware; they have also been known as Virginia Algonquians.

Although they had taken tremendous losses in culture as the result of the racist society which surrounded them, they were able to retain their identity. They were quiet, put down deep roots, brought in new members, and consolidated their community. At one point, almost 90% of the population of Morrisville were Powhatan Renape people, some 42 homes.

In 1982 the Powhatan Renape Nation negotiated an agreement with the State of New Jersey to take over 350 acres of state-owned land in the town of Westampton. The property was recognized by the State of New Jersey and the general public as the Rankokus Indian Reservation. The Nation's administrative Center was located here to manage its community, educational, cultural, social and other programs and services.

Annual events such as the Juried American Indian Arts Festival, the largest of its kind east of the Mississippi River, were held at the Reservation. As such, the Reservation served as a focal point not only of the Powhatan Renape Nation, but for American Indians` of other nations located in the region.

After the Powhatan Chief, Chief Roy Crazy Horse, passed away in 2004, the economy and interest in events at the reservation slowed down. It became difficult for the tribe to maintain the property, and in 2008 when the lease expired, the DEP eventually took back control.

It was an extremely difficult time for the members of the tribe, as they had to pack up all of their personal property at the museum and say goodbye to the place where they could practice their ceremonies as a group. The most important thing the tribe wants to keep alive is their history and rituals, and they know that this can still be accomplished if they teach the future generations.

Beginning in the late 19th century, individual people identifying collectively as the Powhatan Renape Nation settled in a tiny subdivision known as Morrisville and Delair, located in Pennsauken Township, New Jersey.

Pocahontas Myth

The daughter named Matoaka, of the Chief Powhatan, Wahunsenacawh, had the nickname Pocahontas. She was taken prisoner at age 17.

and held hostage in Jamestown for a year until abiding to conditions set by the country. A condition of her release was to marry Thomas Rolfe, a widower and she was taken to England to be used in their propaganda campaign to support the colony. She passed away at the age of 21 before returning to the colonies. After the death of Chief Powhatan, the people of Smith and Rolfe turned upon the people who had shared their resources with them and had shown them friendship. During Pocahontas' generation, Powhatan's people were decimated and dispersed and their lands were taken over. A clear pattern had been set which would soon spread across the American continent. Disney repeated the myth most likely started by John Smith himself of Matoaka loving and saving him. Disney made the film over the protests of the related Powhatan tribes in Virginia and New Jersey.



Rev Roy E. Running Stream Bundy