

THE LAND WE'RE ON



At Cultivate Charlottesville, we work in gardens throughout the City of Charlottesville. We acknowledge that this land, the Piedmont and Blue Ridge Mountain regions of Virginia, was taken from its original stewards, the Siouan Indians of the Monacan and Manahoac tribes.

In 1600, there were 15,000 Monacans living in Virginia. Since the Spanish arrival in the 1500s, European colonizers pillaged Monacan villages, murdered Monacan people, and forced them to assimilate into European culture in order to gain control of this land and resources. Through their extractive mindset, colonizers aimed to supplant the lifeways and foodways that had been practiced for thousands of years around this ecosystem. This is the same land on which we live, work, and cultivate today. The Monacan Nation, now headquartered in Amherst County, is numbered at 2,000 members.

The Monacan people lived in villages established along rivers. There are five known Monacan villages situated on and around the Rivanna and James rivers. Two of the five villages, Monassukapanough (MON-ah-SOOK-ah-pa-NAW) and Rassawek, are located on the Rivanna River which runs through the City of Charlottesville.

The site at Monasukapanough was, without consultation of the Monacan people, excavated and explored by Thomas Jefferson near his home at Monticello. The history of colonizer control over native land continues to this day as the James River Water Authority plans to build a water pump station at the top of Rassawek, the ancient Monacan capital city ([click here to learn more](#)) located at the confluence of the Rivanna and James rivers.

Monacan homes were dome-shaped structures made of bark and reed mats. These were permanent structures but depending on the time of the year, Monacans also resided in smaller camps made up of temporary buildings where they would come to hunt, fish, and gather plants, nuts, and seeds. The Monacan people thrive on a sustainable use of the region's resources and a knowledge of native plants and animals. Their diets have historically centered around foraged foods as well as domesticated varieties of corn, beans, squash, sunflowers, fruit trees, grapes, and nuts. Many of these crops we still grow today.

The Monacan people built sacred earthen mounds to honor their ancestors. This differentiates them from neighboring tribes. The mounds grew over generations as the remains were ceremonially reburied. Some of the burial mounds are more than eight feet tall and forty feet in diameter and are home to over a thousand individuals' remains.

At Cultivate Charlottesville, we work to honor the knowledge, skills, and land of the Monacan people as we engage with students and community members in garden spaces. We do this through uplifting the stories of the Monacan people in activities that focus on telling the history of stolen land as well as the Monacan stewardship of land and resources.

The Monacan Indians have lived here for over 10,000 years and continue to live here to this day. We acknowledge their presence as well as their current and historical contributions to this region.

References:

- Encyclopedia Virginia staff Monacan Indian Nation. (2019, March 11). In Encyclopedia Virginia. Retrieved from http://www.EncyclopediaVirginia.org/Monacan_Indian_Nation
- Our History. (n.d.). Retrieved August 28, 2020, from <https://www.monacannation.com/our-history.html>
- Ware, K. (2018, January 09). The Monacan Indian Nation. Retrieved from <http://www.lyncburgmuseum.org/blog/2018/1/9/the-monacan-indian-nation>
- The Monacan Nation and Politics of Memory. (n.d.). Retrieved from <https://exhibits.lib.vt.edu/the-land-speaks/>

Opportunities to learn more:

- Monacan Indian Nation official [site](#)
- Encyclopedia Virginia: [Monacan Indian Nation](#)
- Virginia Tech Online exhibit: [The Land Speaks: The Monacan Nation and Politics of Memory](#)
- Sign the petition to help [save Rassawek](#)