

# THE PIQUA SHAWNEE TRIBE

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## **Early History**

The Piqua Shawnee are the descendants of Ancestral Algonquians who have lived in Alabama since time immemorial. Most archaeologists refer to their ancestors as Paleoindians, Archaic, and Woodland peoples. Geographically, the range of these ancestral cultures covers the entire state of Alabama. The Piqua Shawnee survived by adopting a mobile, semisedentary livelihood. This economic strategy included strengthening their long-time alliance with the Creek and the sharing of their towns and villages.

The first European contact with the Piqua Shawnee likely occurred in 1540 when Admiral Maldonado, an officer of the Spanish conquistador Hernando de Soto, walked into the village of Ochuse (also spelled Achuse). This village site is located at Gulf Shores, in Baldwin County. However, oral tradition states that we have been here much longer than that. Ancient burial sites that use burial methods common to the Shawnee have been located in several sections of the state. Early accounts can be confusing since what is now called Alabama was once a part of Georgia territory.

After the initial contact with the Spanish in 1540, French and British colonial traders regularly visited Piqua Shawnee settlements along the Chattahoochee River. By the late 1720s at least seven Shawnee villages were located near Fort Alabama on the Coosa River. Early French and English maps show several Shawnee towns in what would be considered Upper Creek territory in Alabama. One village was near present day Talladega and was known in English as Shawnee Town. Another town was near Sylacauga. In 1750 the French took a census mentioning the Shawnee at Sylacauga as well as enumerating another Shawnee town called Cayomulgi, (currently spelled Kyamulga Town) that was located nearby. Kiamulga Town was also listed in an 1832 census. A 1761 English census names Tallapoosa Town as a Shawnee community. This town was also named in 1792 census by Marbury. There are French military records that mention a Shawnee presence at Wetumpka near Fort Toulouse. In most cases the traders called Alabama Indians "Creeks" because they lived on the numerous creeks and waterways in the area. Many of these "Creeks" were not of the same tribe or nation. Rather they went by a large number of names. Each group maintained their own unique heritage while living side by side with their neighbors.

## **Today**

Now, in the 21<sup>st</sup> century there are many descendants who still call Alabama home. Many of their family stories are varied. Some avoided walking the Trail of Tears. Some families escaped into the Cumberland mountains, others concealed themselves east of the Coosa River around Kymulga (old Shawnee town) and Kymulga Cave. A careful study of southeastern history will reveal that not all settlers agreed with Andrew Jackson's removal policy. After the turmoil subsided some families returned. Many families chose to live in outlying rural areas where there was little government scrutiny and their neighbors weren't too curious. While a lot was lost, family histories and ways were passed down.

It is out of that background that current Piqua Shawnee live and work to preserve their unique heritage. The tribe consists of several family groups that are defined by a patrilineal kinship system in which an individual's family membership is traced through the father's clan. Our long-term settlement in Alabama makes us uniquely different from our Shawnee counterparts in Oklahoma. We have maintained our own history, culture, and government. While we as Shawnee people may share a distant common root, due to long-term isolation from one another, we essentially are not the same people.

While we have a Principal Chief, our tribal government is maintained by a Tribal Council. The Council is composed of clan mothers and clan chiefs, with an advisory body known as the Council of Elders. Tribal Council is conducted in accordance with Clan protocol. All issues are debated and taken before the clans for consideration and deliberation. It is the function of the Council to debate and seek consensus on all tribal matters so that the people speak with one voice. Modern positions such as treasurer and secretary are determined by election for a set period of time. These positions do not have a vote on the Council.

On July 10, 2001, the Alabama Indian Affairs Commission, under the authority of the Davis-Strong Act, recognized the Piqua Shawnee Tribe as an Indian tribe in the state of Alabama, thus making the Piqua Shawnee the first petitioning group to be recognized in 17 years.

Enrollment is considered by the Tribal Council for applicants who can document their Shawnee ancestry. Those applicants who are of American Indian descent other than Shawnee must be descended from a tribe that was known to live with Shawnee prior to the 1832 removal act. Potential applicants are encouraged to visit so that we may get to know you before any decisions are made regarding enrollment.

**For further information, please contact:**

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**If you would like to read more about the Shawnee people, the following books may help:**

Tecumseh. A Life, John Sugden, Henry Holt and Company, 1997

The History of Alabama, Albert Pickett (originally published 1851, reprinted 1962), Birmingham Book and Magazine

The Shawnee, The University of Kentucky Press

Tukabatchee, Archaeological Investigations at an historic Creek town Elmore County, Alabama 1984 by Vernon James Knight, Jr., The University of Alabama

A Handbook of the Alabama Anthropological Society, Peter Brannon, Alabama Montgomery: Anthropological Society, 1920

Piqua Shawnee: Cultural Survival in their Homeland, Ruth Morgan, Janet Clinger, Kenneth Tankersley, Barbara Lehmann, Community Works West, 2018

The Worlds the Shawnee Made: Migration and Violence in Early American, Stephen Warren, University of North Carolina Press, 2014