

Virginia's American Indians

The first Virginians have been in Virginia for thousands of years. When Christopher Columbus traveled to North America, he called the people he met there Indians, because he thought he had reached the West Indies. He didn't realize he had reached a whole new continent! Today, we call these people American Indians. They were here first, before any European settlers. All of Virginia's Indians are classified as a group under the name **Eastern Woodland Indians**, which they received because they lived in an area covered with forests and woodlands.

The American Indians that lived in Virginia did not all speak the same language. In the Coastal Plain Region, the Powhatan tribe spoke the **Algonquian** language. In the Piedmont region, tribes like the **Monacans** spoke the **Siouan** language. In southwestern Virginia (Appalachian Plateau) and southern Virginia (near North Carolina), the **Cherokee** tribe spoke the **Iroquoian** language.

Currently living in Virginia are several state-recognized tribes. They trace their family history back to before 1607. In the Coastal Plain (Tidewater) Region we have the **Chickahominy** (CHICK-a-HOM-a-nee), **Eastern Chickahominy**, **Mattaponi** (mat-ta-po-nye), **Nansemond** (NAN-sa-mund), **Pamunkey** (pa-MUN-kee), **Rappahannock** (RAP-a-HAN-nock), and **Upper Mattaponi** tribes. In the Piedmont Region we have the Monacan Tribe.