

Yes, Native American Indians still live in Tennessee ... Some families never left, some came back ... some right away, some more recently, and some have moved here from other areas. According to the US 2000 Census, there are approximately 42,000 persons of various degrees of Indian blood who call themselves and/or their children "Native American Indian" in the state, the vast majority of whom have lost all cultural connection with their ancestors' tribes.

Because Tennessee was racially cleansed of all known Native American Indian tribes back in the so called "Removal" of 1838, a vacuum of Native American leadership existed in the state until the Tennessee Indian Council was founded in 1976 and the Tennessee Commission of Indian Affairs in 1983. Recently groups have formed that call themselves "Native American," but not always with a true and correct understanding of what is really Native American. Here are some responses to frequently asked questions about Native American issues in the state.

• **Who should be called "Chief" in Tennessee?**

Chiefs are elected leaders of historic tribes. Leaders of private cultural organizations are not appropriately called "Chief." While some people assume this title for themselves, it is not appropriate to call anyone residing in this state "Chief" and the title should be avoided.

• **What is a "Clan"?**

Clans are subsets of historic tribes composed of members who are related to each other by family ties. Cherokee and Muscogean tribes have clans, and to be a member of their clans a person needs to be a member of their tribe. Private cultural organizations are not clans, and it is disrespectful to the tribes to call an organization by a tribal "clan" name in Tennessee.

• **Who is "Indian"?**

Native American Indians are persons
1 who can prove descendancy from a Native American family and
2 who affiliate themselves with other Native Americans. Many people in Tennessee like to claim Native American Indian blood but cannot prove it, and many who can prove it do not associate themselves with other Native Americans. Many organizations have sprung up that call themselves "Native American" and "Indian" for the egotistical purposes of their leaders. Before accepting an organization as being truly Native American, ask around. Find out how long a group has been in existence, how its leadership is chosen, how often its leadership has changed, and what other Native American Indian organizations it associates with.

• **What is "recognition"?**

"Recognition" is affirmation by the federal government, state legislature, or a historic tribe that a tribe, organization or person is Native American Indian. The most common form of recognition is individual citizenship in a tribal nation that is acknowledged by the U.S. federal government as having existed for many years. Some states, like Alabama and Georgia, recognize tribes within their states too. The state of Tennessee, through its Commission of Indian Affairs, has recognized some organizations and some individuals as Native American Indian. All tribes and some states have a process by which to test and determine whether or not a tribe, organization or person should be recognized as Native American Indian. For more information, search the web for Tennessee Recognition Criteria for Native American Indians.

• **Who represents the Native American Indian community in Tennessee?**

The Tennessee Commission of Indian Affairs represents Native American interests to the state. Other organizations, such as the Native American Indian Association of Tennessee, founded in 1983, represent their members' interests directly to the state and to tribal nations. Several special interest groups exist, like the Alliance for Native American Indian Rights, which is based in Nashville and is dedicated to representing Native American interests in preserving and protecting Native American burial grounds and other culturally significant places.

• **What is an "Indian card"?**

Many modern tribes issue identification cards to their citizens, much like a passport. It identifies the person as a tribal member, eligible for tribal services. Tribes may issue "Certified Degree of Indian Blood" CDIB cards to descendants of their members who do not qualify for official membership. Cards do not make a person Indian nor can real tribal cards be bought or sold.

• **What is a Tennessee "historic tribe"?**

Tribal nations and tribal groups that existed in Tennessee prior to "removal" in 1838 are some times referred to as Tennessee's "historic tribes." These include the Muscogee Creek, the Yuchi Euchee, Chickasaw, Choctaw, the Cherokee, the Chickamauga, the Shawnee and the Koasati Quassarte/Coushatta. Organizations whose members recently got together to explore their mutual Indian heritage are not historic nor are they tribes.



• **What is “the Commission”?**

“The Commission” is the Tennessee Commission of Indian Affairs TN CIA , an official entity within the executive branch of the state government, whose purpose is to represent Native American Indian concerns to the state. It is composed of seven Commissioners from the four largest metro areas and the three Grand Divisions of the state. It meets quarterly to discuss issues and make decisions. Several of the Commissioners have local quarterly meetings in which to discuss local and state issues with their constituencies.

• **What is the “Advisory Council”?**

The Advisory Council on Tennessee Indian Affairs ACTIA is a non profit organization of people elected from around the state to study issues and present their findings to the Commission.

• **What is “TNNAC”?**

The Tennessee Native American Convention TNNAC is a non profit organization responsible for holding biennial elections for Native American nominees to the state.

• **What is an “Indian Princess”?**

There is a common myth told by persons who claim to have Native American Indian ancestry that their great grandmother was an Indian princess. Stories of “the chief’s daughter” marrying outside the tribe are a way of both making an acceptable racial bridge despite miscegenation taboos and raising a person’s social status, and are generally not accepted as historical fact.

• **What is “Southeastern” native culture?**

Native American Indian culture of the South east was very different from what passes as generic or pan Indian pow wow culture brought in by people associating with western tribal cultures. For instance, Southeastern native culture is focused on agricultural seasons, and doesn’t have ‘pow wows.’

TENNESSEE COMMISSION OF INDIAN AFFAIRS
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www.state.tn.us/environment/cia/

NATIVE AMERICAN INDIAN ASSOCIATION OF TENNESSEE NAIA 1983 / www.naiatn.org

NATIVE AMERICAN INTERTRIBAL ASSOCIATION OF MEMPHIS 1984

EAST TENNESSEE INDIAN LEAGUE 1989
www.kornnet.org/etil/

CHATTANOOGA INTERTRIBAL ASSOCIATION
1993 cita.chattanooga.org

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answers to

questions about

NATIVE AMERICANS

in **TENNESSEE**

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- What is “recognition”?
- *Who represents the Native American Indian community in Tennessee?*
- What is a “cultural” organization?
- *What is an “Indian card”?*
- What is “the Commission”?