

## My Native American Ancestry – by David Arthur The “Story Tellers”



NA ancestry Estimated based on DNA – Mother, Bertha Overby Arthur 1/128 – Grandfather, James Overby 1/64 – G-Grandmother, Sarah Skinner Overby 1/32 – 2<sup>nd</sup> G-Grandmother, Elizabeth Edmonds Skinner 1/16 – 3<sup>rd</sup> G-Grandmother, Sally MNU Edmonds 1/8 – 4<sup>th</sup> G-Grandmother Unknown 1/4 - 5<sup>th</sup> G-Grandmother Unknown 1/2 ---- the next several previous generations were likely both parents 1/2 Native American as there was in this area, a sub-culture of half Native Americans resulting from European Male immigrants having had children with Native American women (common law type marriages with no colonial records). The children of these marriages (all half Native Americans) married each other for several generations before assimilating into either the European/American culture or the African American culture. Descendants of this sub-culture have to this day varying skin color tones in the same set of siblings.

My Native American Ancestry, which is approximately 0.4%, most likely is through a 5<sup>th</sup> Great-Grandmother dating to the late 1600s or early to mid 1700s in South Central Virginia. This ancestor would have been 1/2 descended from one or more of the Siouan-speaking tribes. The documentation copied below is in a large part about the Occaneechi people. My Ancestry is not likely from them, but is likely from some of the associated Siouan-speaking tribes, most

probably the Nottoways, Meherrins, or Saponi. These associated tribes are discussed in some of the documentation below.

In the Lunenburg County VA area as well as much of the surrounding area there existed a culture of peoples derived from the intermarriage of early European immigrants with Native Americans. In the decades after the settlement of Jamestown, there were numerous young single European males who came to North America, while almost no single European females immigrated in the early years. This resulted in the marriage, many times, common law marriages, or some such arrangement, between these European males and Native American females. The resulting children, half native American and half European, resulted in a culture of peoples which were separate from the "aristocracy immigrants" who received gifts of land from the English King. The half natives were numerous and married almost exclusively with other part natives for several generations. Due to their paternity being the males from Europe, these people all had European surnames. In Southeastern Lunenburg, these surnames included, Edmonds, Turner, Daniel, and Thompson. These people were the surviving segment of the Native American culture, as many of the Native Americans sub-combed to European diseases for which they had no immunity. The children of the inter-marriages did have immunities from their paternal heritage. They, for the most part, adapted to live as European culture dictated, but continued many of the Native American culture traditions, ie. herbal medicine and a penchant for hunting and fishing. As a child, I remember my maternal grandfather, (who's Grandmother, Elizabeth Edmonds, was said to be descended from the part native subculture), continuing the tradition of storytelling.

<http://www.edavidarthur.net/FamilyHistoryStoryTelling.htm> Stories from my Grandfather.

## **Documentation**

<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Occaneechi>

The Occaneechi (also Occoneechee and Akenatzy) are Native Americans who lived in the 17th century primarily on the large, 4-mile long Occoneechee Island and east of the confluence of the Dan and Roanoke rivers, near current-day Clarksville, Virginia. They were Siouan-speaking, and thus related to the Saponi, Tutelo, Eno and other Southeastern Siouan-language peoples living in the Piedmont region of present-day North Carolina and Virginia.

## **Name**

The meaning and origin of the name Occaneechi is unknown. They have also historically been called the Achonechy, Aconechos, Akenatzy, Akenatzy's, Hockinechy, Occaneches, Occaanechy, Occhonechee, Occonacheans, Occoneechee, Ockanechees, Ockanigee, Okenechee, Acconeechy, Occaneeches, Ochineeches, and Ockinagee.

## **History**

*17th century*

The Occaneechi were first written about in 1650, by English explorer Edward Bland. He wrote that lived on the Trading Path that connected Virginia with the interior of North America. Their position on the Trading Path gave the Occaneechi the power to act as trading "middlemen" between Virginia and various tribes to the west. In 1673, Abraham Wood, a Virginian fur trader, sent James Needham and Gabriel Arthur into the southern Appalachian Mountains in an attempt to make direct contact with the Cherokee, thus bypassing the Occaneechi. The party did make contact with the Cherokee. It was not until the last decades of the 17th century, when South Carolina colonists established a strong relationship with the Cherokee and other interior tribes, that the Occaneechi role as trading middleman was undermined. In May 1676, the Occaneechi allied with Nathaniel Bacon and his British troops in a war with the Susquehannock; however, the British immediately turned on their allies and attacked three forts within the Occaneechi village. The British killed the Occaneechi's leader Posseclay, approximately one hundred men, as well as many women and children. A Susquehannock war party attacked Occaneechee Island in the summer of 1678.

### *18th century*

In 1701 John Lawson visited the Occaneechi village, located on the Eno River near present day Hillsborough, North Carolina. His written report plus modern archaeological research at the site give insight into a society undergoing rapid change. They also were working to continue traditional crafts and a way of life.

Historian Robert Beverley, Jr., in his *History and Present State of Virginia* (1705), wrote that the Occaneechi language was widely used as a lingua franca, "understood by the chief men of many nations, as Latin is in many parts of Europe" — even though, he says, the Occaneechi "have been but a small nation, ever since those parts were known to the English." Beverley said that the "priests and conjurers" of the other Virginia Indian tribes "perform their adorations and conjurations" in this general language, much "as the Catholics of all nations do their Mass in the Latin." Linguistic scholars believe that the Occaneechi spoke a dialect of the Siouan language Tutelo. Virginia governor Alexander Spotswood mentioned the Occaneechi as being one of nine Native nations within Virginia in 1712. Along with the "Stuckanok, Tottero, and Saponi," the Occaneechi signed a "Treaty of Peace" with the colony of Virginia in 1713. They moved to Fort Christanna in southeast Virginia. Occaneechi Town was almost entirely abandoned by 1713.

Fort Christanna was operated by the Virginia Company from 1714 to 1717. Its closure was apparently due to a lack of profits as an Indian trading center. Although several distinct groups of Siouan Indians lived at Fort Christanna, the English Virginians tended to refer to them simply as "Saponi" or "Fort Christanna Indians." After the closing of Fort Christanna in 1717, colonial records contain few references to the Occaneechi. Those references that do exist indicate a continued trade between Virginia colonists and the Saponi and Occaneechi. By 1720, after ongoing losses from warfare, the remnant bands of the Occaneechi, Saponi, and Stukanox, "who not finding themselves Separately Numerous, enough for their Defence, have agreed to unite in one Body, and all of them now go under the Name of the Sapponeys, as William Byrd II wrote.

In 1727, a settler living near the Iroquoian Meherrin, in a region where some violence had broken out, wrote to the governor of Virginia about the events. He said the Meherrin denied attacking the Nottoway (another Iroquoian tribe). "They lay the whole blame upon the Occaneechy King and the Saponi Indians." This suggests that English settlers recognized a distinction between the Occaneechi and Saponi.

In 1730 Virginia's House of Burgesses records noted an "Interpreter to the Saponi and Occaneechi Indians." This implied the existence of monoglot Occaneechi people.

In 1730, many Saponi moved to live among the Catawba in South Carolina, but most returned to Virginia in 1733, along with some Cheraw Indians. After 1733 the Saponi appear to have fragmented into small groups and dispersed. Some apparently remained in the vicinity of Fort Christanna, which was noted in Virginia records by its Saponi name, Junkatapurse. After 1742 the settlement is no longer mentioned, but only a road called Junkatapurse. In the 1740s, the Saponi migrated south to live with the Catawba. Governor Gooch of Virginia reported that the "Saponies and other petty nations associated with them ... are retired out of Virginia to the Cattawbas" during the years 1743-1747. Most of the remaining Saponi members were recorded as migrating north in 1740 for protection with the Iroquois. They mostly disappeared from the historical record in the Southeast. After the American Revolution, in which four of the Iroquois Six Nations had sided with the losing British, the majority of the Iroquois (and Saponi) went to Canada for resettlement. Descendants live mostly at the Six Nations of the Grand River First Nation reserve in Ontario. Traditional English-American histories typically describe the Saponi group of Indians as having left Virginia and North Carolina in the 18th century, either to join the Catawba or the Iroquois.

Starting in the middle of the 18th century, however, historic records note Saponi living in North Carolina. Some Saponi moved from Virginia to various places in North Carolina. There is some evidence that isolated Indians never left these areas of North Carolina and became consolidated with Saponi from Virginia.

In 1756, Moravian settlers living near present-day Winston-Salem reported an Indian palisaded "fort" settlement near the Haw River. The Moravians called the Indians "Cherokees", but it is more likely they were Sissipahau ("Saxapahaw") or another group related to the Occaneechi. This, along with various oral traditions, indicates Indians' living in a more or less traditional manner in North Carolina's Piedmont after such settlements supposedly vanished.

In 1763, Lt. Governor Francis Fauquier of Virginia wrote a letter that included a description of the Indians of Virginia: "There are some of the Nottoways, Meherrins, Tuscaroras, and Saponys, who tho' they live in peace in the midst of us, lead in great measure the lives of wild Indians." He contrasted these Indians with the Eastern Shore and Pamunkey Indians, whom he described as more assimilated to English ways. Thus, there are still indications of Saponi in Virginia during this period.

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<http://www.obsn.org/home>

## A Brief History of the Occaneechi Band of the Saponi Nation

The Occaneechi Band of the Saponi Nation—OBSN for short—is a small Indian community located primarily in the old settlement of Little Texas, Pleasant Grove Township, Alamance County, North Carolina. Until the middle part of the 20th century, the community was largely occupied in agricultural pursuits, sometimes supplemented by day wage labor jobs or jobs in nearby factories. In recent decades the numbers of people engaged full or part time in agriculture has declined significantly, and most working adults in the community now work in offices, or as skilled workers and craftsmen, or in the few remaining factories in the area.

The OBSN community is a lineal descendant of the Saponi and related Indians who occupied the Piedmont of North Carolina and Virginia in pre-contact times, and specifically of those Saponi and related Indians who formally became tributary to Virginia under the Treaties of Middle Plantation in 1677 and 1680, and, who under the subsequent treaty of 1713 with the Colony of Virginia agreed to join together as a single community. This confederation formed a settlement at Fort Christianna along the Virginia/North Carolina border in what is now Brunswick County, Virginia.

The confederation included the Saponi proper, the Occaneechi, the Eno, the Tutelo, and elements of other related communities such as the Cheraw. All of these communities were remnants of much larger Siouan communities that had lived in North Carolina and Virginia in prehistoric times.

The Saponi confederation was closely allied with the Catawba confederation, and occupied several forts and settlements located in what are now Greensville County and Brunswick Counties, Virginia from about 1680 until the mid-18th century, when the last Virginia fort, Christianna, fell into disuse. They also continued to occupy fortified villages and other settlements in North Carolina into the mid-1700s during this period. While maintaining distinctions among themselves (sometimes exaggerated by non-Indian contemporaries and by later historians), the various elements within the Saponi confederation had a common origin and were closely related, linguistically and culturally. Their final treaty with Virginia included an agreement among the four signatory groups to formally incorporate as one tribe under the name "Sapony."

In January, 1715, Virginia's Governor Spotswood wrote a letter to the Bishop of London describing how he had "engaged the Saponie, Oconeechee, Stuckanox [Eno] and Tottero Indians (being a people speaking much the same language, and therefore confederated together, tho' preserving their different Rules) immediately to remove to y't place, which I have named Christ-Anna." In June of that year, Spotswood wrote to the Commissioners of Trade in London that he had "...been for a good part of last Spring, employ'd in finishing the fortifications of Christanna, and in settling there a Body of our Tributary Indians to ye number of 300 men, women and children, who go under the general name of Saponies..." Acculturated members of the confederation and their descendants gradually formed a settled community that, over time, became geographically and culturally distinct from the traditional community. Formal marriages and common-law relationships between Indians of the community and their European neighbors contributed to divisions between the settled community and more conservative community members. Documentary evidence of the existence of the acculturated community begins to appear in local records as early as the 1720s. As these records involve adults, it is likely the acculturated community dates back into the 17th century. A great majority of the tribe's members can trace their ancestry back to the individual Indians identified in such records. The acculturated community occupied a small tri-border area in what are now Greensville County, Virginia, Brunswick County, Virginia, and Northampton County, North Carolina. Their settlement was also midway between two forts built for the Indians by Virginia, and about 10 miles south of a third fort, near modern-day Purdy, Virginia, that was apparently built by the Indians themselves, probably for defense against Iroquois raiders from the north. More precisely, the community's land was located south of modern Emporia, Virginia (Greensville County), west into Brunswick County, and extending across the State line into the northwestern corner of Northampton County, North Carolina and to the Roanoke River. Researchers for the OBSN have documented the development of this community from the late 17th through the

early 19th centuries, by which time emigration to the Midwest and other parts of the South had reduced it to a handful of families.

For years lay people and researchers have discovered thousands of artifacts from "Occoneechee Town," "Saponi Town" and "Tutelo Town" on islands in the Roanoke River near Clarksville, Virginia. Prior to the flooding of the islands in 1952, this was one of the richest archeology sites on the East Coast. Since 1983 the Research Laboratories of Anthropology at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill have been uncovering another "Occaneechi Town", a late 17th and early 18th century Occaneechi village on the Eno River near present-day Hillsborough, North Carolina.

### *Recent history*

In 1995, a community centered around Pleasant Grove, North Carolina claimed descent from the Fort Christanna confederation of Occaneechi, Saponi, and Tutelo began hosting an annual powwow and organized under the name Occaneechi Band of Saponi. They are recognized by the state of North Carolina and primarily reside in Alamance County.

The contemporary Occaneechi and Haliwa-Saponi tribes are mostly descendants of multiracial people who settled on the frontier of Virginia and North Carolina as early as the mid-to late 18th century. They migrated and acquired land as did European or English neighbors from the Tidewater areas. 20th century researchers such as Paul Heinegg and Dr. Virginia Easley De Marce have conducted extensive research in colonial records: including court records, deeds of land, wills, etc. to trace back members of families in this area who were listed in the 1790 census. They have found 80 percent of those listed as free people of color, a category that then included Indians, could in fact be traced back to African Americans free in Virginia during the colonial period. Most of the free people of color were descended from relationships between white women and African men, often both indentured servants, during the 17th and 18th century when racial boundaries between groups were not as hardened as they later became. Some of the African men were slaves freed as early as the 17th century, as was John Jeffries, a "Negro man" belonging to Captain Robert Randall and freed in 1698 in Surry County, Virginia. Paul Heinegg believes he was the great-grandfather of Jacob Jeffries who settled in Orange County, North Carolina by 1790, but there is no documentary evidence for this. In frontier areas, such peoples of mixed race sometimes identified themselves (or others did) as Indian, or Portuguese, or Spanish, to explain darker skin color or physical features not typical of northern Europeans. In some areas they may also have intermarried with a few American Indians. People in the mixed-race groups associated with different social groups over the decades: some marrying into the white community, some marrying other multiracial people and identifying as Indian, and others marrying into the black community.

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