



# COMMONWEALTH of VIRGINIA

Council on Indians

Thomasina Jordan  
Chair

## MEMORANDUM

**To:** The Patawomeck Group (Mr. Robert Green)

**From:** Tribal Recognition Committee members  
(Professor Helen Rountree, Wayne Adkins, Lionell Custalow and Gene Adkins)

**Re:** Petition of the Patawomeck Group seeking State Recognition

**Date:** February 12, 1998

We, the Committee members designated by Thomasina Jordan, Chair of the Virginia Council on Indians, have come to the following conclusion regarding the petition of the Patawomeck Tribe for State Recognition. After careful thought and research, including both the indigenous and the anthropological aspects of the case, we have concluded that the "petitioners" documents have not shown sufficient evidence of the existence of a tribal community to justify recognition as an Indian Tribe by the Commonwealth. In particular, we note the following:

- 1). No persons in the "Patawomeck" group in the 1920s through 1950s were harassed by the state's Vital Statistics Bureau. Dr. Plecker's 1943 "Circular" listing "suspicious" surnames county-by-county does not list anyone in Stafford or King George Counties. Dr. Plecker was known for going after people who publicly claimed to be Indians, so we doubt that any of the petitioners or their ancestors were claiming an Indian identity at that time. Additionally, the U.S. Census schedules that Dr. Plecker had access to (1790 through 1860) list the "Patawomecks" ancestors as white; even the suspicious Plecker does not seem to have questioned that identity. The petitioners have submitted no federal, state, or county documents indicating that their ancestors ever claimed an Indian identity publicly, nor have they presented documents to show a close in-group relationship that set their ancestors apart from neighbors who did not have Indian descent ( a necessity in proving the existence of a TRIBE).
- 2). Only one of the three anthropologists working with the Powhatan-descended tribes before 1940 mentions "Potomac" Indians in his field notes. That exception was Frank Speck from the University of Pennsylvania, who spent one night in Luther James Newton's house.

Speck, then wrote in 1928 that there was a possibly Potomac-descended group that ~~ought~~ to be checked out. In the early 1940's, Speck placed graduate students with several groups that are now recognized, but he never sent a student out to look at any group in Stafford/King George county

3). The first two anthropologists (Albert Gatschet and James Mooney from the Smithsonian) queried the reservated Pamunkeys and Mattaponi's about other, non-reservation Powhatan-descended groups in Virginia. The Pamunkey and Mattaponi knew about several others, some of whom are State Recognized Tribes today. However, they made no mention of any group in Stafford/King George County.

4). The Indian committee members (who include Mattaponi, Chickahominy, and Eastern Chickahominy representatives) did not hear anything about a "Potomac" group from their elders as they were growing up, which indicated that the current petitioners were out of touch, for whatever reasons, even in the 1920's when Frank Speck was encouraging regional get-togethers in Virginia, Maryland, and Delaware.