

The Meherrin ^[1]

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By Claire Morrow and Duvonya Chavis, The North Carolina Humanities Council and the UNC American Indian Center
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See also: [Meherrin: People of the Water](#) ^[2], Research Branch, NC Office of Archives and History

General information

The Meherrin Tribe is located in northeastern North Carolina, in Hertford County. As of 2011, there are approximately 900 enrolled members. The tribe maintains an [official website](#) ^[3] with more information.

Official tribal contact information

Meherrin Indian Tribe
P.O. Box 508
Winton, NC 27986
Phone: 252-398-3321

Tribal government structure

The Meherrin Indian Tribe is incorporated as a non-profit Indian tribe. It is governed by a seven member Tribal Council and a Tribal Chief, elected by the enrolled membership of the tribe.

Tribal history and contemporary community

Tribal History

The Meherrin Indian Tribe is a small tribe in northeastern North Carolina. It is of the Iroquoian language group, which is the same as the Cherokee, Tuscarora, and other tribes of the Iroquois Confederacy of New York and Canada. The Meherrin Indians spoke a language that was very similar to the Tuscarora language. The Europeans used various spellings of the Meherrin Tribal name in documents and historical writings. These spellings include: Meherrin, Maherineck, Maharineck, Maherrin, Menheyricks, Maherine, Meherins, Meahaearin, Meheren, Macherine, Maherring, Meherron, Maherin, Mecharens, Mehorin, Meherring, Maherians, and Meharins.

The Meherrin Indians were first encountered by English colonists on August 29, 1650. An English merchant named Edward Bland arrived in the Meherrin village of Cowochahawkon on the north bank of the Meherrin River, two miles west of the present-day city of Emporia, Virginia. He was accompanied by five other Englishmen, one Nottoway Indian, and one Appamattuck Indian. There were two other Meherrin villages in the same vicinity at that time: Taurara, near present-day Boykins, Virginia and the village of Unote, which was on the Meherrin River between Emporia and Boykins. Much of the Meherrin territory extended beyond the villages and included the land bordering the Meherrin River, which they used for hunting, fishing, and farming. The river begins in present-day Lunenburg County, Virginia, and runs southeast for more than eighty miles into Hertford County, North Carolina, where it feeds into the Chowan River. The land, river, streams, and creeks of the area provided the wild game and other natural resources that fulfilled the needs of the tribe.

The Meherrins faced many challenges when the English spread across the coastal plain to form the colonies of Virginia and North Carolina. These English newcomers were different in many ways, including in their appearance, and their language. They moved onto lands that Meherrin Indians had lived on for centuries. This greatly disrupted the Meherrin way of life. To make matters worse, the Meherrin River, along which they lived, crossed the boundary line separating Virginia and North Carolina. The two colonies had an ongoing dispute over that boundary line.

The Meherrin Indians, and other tribes in Virginia, were attacked during Bacon's Rebellion from 1675 to 1676. The Virginia Governor responded by meeting with the tribal leaders and negotiating a peace agreement with the tribes. This agreement between the Virginia Colony and the Virginia tribes (including the Meherrin) was called the Treaty Between Virginia and the Indians (also known as the Treaty of Middle Plantation). The Meherrin tribal chiefs signed the Treaty of Middle Plantation with England's Virginia Colony in 1677. The treaty was supposed to prevent English colonists from moving onto Meherrin lands, in exchange for friendship and military support from the Meherrin Tribe during conflicts of the colony with other tribes. In spite of the treaty, colonists did move onto their land.

The Meherrins repeatedly sought assistance from the Virginia Governor to stop colonists from claiming their farm lands, hunting lands, and crops. However, colonists continued to ignore the rulings of the Governor and Executive Council, causing the Meherrin Indians to move further down the Meherrin River into land that is now in Hertford County, North

Carolina. They settled at the mouth of the Meherrin River around 1706. The Meherrins had close ties with neighboring tribes, the Nansemond Tribe, the Chowanoke Tribe, and the Nottoway Tribe. They were also allies of the Tuscarora Indians, and played a supportive role in the Tuscarora War, which lasted from 1711 to 1713.

Resources

Colonial and State Records of North Carolina^[4], North Carolina State Archives, State Library of North Carolina.

Early American Indian Documents: Treaties and Laws, 1607-1789 Volume IV Virginia Treaties, 1607-1722 Edited by W. Stitt Robinson

Early American Indian Documents: Treaties and Laws, 1607-1789 Volume XIII North and South Carolina Treaties, 1654-1756, Edited by W. Stitt Robinson

"The Meherrin's Secret History of the Dividing Line"^[5], by Shannon Lee Dawdy *The North Carolina Historical Review*, vol. LXXII no. 4

"In the 'Scolding Houses': Indians and the Law in Eastern North Carolina, 1684-1760"^[6], by Michelle LeMaster *The North Carolina Historical Review*, vol. LXXXIII no. 2

Subjects:

21st Century (2001-present) ^[7]

American Indians ^[8]

Colonial period (1600-1763) ^[9]

Meherrin Indians ^[10]

Precolonial period (pre-1600) ^[11]

Authors:

Chavis, Duvonya ^[12]

Morrow, Claire ^[13]

Origin - location:

Hertford County ^[14]

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