



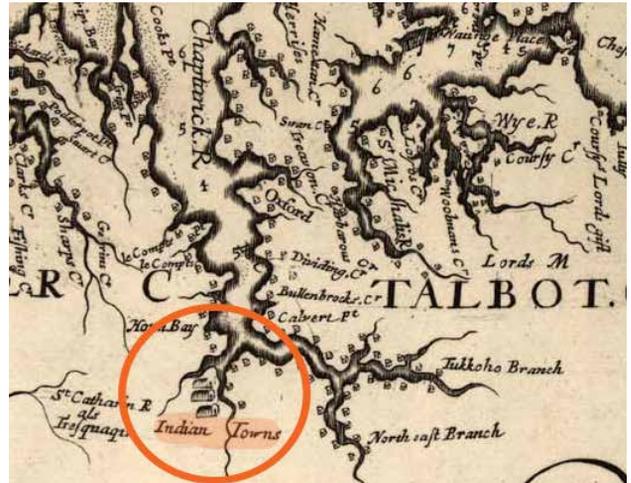
Native Americans of the Chesapeake Bay Today

When the English established Jamestown in 1607 and John Smith began his voyages of exploration around the Chesapeake Bay, he encountered many Native American communities. Most of these Native people belonged to three main tribal groups in the region: the Powhatan, the Piscataway, and the Nanticoke. Overseen by powerful chiefs, each group represented many smaller tribes.

These smaller tribes sought protection, first from warlike tribes from outside the Bay watershed, and later from the colonists—especially as Smith’s map, published in 1612, began to be used as a guide to settlement in the Chesapeake Bay. Along with his map, Smith printed a guide describing the plants, animals, rivers, and native people of the area, providing readers with amazing accounts of the Chesapeake in the early 1600’s.



Continuing their traditional fishing practices, the Pamunkey Tribe in Virginia used needles like this to make nets for catching sturgeon and shad in the 20th century. Image courtesy of the National Museum for the American Indian, Speck Collection.



By 1660, many of the Chesapeake’s native people were being moved into reservations, set apart from the colonial communities. The map detail above shows one such reservation on the Choptank River. Detail, Augustine Herman Map, 1670.

For the next hundred years, Europeans looking to start a new life in Virginia (and later Maryland) used this map and Smith’s guide to direct and inform them as they built new towns along the Bay and its many tidal rivers.

As more and more European settlers arrived on the Bay’s shores in the 1600s and tobacco took hold as a cash crop that made life in the New World profitable, the hunger for land often led to conflict between the Indians and the English. As these conflicts became more frequent and more violent, the settlers tried to remove or displace the native people.



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Some native people were driven off of their lands by force, while others were confined to reservations—lands set aside specifically for the tribes. Many Indians died from diseases that the Europeans had brought with them across the ocean. Still others decided to leave their homelands and join up with other tribes living in different regions.

But many Native people remained, and were able to maintain their communities and traditions, living in the same areas where their ancestors have lived for thousands of years.

Today, tens of thousands of people across the watershed identify as American Indian. There are eleven tribes recognized by the State of Virginia, for example, and many other tribal groups in Virginia, Maryland,



Native people in the Chesapeake continue to celebrate their heritage and traditions. Chicahominy Fall Festival and Powwow 2016. Image courtesy Tony Alter.

Delaware, and Pennsylvania that are still active and hold festivals to celebrate their culture and traditions.

To learn more about the tribes of the Chesapeake, then and now:

National Park Service, Chesapeake tribes today: <http://bit.ly/2OclUwp>

Library of Congress, Virginia's Early Relations with Native Americans: <http://bit.ly/2ObVG1Q>

Secretary of the Commonwealth, Virginia Indians: <http://bit.ly/2O7tCNd>



The formal ceremony as the United States and the State of Virginia recognize the Nansemond Tribe of Virginia in 2013. Image courtesy Tony Alter.