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U.S. Dept. of the Interior
Office of the Assistant Secretary – Indian Affairs
Attention: Office of Federal Acknowledgment
1849 C Street NW
Washington, D.C. 20240
February 13, 2024

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DOI/OS/AS-IA/OFA
Washington, DC

Dear ladies and gentlemen,

I am writing these comments concerning Petition No. 406 by the “Tripanick Nansemond Family Indian Tribe,” based in Kansas but claiming descent from the Virginia Nansemonds. I have read the petition in detail, but I will stick to general comments in this letter.

* The surviving historical records in both Virginia and North Carolina contain next to no mention, ever, of “Tripanicks.” The one and only mention by an Englishman who actually came over here and talked to Indians is a vague one that dates from 1587, when Ralph Lane (through an interpreter) interviewed a Chowanock chief. The chief did not make it plain whether the “Tripanicks lived in what is now NC or Va, nor whether they comprised a village or an independent chiefdom.

* The petition tries repeatedly to hook onto the historical Virginia Nansemonds and use records about THEM (which, in my opinion, is hijacking other people’s history to create more sympathy for oneself). The petitioners, themselves, try through out the petition to claim that ALL records about the Nansemonds are about themselves – but it lacks any first-hand, contemporary documents to prove anything of the sort.

* The petition also tries to fill remaining, very large gaps in 16th-19th centuries by dragging in large amounts of the Virginia Algonquian-speakers’ 17th century culture, some of it inaccurate or oversimplified. Instead, we need to know where the “Tripanicks” were located in the second half of the 17th century and what they were doing in those places as a GROUP then, *as well as in later times*.

* The petition also tries to fill late 18th through 19th century gaps by using federal records that were made about entirely different Native peoples outside of Virginia (in my opinion, the worst kind of padding). [NOTE: my dissertation I compared Virginia laws about Indian lands with federal ones across the U.S.; I was able to get oriented in the latter by a semester-long course in federal Indian law in general at the beginning of my doctoral coursework.] Those laws applied only to Indian groups who had formal relations with the federal government, of which there were none in Virginia until the 2010s [2018 for the Nansemond Indian Nation].

* I notice that nearly all of the citations in the petition are from popularized, online sources, some of them of dubious quality. Any books cited are those available online. The petitioners also make extensive use of Albert Bell's book, which covers the whole South, to show where "Tripanicks" were supposedly living (conveniently, their actual places of residence are never mentioned). Tracking down earlier tribal members, to see how they interacted with one another, properly involves many more local records, most of which are not available online or on microfilm – at least in Virginia. Without local, contemporaneous records showing their presence *anywhere* as a *group*, the "Tripanicks'" ancestors seem simply to be people who scattered out widely after 1700 (as did many, many non-Indians). And before the advent of telephones and automobiles, that kind of scattering would make keeping together as a genuine tribe virtually impossible.

* The "Tripanicks" claim they were in touch with the Virginia, now-federally recognized Nansemonds from the 1920s onward. I never heard any mention of such prior contact during my (ongoing) fieldwork with them. The first documentable contact between the two groups occurred at the NIN's August 2019 powwow, when Robert Bass approached Councilman (and Chief Emeritus) Sam Bass, whom I queried this past November. Robert was new to Sam, who also found him "rather aggressive" and overly eager to attach his group to Sam's. The photograph of the two men in the petition taken at that time, seems to me to show Sam looking less than "buddy-buddy" or happy about such a picture being taken. (I picked up on that tidbit from experience: another Wannabe group earlier that same summer actually manhandled me after a speaking gig, to get a photo they could use for publicity. Fortunately for me, I looked much worse than Sam did.)

I hope you find these comments useful. If there are questions, I am easiest to reach by email: [REDACTED] ("Metemsis" is the old Powhatan word for "little old lady, which I am nowadays.)

Sincerely

[REDACTED]

(Dr.) Helen C. Rountree

Author, *The Powhatan Indians of Virginia Through Four Centuries* (1990, U. of Oklahoma Press) and nine other scholarly books about Native people in VA, MD, and NC.

Honorary Member of the Nansemond Indian Nation (previously the Nansemond Tribal Association) since 1986. Fieldwork with them beginning in 1971.