

POCOMOKE PARAMOUNTCY

The Pocomoke Nation and its Tributary Nations / Bands

A Non-profit 501c3 Entity Operating as The Pocomoke Indian Nation, Inc.

Website: www.pocomokeindiannation.org

email: quindocqua@aol.com

BACKGROUND

The Pocomoke Nation and its tributary nations / bands form the Pocomoke Paramountcy. Its traditional homelands and sphere of influence-historically included all of present-day Somerset County, Maryland, a northern part of Accomack County in Virginia, the southern parts of Worcester and Wicomico Counties in Maryland and a south-eastern part of Sussex County, Delaware. Its people were of the Algonquian language family and are regionally identified as a Northeastern Woodland group. The Pocomoke considered the Lenape as "grandfathers."

Giovanni da Verrazano in 1524 observed Native People on the Assateague peninsula. In 1649 Henry Norwood's ship became stranded off the Atlantic Coast. He and a party of men rowed ashore and requested assistance from the natives to reach the English settlement at Jamestown on the Western Shore. In 1608 Captain John Smith explored the eastern shore of the Chesapeake Bay and visited a palisaded town and King's house on the Wighco Flu, known today as the Pocomoke River. According to Capt. Smith's journal these People and their northern neighbor, the Nanticoke, spoke a similar dialect; while the Accomac and Accohannock People he visited earlier were politically and culturally associated with the Powhatan across the Chesapeake Bay and spoke a different dialect. Verrazano's observations, Norwood's detailed account and Smith's journals present an early view of Pocomoke's "cautious" hospitality to strangers and a window into its culture prior to English colonization.

ORGANIZATION

Early records document and identify the bands of the Pocomoke as Annemessee (an-ee-mess'-ee), Acquintica (ack-quin'-tee-cuh), Gingoteague (gin'-go-teeg'), Manonoakin, Manokin (man-o'-noakin'), (ma-no'-kin) Monie, Monye, or Manny (mo ni', muh-ni', man-ni'), Morumsco (mur-um'-sco), Nusswattux (nuss-wah'-tux) and Quandacquan (quan-donk'-quan).

Oral and written records locate Pocomoke towns, villages and places as Askiminokansen (ask-im-in-o-kahn'-sun), Arroccoco (air-o-coco'), Great Monie (great-muh-ni'), Manokin (ma-no'-kin) Parahockin (pear-uh-hock'-in), and Wighcocomoco (wi-co-co'-mo-co). (Above pronunciations are writer's suggestions)

GEOGRAPHY

The Pocomoke paramount chiefdom and territorial sphere of influence encompass Tangier and Smith Islands and the bayside islands southward of Hooper Straits, then to the confluence of the Nanticoke and Wicomico rivers, then northeasterly toward the Atlantic Ocean, and then southwardly encompassing bottomlands, forests, rivers, creeks, swamps, coastal bays and seaside islands. A map of the Pocomoke Paramountcy would cover all of present-day Somerset County and portions of Worcester, Wicomico, Sussex, and Accomack Counties.

LIFESTYLE

Pocomoke's spiritual and political leaders were revered by other nations along the Atlantic seaboard. As noted in church records and regional newspapers, Pocomoke descendants continue to heed a call to the ministry and public service. Pocomoke leadership was traditionally and hereditarily carried through the Pocomoke band. Subject tribes or bands delivered annual tribute of corn and other staples to the Pocomoke storehouses. Resources of clam, whelk, mussel and terrapin shells for making roanoke and peake, or wampum, and cypress trees for making dugout canoes, provided the Pocomoke with goods for trading with other nations to acquire articles of copper, stone and a red dye called puccoon. Wigwams were constructed with bent saplings and covered with cattail mats or thatch and bark. A leather flap was connected to a smoke hole and adjusted by a long pole. Sleeping platforms covered with mats were on either side of the center fire pit. Cooking and food preparation was usually done outside with the fire in the wigwam used mostly for comfort. Antlers and animal bones were fastened on the inside for hanging tools, bows and arrows, and other necessities. A palisaded Pocomoke town would have many wigwams, possibly longhouses, and a number of other structures for storage and

utilitarian uses. It was a common practice for clans to be separated, often on opposite sides of a creek or river. Upstreams of noble rivers would sometimes separate adjacent tribes and paramountcies. The climate varied from cold winter to wet spring, and from hot summer and to moderate autumn. This variance of seasons provided the Pocomoke with an annual bounty of corn, squash and beans, traditionally called “the three sisters.” Winter was a time for hunting and trapping game, springtime for planting and fishing, summer for gardening and making pots and clothing, and fall for harvesting, celebrations, and preparing for the coming winter. All took part in picking berries during the strawberry moon, gathering nuts in the woods and foraging for eggs in the marshes and along the creeks, bays and sounds. Inter-tribal activities were held during the fall after harvesting and storing of corn and keeps. These traditions have continued in rural Delmarva. Other traditions that survive are giving-away ceremonies including the “pot-latch” and honoring those who have passed including the “feast of the dead.” Another tradition that continues is the giving of names. The name given by the tribe’s name-giver would sometimes be kept secret, in keeping with the legend, to avoid evil intentions by spiritual enemies. Pocomoke People believe in an afterlife and show respect to all of nature by blessing all which is taken.

EUROPEAN CONTACT

Europeans began intensive trading with the Pocomoke by the early seventeenth century. Trading was mutually beneficial with furs and skins being traded for steel tools, blankets, and other commodities. Englishmen established plantations on the eastern shore of the Chesapeake Bay, necessitating the transportation of craftsmen and laborers to build and maintain their dwellings. This was followed by a huge introduction of Negro slaves for field labor on plantations. These traders, colonists, craftsmen, and laborers brought numerous diseases upon the Pocomoke who, lacking immunities, succumbed to their ill effects in large numbers. Virginia colonists, led by Colonel Edmund Scarborough, raided Pocomoke towns; harassing and slaughtering its men, women and children. Colonists patented land upon Pocomoke towns and on Pocomoke hunting and foraging areas. Some of the Virginia patents fell within lands and waters granted to Lord Baltimore under a 1632 royal grant. In 1668 the border was marked by an agreement between Phillip Calvert, Esq. and Colonel Edmund Scarborough. The marked boundary cut through Pocomoke territory; leaving some Pocomoke towns and their hunting and foraging areas on both sides of the boundary line. Following the 1668 agreement, Maryland created a commission to issue its own patents and appointed Edmund Scarborough as one of the commissioners. Virginia land patents that encroached on Maryland’s charter were honored or reissued as Maryland patents, likely an appeasement to Scarborough and his fellow Virginians.

Maryland continued the removal of the Pocomoke People; culminating with the majority of Pocomoke, along with some neighboring Assateague People, taking refuge in Askiminokansen, one of several reservations established by Maryland. The Askiminokansen reservation failed to provide refuge from injustices by the colonists; who had designs on the reserved land and an aspiration to carve out their own county. Maryland’s reluctance to address these injustices and undeterred invasions allowed Askiminokansen to be patented out and accordingly, the Pocomoke were dispossessed of this reserved land. Treaties between the Pocomoke and the Province of Maryland occurred from 1678 to 1742. The treaties were, in essence, a roadmap for removing the Pocomoke Nation from its homeland by congregating its people onto untenable reserves, disarming its men, applying English law and dominion, and interfering with its political and social intercourse with other nations. It can be rightly assumed that the treaties were designed to assuage the colonist’s fear of reprisals by the Pocomoke, and the dispossession of the Pocomoke People to their land and resources. A provision in the treaties for the Pocomoke’s “inviolable” right to hunt and fish was ignored and violated, even to this day. That “inviolable” right is diminished when put against the treaties as a whole. The articles stated in the treaties assume governance of Pocomoke territory, subject the Pocomoke to English law, and display an unequal basis of personal rights, Pocomoke versus English colonists; so how could the “inviolable right to hunting and fishing prevail? The answer fits a seventh century word: “*conundrum*.”

TODAY

The Pocomoke people survived as descendant communities without assimilation in its truest form. Its People continued their lifeways along the necks of land between rivers, creeks and coastal bays; land found less suitable for the colonists’ plantations. Family legends abound of marriages of Pocomokes to white and black persons; with only a few unions ever finding their way into official records and local church histories. Pocomoke descendants continue to proclaim their heritage and their recognition as a great nation.

All rights Reserved

Norris C. Howard SR, Paramountcy Chief

Revised 11-15-2023

“Inviolable”: never to be broken, infringed, or dishonored