

REPORT OF THE

COMMISSION ON INDIANS

TO

THE GOVERNOR

AND

THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF VIRGINIA

1983

MEMBERS OF THE COMMISSION

The Honorable C. Hardaway Marks, Hopewell, Chairman

Stephen R. Adkins, Chickahominy Tribe, Charles City County,
Vice Chairman

Chief O. Oliver Adkins, Chickahominy Tribe, Charles City
County

Dr. Robert J. Austin, Richmond

Nokomis M. Fortune, United Rappahannock Tribe, Essex County

Kathleen A. McKee, Alexandria

The Honorable Wiley F. Mitchell, Alexandria

William A. Stewart, Eastern Chickahominy Tribe, New Kent
County

Millard D. (Pete) Stith, Chesterfield County

Chief Malcolm O. Tupponce, Upper Mattaponi Tribe, King
William County

G. Warren Cook, King William County, Ex-Officio

December, 1983

To: The Honorable Charles S. Robb, Governor of Virginia
and
The General Assembly of Virginia

The Commission on Indians was established by the 1983 General Assembly and became effective July 1, 1983. Creation of the Commission was recommended by the Joint Subcommittee Studying Relations between the Commonwealth and Native Indian Tribes, established by the 1982 Session of the General Assembly. Statutory direction is given the Commission to gather information, make studies, and conduct research into the Indian tribes of the Commonwealth. The Commission also is to suggest ways to assist Virginia's Indian population in reaching its full economic and social potential.

The Commission on Indians is composed of ten members, five of whom are Indian and five of whom are non-Indian. The State Coordinator of Native American Programs also serves as an ex-officio member. At its organizational meeting the Commission elected The Honorable C. Hardaway Marks of Hopewell, Member of the House of Delegates, as its Chairman. Mr. Stephen R. Adkins of Charles City County, Assistant Chief of the Chickahominy Tribe, was elected Vice-Chairman. Since the Commission does not have a staff,

Ms. Nokomis Fortune of the United Rappahannock Tribe has served as Secretary.

Four meetings have been held by the Commission since July 1, 1983. These early meetings have been concerned with briefings on current activities affecting Virginia Indians, defining the role of the Commission, and tentatively identifying goals and strategies by which our statutory mandates may effectively be accomplished. From these discussions a preliminary list of needs which the Commission will seek to address have emerged.

Commission Structure

First, the Commission should draw upon the experience of other states in developing the appropriate model which will guide the evolution of the Virginia Commission. Neither the legislative study nor the legislation creating the Commission contemplated that the Commission would be an administrative agency, and we endorse that position. Other states have also created non-administrative commissions,, however, and Virginia should benefit from this experience, adapting workable approaches and avoiding unsuccessful experiments.

The Commission has written to every other state which has a commission or office responsible for Native American programs to ascertain the governmental status and the types of programs, activities, and duties of each. Responses are presently being received and will be reviewed and evaluated by the Commission.

Programmatic Goals

Economic Development.

The Commission's enabling legislation clearly contemplates that one of its major responsibilities will be to promote economic opportunities for Indians in the Commonwealth. Education opportunities and job training programs are an important element, but they alone are not sufficient. Our early discussions have identified economic development both as employment opportunity and business ownership. We believe that a primary task of the Commission should be to increase Indian awareness of and participation in the economic and business councils of the State and its localities.

Strategies which the Commission will follow include:

1. Familiarize tribes with and encourage their participation in various economic development and business councils and organizations in the state. Seek assistance both from State agencies, such as the Division of Industrial Development and Office of Minority Business Enterprise, and private groups, such as the Virginia Chamber of Commerce.

2. Prepare an inventory of Indian-owned business enterprises in the state.

3. Identify existing federal, State, and private programs which may be of assistance to Indian Tribes or individuals in employment training, inducement of firms offering employment opportunities, or establishment of business enterprises.

These will be ongoing activities in the coming year.

Increased Program Participation. The legislative study which led to the creation of the Commission also recognized the need for action if "Virginia's Indian population is to secure its share of federal governmental programs and support." These include specific programs or program components with "set-aside" funds for which Virginia's tribes are eligible, as well as more generalized programs which may be of particular importance to Indians. We believe that action should proceed on two fronts. One set of strategies focuses upon familiarizing Indian tribes with the availability of federal programs and enhancing their ability to qualify or compete for these programs:

1. Compile and distribute a list of programs.
2. Ask tribal organizations to rank the importance of the various programs.
3. Encourage dialogue between tribal organizations and federal agencies (by facilitating individual agency contacts, sponsoring workshops).
4. Assist in applying for grants and programs (sponsoring training sessions in grant applications, developing a system for timely dissemination of information on programs and grant availability).
5. Catalogue state or local agencies which either "pass-through" federal programs dollars or make available programs which could be of assistance to Indians. The Commission has collected and reviewed materials in this regard during its first five months.

A second dimension of the federal programs goal will be

to ensure that programs are continued and adequately funded. Monitoring and input into the federal process is essential through such means as:

1. Monitor the federal budget process and hearings on other relevant legislation.
2. Alert the Virginia congressional delegation and the State Liaison Office to legislation of interest to Virginia's Indian population.
3. Inform state agencies and officials of federal developments which may have an impact upon Indians.
4. Inform and encourage tribal organizations to participate.

All of these items will be continuing activities in the coming year.

Increased Inter-tribal Cooperation. A fourth goal of the Commission will be to encourage greater cooperation and participation by all Indian tribes of Virginia. A sense of common purpose rather than competition will mutually benefit Virginia's recognized tribes, other tribal organizations who may come forward in the future, and the Indian population of the Commonwealth in general.

Finally, the Commission has noted other activities which are relevant to our mission. These include encouragement of research into Indian history and methods of increasing public awareness both of Indian history and present contributions of Indians in Virginia. Strategies to develop Indian history and culture projects will be considered by the Commission in the future.

The Commission last of all notes that the 1982 legislative study report, which led to official State recognition of four Indian tribes in addition to the two reserved tribes, suggested that the Commission might consider the case of other tribes which present a case for official recognition. The Commission has not been approached by any group in this regard.

In conclusion, we reiterate that the Commission is in its early organizational stages. This first report of the Commission therefore simply reflects our initial steps to define a meaningful role for the Commission. Not all of the strategies listed herein will be accomplished over the next two years, but they will serve as a blueprint for Commission activities between now and our next report at the end of 1985.

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