

“County’s First Citizens”

A summary of the presence of American Indians from Frank S Walker, Jr. in his book, *Remembering, A History of Orange County, Virginia*:

“The earliest evidence we have of Indians in Orange County comes from a **Clovis** spear point which was picked up on the Rapidan River bottoms north of Somerset. This point, named for a site in Clovis, New Mexico, where they were first found, has been dated to **9,000 B.C.** Others have since been found in this area, confirming that date, which is around the end of the last ice age. This region would have had patches of scrub forest, with most of the land covered with low, tundra-like vegetation. It would have attracted migrating herds of large animals, such as elk, deer, and possibly woods bison. The Indians themselves would have been representatives of the Paleo-Indian culture, who hunted the herd animals and moved with them. Winters here at that time were severe, and both the animals and the Indians probably made a point to be elsewhere by the time snow flew.¹

“As the climate warmed, the open plains disappeared into tall, dense forests, and the large herds stopped coming this far east. An Indian culture which could survive in that changed environment evolved. Features of that **Archaic Indian** culture, which existed from roughly **7,000 to 1,000 B.C.** were semi-migratory family groups, hunting the resident large animals and smaller game of the woods and meadows. Traps and snares were used in addition to spears and clubs. They still moved often, and we find their flaked stone tools and axe heads everywhere in Orange County. As the years went by, more and more fishing and gathering of fruit, nuts, berries, roots, and other edible plant material was done by these people to supplement their game harvest.²

“By **1,000 B.C.** the **Woodland Indian** culture had evolved, a culture which continued in our area until European settlement pressure forced it out. Multi-family tribal groups lived in semi-permanent villages, moving when the soil wore out or to avoid hostile neighbors. Confederations and alliances among tribal groups grew larger and more highly organized during this time. The bow and arrow’s contribution to hunting game came late in the period. In addition to hunting and fishing for food, the Indians cultivated crops, such as corn and squash. Clay pottery, along with bone and shell tools and ornaments were in use, some of it polished and decorated. Trade-based commerce between friendly tribal groups existed. Because tribes of Woodland Indians were occupying the Orange County area at the time the settlers came, we know more about them than we do about their Paleo and Archaic predecessors, but still not as much as we would like.

“The tribes occupying this part of the Virginia piedmont when the Virginia Company settlers arrived at Jamestown [1607] spoke the Siouan language and were generally divided into two

¹ Frank S. Walker, Jr., *Remembering: A History of Orange County* (Orange, Virginia: Orange County Historical Society, 2004), 64.

² *Ibid.*, 64-65.

large confederations. The **Manahoac** confederacy of tribes existed in our immediate area, with the **Monacan** territory beginning south of the Rivanna River. Eastward, between the Manahoacs and the Jamestown settlers were tribes speaking the Algonquian language, most of whom were members of the fearsome Powhatan confederation. Marking the approximate boundary between their territories in our region were the falls of the Rappahannock at today's Fredericksburg.³

"...In August of 1608, Captain John Smith started sailing up the Rappahannock. The journey was a part of his explorations to supplement and expand upon his map of the Chesapeake Bay area. Part way upstream, Smith and his party finally came to a rock shallows and an island. The ship could go no further, and Smith, Mosco, and others went ashore. Welcome to Fredericksburg.

"The party was soon attacked by Indians with bows and arrows. They responded with muskets. The uneven skirmish lasted about a half-hour, then the Indians withdrew, leaving one of their wounded behind. In that suffering captive, John Smith met his first Manahoac.

"After a bit of food and drink, the Manahoac became rather chatty. Through Mosco, Smith learned something about the Manahoac people and their villages farther upriver. Out of this came the **first crude map of what would become Orange County**.

"Fearing further attacks in this narrow section of the river, Smith ordered the ship to be sailed downriver to where the stream width could protect them. Sure enough, a large body of Manahoac followed on shore bouncing arrows off the ship and setting up a great yelling and hallooing every time an effort was made to talk with them.

"Finally a conversation was established with the voices in the woods. After much talk, Indians appeared on a point of land that jutted out into the river. There was more talk, and they hung up their bows and quivers. Smith and a party then went ashore and returned the wounded captive to his people.⁴

"After much visiting and trading, it was time to go home. As his ship drifted downstream, Smith observed that they left 'four or five hundred of our merry Mannahocks, singing, dancing and making merry.' It was the **first and last time Europeans would see the Manahoacs** as an organized society. In **1669 and again in 1670**, a young German by the name of John Lederer came through the Orange-Madison-Culpeper area. On the second trip Lederer came through this immediate area, accompanied by Col. John Catlett of Port Royal and several guides. In a report which was published in 1672, Lederer stated that all the Manahoac villages had been long abandoned and that the Indians were gone. It was a No Man's Land and had been for some time. Possibly the combination of European-introduced diseases and tribal warfare had rendered this part of Virginia uninhabitable for the Manahoacs. All we know for sure is that they were gone.⁵

³ *Ibid.*, 65.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 66.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 67.

“At a later date, Lieutenant Governor Spotswood settled some **Saponi** Indians in the Orange County area to act as interpreters and guides, but they soon wore out their welcome. Complaints about these Indians burning the woods as a means of hunting--and of poaching the settlers’ livestock--and of shots being fired near people put Spotswood on the defensive, and he eventually sent them home....”⁶

“**The Carolina Road**...was one of the earliest known north-south travel ways through this part of colonial Virginia, [and] the settlers made extensive use of it. Where the Carolina Road crossed into Orange County **near Raccoon Ford**, one of the county’s first commerical settlements west of Germanna evolved.”⁷

“Farther down the Rapidan, just before you get to the U-shaped bend that creates Culpeper County’s Fox Neck, there is the Orange County community of **Indiantown**. It is the site of a Manahoac village and is believed to be the one described to John Smith in 1608 as **Shackaconia**, named for its chief. With the Manahoacs gone, Spotswood had used the site for his Saponis. When the Saponis were dismissed, European settlers moved onto the site. Home sites were already substantially cleared, a road and a trail system accessing it was in place, and sources of water, sometimes a problem thereabouts, were already developed. The residents’ use of the name Indiantown stands as a legacy to those who had come before them.

“Still farther down the Rapidan is a fish trap, consisting of large stones set across the river shallows in a loose “vee” array, the point upstream. Swimming against the current, fish work their way from one flow-breaking stone to the next. All you would need this very day to complete the picture would be a Manahoac, hovering near his catch basket at the point of the trap.

“Almost all the way in the opposite direction on the Rapidan in today’s Orange County is an Indian burial mound on the river bank, actually now in the river bank. The mound is in the vicinity of another Manahoac village called **Stegara**, whose exact location is not known. There may be no connection between the village and the mound, but the mound is considered to be Manahoac. The river is slowly washing the mound away, but it was at least studied and reported on some years earlier.”⁸

⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷ *Ibid.*, 67-68.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 68.