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The Monacan Indian Nation

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INDIGENOUS APPALACHIA



The Monacan Indian Nation

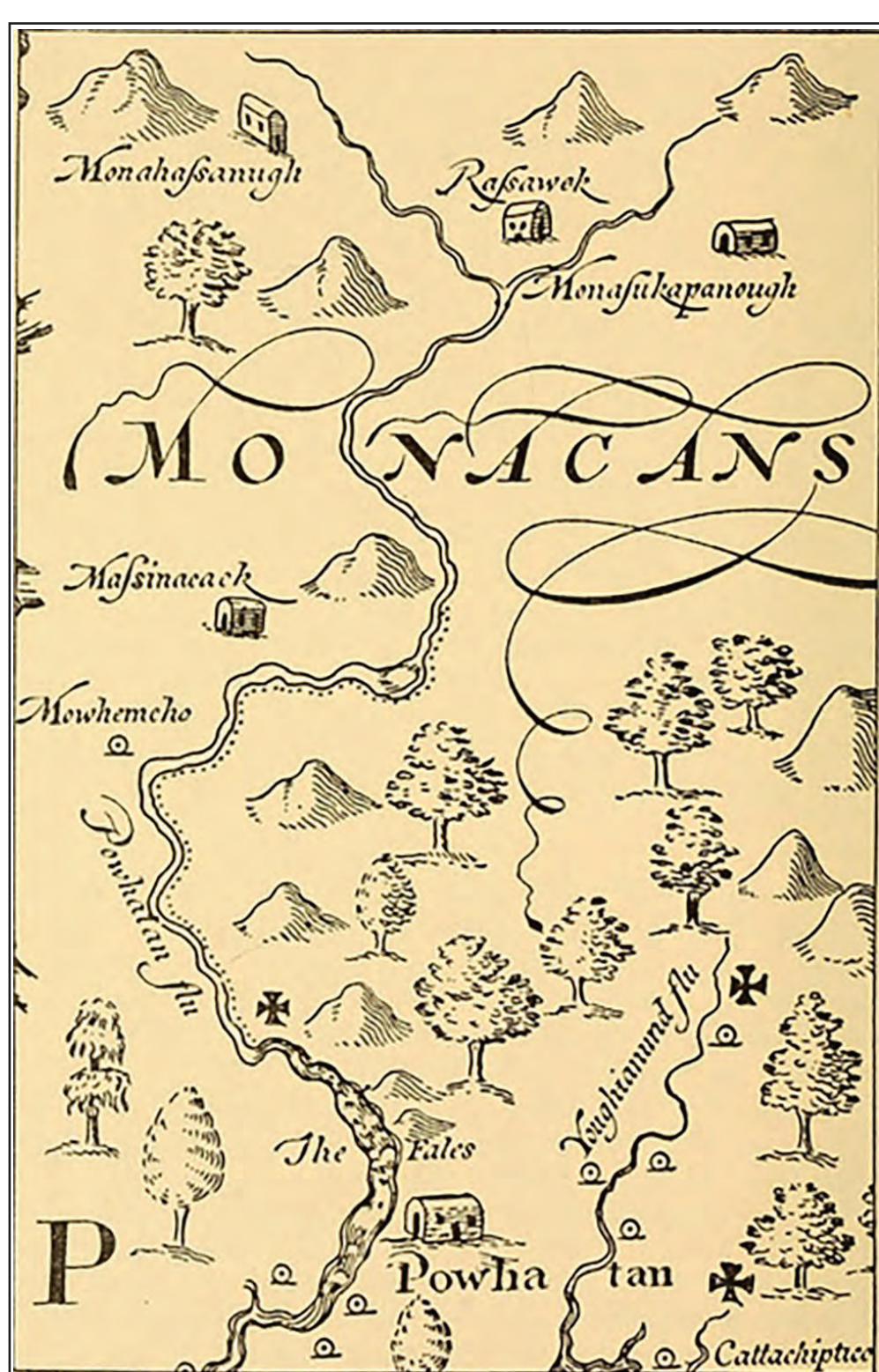
The Monacan Indian Nation is located in the Piedmont region of Virginia, adjacent to the Blue Ridge Mountain, headquartered in what is now Amherst County. This area has been occupied for more than 10,000 years. Along with other Siouan-speaking tribes such as the Saponi, Tutelo, and Mannahoac, the Monacan once occupied most of the western half of what is now Virginia.

Monacans were traditionally a mound-building culture. They hunted deer, fished the rivers of the territory, and farmed corn for more than 900 years. They were also known to mine copper and they became proficient traders with other Indian tribes, trading copper, which was highly valued, for items such as shell beads. Monacans were also highly skilled basketmakers who created a unique form of basket weaving that incorporated animals and flower designs into the weaves. The potters employed the coil method to create wares of exceptional beauty and durability. Their skills are still practiced among Monacan artisans, along with contemporary arts.

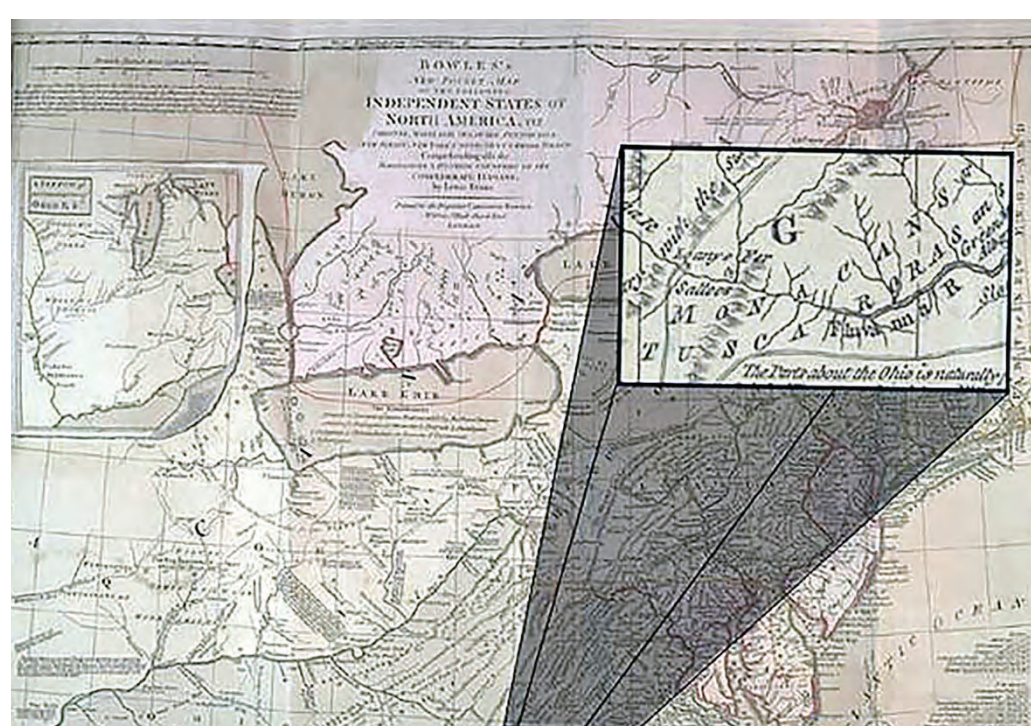
The first known encounter between Monacans and Europeans occurred in 1608, when Captain John Smith and his men engaged in hostilities with the Monacans. The Europeans captured a wounded man named Amorolek. When John Smith asked Amorolek why his people had been hostile toward the English, he replied, "We heard that you were a people come from the underworld, to take our world from us." His prophetic statement stands as an accurate description of the Monacan experience.

Because the Monacan were enemies of the Powhatan and chose not to interact with colonists, early Europeans wrote little about them. Around 1750, when the city of Lynchburg was founded, Monacan people lived in two traditional communities along the James River. They established the post town of Oronoco about 1800, where they raised tobacco for market and grew other crops. Soon after, William Johns purchased 500 acres on Bear Mountain and established an Indian farming settlement. By the end of the century, more than 250 Monacan descendants lived in the area. Today 2,000 members of the Monacan Nation are self-governed by a chief, assistant chief, and tribal council elected by tribal members.

Text courtesy Monacan Indian Nation



LEFT: Virginia / Monacans Map, 1606
Library of Congress Geography and
Map Division, Washington, D.C.
RIGHT: View of Point of Fork, Fluvanna
County, VA. Believed to be the site of
the Monacan Nation's ancestral capital city,
Rassawek. Credit: Article by Toby Cox,
The Central Virginian, 2021
BOTTOM: Lewis Evans 1755 Map,
Courtesy of Virginia Center for
Digital History,



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