

About the Coharie

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Figure 1. Logo of the Coharie Indian Tribe

General information

The Coharie Tribe is located in Sampson and Harnett Counties in North Carolina. As of 2011, there are 2,791 enrolled Coharie members. The tribe maintains an official website¹ with more information.



Figure 2. Coharie tribal banner displayed at the annual NC Indian Unity Conference.

Official tribal contact information

Coharie Intra-Tribal Council, Inc.
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Coharie tribal government structure

When European explorers arrived in what is now North Carolina, American Indians already had long-established ways of organizing and governing their communities. Colonization forced most tribes to give up their lands and abandon their ways of life. Since the 1800s, many tribes have reunited and recovered their heritage. They have fought — and are still fighting — for respect, recognition, and the right to govern themselves.

The Coharie Tribe has a tribal governing body. The governing bodies consist of two boards. The Coharie People Board is a governing body elected by the tribal community. This board oversees the tribal functions and the tribal office building. Tribal functions include the annual powwow in September and the annual Coharie Princess Pageant in July. The board consists of nine people. This board has a chairman, vice chair, secretary, treasurer, and members. From this board, three members are voted and agreed upon to go to the Coharie Intra-tribal Council board. This board oversees and governs all the finances, (e.g. grants), petitions for federal recognition, tribal enrollment, staffing, and other executive duties. This board consists of an elected chairman, vice chair, secretary, and members. The tribe also has an elected tribal chief whose duties are mainly of traditional stature (eg. naming ceremonies, blessing of powwow arena, representing the tribe at other tribal and statewide functions).

Coharie organizational chart² (PDF)

thumbnail

This organizational chart shows the structure of the Coharie Intra-Tribal Council.

The Coharie Tribe is officially state-recognized but has been petitioning and fighting for federal recognition status for years.

Coharie tribal history and contemporary community

The present population of the Coharie Indian Tribe is located in the state of North Carolina in the counties of Harnett and Sampson. They descend from the aboriginal tribe of the Neusiok Indians. According to the 2000 census, the Indian population was 1,870. The current tribal roll has 2,791 members, with approximately twenty percent of these members residing outside the tribal communities. Historical movement, initiated by the inter-tribal as well as white/Indian colonial hostilities, caused the Coharies to move to their present

location between 1729 and 1746. Since this date, they have lived continuously as an Indian tribe.

Throughout the 1800s, the Coharies built a political base in Sampson County. This allowed the tribe to establish their own small subscription schools for the Coharie children since 1859. This was accomplished with their own funds and teachers. In 1911, however, the North Carolina Legislature gave them their own school system. Due to the conflict, the law rescinded in 1913. However, due to the tribal activity, which included a published book on the tribe's history by their attorney, the law was reinstated in 1917. The Coharies were given the East Carolina Indian School in 1943. This was a high school for tribal members. Governor Melville Broughton gave the main address during the dedication services. The current building serves as the current tribal offices.

Slideshow: Memories of Coharie schools³

screenshot

Through photographs and scrapbook pages, this slideshow offers a look back at the East Carolina Indian School and the New Bethel Indian School. A collection of documents⁴ (ZIP), including newspaper articles and transcribed interviews, provides more information about Coharie schools.

The fight to retain their school system was headed by the Sampson County Indian Clan, the governing body of the tribe through our earlier history. Through their Indian clan, the Coharie had a well-defined political structure for the management of internal kinship needs, such as pooling economic resources and financially supporting the school system and churches. The clan was also responsible for establishing eligibility committees to make sure that the students in the tribal school system met the necessary criteria.

The contemporary Coharie community consists of four settlements: Holly Grove, New Bethel, Shiloh, and Antioch. Within the main Coharie settlement are a number of Indian churches. The churches are the center of the Coharie activities. It is through the churches that families interact, the elders are honored, and the social rules enforced. The Coharies' sense of themselves is manifested most clearly through their religious activities.

Slideshow: Coharie Churches⁵

screenshot

This slideshow features historic and contemporary images of the Coharie Tribe's churches located in Harnett and Sampson Counties in North Carolina.

The Coharie Indian Tribe has been recognized by the state of North Carolina since 1971. The Coharie Intra-Tribal Council, Inc. currently governs the tribe. It consists of a seven-member tribal council that is elected by the tribal membership. Since 1980, Lumbee Legal Services (Legal Services of N. C. Pembroke) has represented the tribe on the petitioning process for federal recognition. A substantial amount of research has been conducted to write the tribe's petition for acknowledgement.

On the web

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Notes

1. See <http://www.coharietribe.org/>.
2. See http://www.learnnc.org/lp/media/uploads/2011/10/coharie_organizational_chart.pdf.
3. See <http://www.learnnc.org/lp/editions/coharie-schools>.
4. See http://www.learnnc.org/media/collections/nc/coharie_schools.zip.
5. See <http://www.learnnc.org/lp/editions/coharie-churches>.

Image credits

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Figure 1 (page 1)

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Figure 2 (page 2)

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