

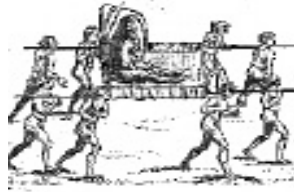


Painting: Greg Harlin © McClung Museum

Unwrapping the Enigma of the Yuchi

The Tsoyaha (Yuchi) were a large, powerful tribe according to reports of the De Soto expedition, as well as Yuchi oral traditions. They are not well represented in the history books though. This is for several reasons including neglect and disinterest among scholars. Evidence also indicates that disease/epidemics ravaged the Yuchi after the Spanish men visited the East Tennessee area. The Yuchi were known to have widely scattered villages that ranged from Florida to Illinois, and from the Carolina coast to the Mississippi River. The Yuchi being traditionalist did not seek to become close friends with the dominant culture, even though they seemed to have established a real bond with the mostly forgotten Spanish miners of the Southeast. We do know that much of what is now Tennessee was occupied by a tribe with cultural characteristics of the Mouse Creek (Uchean) culture for at least 6 or 8 centuries, and that these villages intermingled with those of the neighboring tribes. It is certain that the Yuchi were among the Moundbuilding People, and therefore among the oldest recognizable residents of the Southeast.

Despite the neglect by Dominant culture historians, the Yuchi were pivotal in organizing the many peoples of the Southeast into the First United States of this Land while Europe was still in the Dark Ages. Though the Dominant History



has paid them scant coverage, the many majestic mounds are silent testimony to the grandeur of this great culture. This culture was crafted around a spirituality of gracious thankfulness and peace among the peoples. The Yuchi played key roles as the priesthood and the traders of this multicultural nation. The Yuchi came to this land by island-hopping, and brought pottery, corn agriculture, tobacco and the pipe, and moundbuilding. Only the Lenape hunters were here when they arrived. As other peoples arrived the Yuchi were challenged to bring everyone together in a peaceful sharing of the land. The Moundbuilding and the Greencorn rites were the statecraft they used. The Yuchi language bears testimony to a coevolution with the Greencorn Ceremonial Rites and trade in the Moundbuilding Nation. It is also a unique language not known to be related to any other of the more than a thousand American Indian languages.

Today the Yuchi remain a proud, but scattered people. Remnants of the Yuchi live among the Creek, Seminole, Delaware, Shawnee, Cherokee, Melungeon and Dominant culture populations. The principle heritage trait they all share is the staunch pride of being Yuchi. Many of the Yuchis have held tightly on to their ancient traditions despite an unrelenting pressure to be absorbed into the cultures around them. The Federal government continues such pressure by failing to recognize the Yuchi as a living culture. The Yuchi remain mysterious to outsiders, because so little effort has been expended to understand their culture or their pivotal role up through the protohistoric times. The Yuchi National Archive is working to bring the Yuchi Culture out of the shadows, and to build a National pride in the Yuchi Cultural Heritage. For more on the Yuchi go to www.yuchi.org.

Yuchi Area of Principle Influence



Salt, Peace, Trails and Commerce -- A Scattered Yuchi/A Remnant Yuchi

The Yuchi story centers on the Commerce of commodities like salt, peace and common belief structure. This is why the Yuchis lived in villages scattered along the major trade trails throughout the Southeast. It is why they still live as a scattered remnant among the many peoples after the population collapse at Contact. There are Yuchi populations and people with Yuchi heritage living throughout the Southeast today in Tennessee, Kentucky, Alabama, Texas and Oklahoma -- and throughout the Southeast. A major center was at the salt source of Saltville in Virginia.



Yuchi Language -- the heart of the culture

The heart of any culture is in its language -- its mode of thinking about the world. To the degree the language dies, the culture loses its heart. The Yuchi Language is in a desperate struggle to remain vital.

yUdjEhasala Enu 'OwAdenA 'EwAdA s@nlAT@^

(It will be a great day when All the Euchee people once again speak their own language.)

gO^ ta!á^ yUdjEha gO'wAdenAA OwAdAnE

(Only about four people speak the Euchee language.)

yUdjEha OhahanE Enu yUdjEhaA OdzOTa

(The Euchee elders, they are teaching me the Euchee language.)

yUdjEha akAyu^ya yUdjEhaLA'wAdA

(If you are Euchee, talk Euchee.)

Yuchi National Archive

The Yuchi National Archive is a grassroots effort to gather the records and oral traditions and make them available to all. They have remained hidden in dusty basements for far too long. Yuchi pride should be a knowing and a sharing pride in our ancestors achievements and heritage. It is an effort to bring all Yuchis together around a common heritage pool.



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Painting: Martin Pate, for the National Park Service

Yuchi Heritage Preservation



Madeline Kneberg Lewis Tribes that Slumber