



Native People of Arkansas, 1541- Present: A Case Study

When Europeans arrived in the Louisiana Territory (which includes present-day Arkansas) during the 17th and 18th centuries, they encountered hundreds of Native communities living in what is now Arkansas. These brief summaries provide a mere peek into the lives of the Native People of Arkansas between 1541 and the present.



Quapaw Village. Courtesy of Kugee Supernaw.

Quapaw. Quapaw Indians lived on the lower Arkansas River where it joins the Mississippi. They built a type of house called a “longhouse,” with bark-covered walls and roofs. Quapaws grew corn, beans, squashes, pumpkins, and gourds in nearby fields. They gathered wild plants and hunted deer, bear, buffalo. They caught fish, small animals, and birds. When the United States bought their land in 1803, Quapaws moved to Oklahoma. Today, more than 2000 Quapaws live near Miami, Oklahoma.

Osage. Osage Indians lived in southwest Missouri but hunted buffalo and other animals in Kansas, Oklahoma, and Arkansas. They raised corn, beans, squashes, pumpkins, and other crops in nearby fields. They built longhouses much like the Quapaws. Osages traded food, hides, and other animal products to European and American settlers. This trade brought wealth and power but Osages were forced to sell their lands in the 19th century. They moved first to a reservation in Kansas, and later to Oklahoma. Today, more than 10,000 Osages live near Pawhuska, where they have the oldest Native American museum in the country.



Osage traders. Courtesy of Charles Banks Wilson.

To learn more about the Native People of Arkansas, check out: <http://archeology.uark.edu/indiansofarkansas/index.html>



Tunica Saltmakers. Courtesy of the Tunica-Biloxi Museum.

Tunica. Tunica Indians lived along the Mississippi River in southern Arkansas and northern Mississippi. Their villages had circular houses with mud-plastered walls and grass-thatched roofs. They raised corn, beans, squashes, and other crops, and gathered wild plant foods and hunted and fished. They made salt from salt-water springs, trading it with other Indians and Europeans for food and other goods. In the 19th century, Tunicas joined Biloxi Indians living near Marksville, Louisiana, where they continue to live today.

Caddo. Caddo villages were scattered across southwest Arkansas and parts of Texas, Louisiana, and Oklahoma. Families had their own farms with one or two circular, grass-covered houses, work areas, and crop fields. Families grew corn, beans, pumpkins and squashes, and fruits, and hunted and fished in nearby forests, fields, and streams. They also produced salt for their own use and for trade. When the United States forced Caddos from their lands after 1840, they moved first to central Texas and later to Oklahoma. More than 5,000 Caddos live near Binger and Oklahoma City today.



A Caddo farmstead. Courtesy of Ed Martin.



Cherokee community along the Arkansas River. Courtesy of the Arkansas Historical Commission.

Cherokee. Cherokees moved into Arkansas in the late 1700s, from their homelands farther east. By the early 1800s, their villages were located along the Arkansas River near modern Russellville. Cherokees built log cabins, used horses to plow their fields, and dressed in store-bought clothes. They were forced to move to Oklahoma after 1828. They built new homes and farms and even a college for women. Modern Cherokees live near Tahlequah, Oklahoma, where they have a museum on the old college grounds.

