

# History Of The Puyallup Tribe



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The Puyallup Tribe is a Native American tribe located in the Pacific Northwest region of the United States, primarily in what is now Washington State. With a rich cultural heritage that spans thousands of years, the Puyallup Tribe has navigated significant sociopolitical changes and has maintained its identity despite external pressures. Their history is marked by resilience, adaptation, and the struggle for recognition and rights.

## Origins and Early History

The Puyallup Tribe belongs to the Coast Salish people, who are indigenous to the region encompassing the Puget Sound and surrounding areas. The name "Puyallup" translates to "generous people" in the Lushootseed language, which is spoken by many Coast Salish tribes.

## Pre-Colonial Era

### 1. Lifestyle and Culture

- The Puyallup people traditionally thrived as fishers, hunters, and gatherers. Their diet was primarily based on salmon, which was plentiful in the rivers and streams, especially during the seasonal runs.
- They also gathered berries, roots, and other edible plants, and hunted game such as deer and elk. Seasonal

migrations were common as they followed the cycles of food availability.

## 2. Social Structure

- The Puyallup Tribe was organized into several villages, each led by a chief. These villages were often matrilineal, with lineage traced through mothers.
- Social roles were defined, with men primarily engaging in hunting and fishing, while women were responsible for gathering and processing food, as well as crafting items such as baskets and clothing.

# Contact with European Explorers

The first recorded contact between the Puyallup people and European explorers occurred in the late 18th century. The arrival of explorers, traders, and settlers brought profound changes to the tribe's way of life.

## 1. Influence of Trade

- The fur trade became a major influence, as European traders sought to exchange goods. This led to the introduction of new items such as metal tools and firearms, which altered traditional practices.
- The trade networks expanded, and the Puyallup began to engage with both European and other Native American groups.

## 2. Disease and Population Decline

- With contact came devastating diseases, such as smallpox and measles, to which the Puyallup had no immunity. This resulted in significant population decline and disruption of their communities.
- By the mid-19th century, the tribe had lost a large portion of its population, leading to social upheaval.

# 19th Century: Treaties and Land Loss

The 19th century marked a significant turning point in the history of the Puyallup Tribe, as they faced increasing pressure from American settlers and the U.S. government.

## Treaty of Medicine Creek

### 1. Signing of the Treaty

- In 1854, the Puyallup Tribe, along with other tribes in the region, signed the Treaty of Medicine Creek. This treaty established a reservation for the Puyallup and recognized their rights to fish and hunt in their traditional territories.
- However, the treaty was often not honored by the U.S. government, leading to further conflicts.

### 2. Land Loss

- The treaty ceded vast tracts of land to the government, reducing the Puyallup's territory significantly. This loss of land was compounded by the influx of settlers, who established farms and towns on traditional Puyallup lands.
- The Puyallup were restricted to a smaller reservation, which limited their access to traditional resources and disrupted their way of life.

## **Struggles for Rights and Recognition**

### **1. Late 19th Century Conflicts**

- Tensions escalated as settlers encroached on Puyallup lands, leading to conflicts over fishing rights and land use. In response, the Puyallup people sought to assert their rights through legal means and negotiations.
- The U.S. government often ignored treaty obligations, leading to frustration and resistance from the tribe.

### **2. Cultural Resilience**

- Despite the challenges, the Puyallup Tribe worked to preserve its cultural identity. Traditional ceremonies, language, and practices continued, fostering a sense of community and resilience.

## **20th Century: Rebuilding and Recognition**

The 20th century was a period of significant change for the Puyallup Tribe as they worked to reclaim their rights and rebuild their community.

## **Indian Reorganization Act of 1934**

### **1. Federal Recognition**

- The Indian Reorganization Act (IRA) of 1934 aimed to reverse some of the damage caused by previous policies of assimilation and land allotment. It allowed tribes to establish self-governance and reestablish their governments.
- The Puyallup Tribe took advantage of this act to form a tribal council and begin the process of self-governance.

### **2. Economic Development**

- In the post-war era, the Puyallup Tribe began to explore economic opportunities, such as timber management and fishing rights. Their strategic decisions laid the foundation for future economic growth.

# Legal Battles for Fishing Rights

## 1. Fishing Wars

- In the 1960s and 1970s, the Puyallup Tribe became involved in what is known as the "Fishing Wars," a series of protests and legal battles to secure their treaty rights to fish in traditional waters.
- These efforts culminated in the landmark U.S. Supreme Court case, *United States v. Washington* (1974), which upheld the treaty rights of the Puyallup and other tribes to fish in their traditional waters.

## 2. Impact of Legal Decisions

- The ruling led to the establishment of co-management agreements between tribes and the state of Washington to ensure sustainable fish populations and access to traditional fishing grounds.
- This success sparked a broader movement among Native American tribes to assert their rights and reclaim traditional practices.

# 21st Century: Modern Developments

The Puyallup Tribe continues to thrive in the 21st century, focusing on cultural preservation, economic development, and self-determination.

## Cultural Revitalization

### 1. Language and Education

- Efforts have been made to revitalize the Lushootseed language, with programs aimed at teaching younger generations about their heritage.
- The tribe operates educational initiatives that emphasize cultural history, traditional practices, and the importance of community.

### 2. Cultural Events and Celebrations

- Annual events such as powwows and cultural festivals serve as platforms for cultural expression, bringing together tribe members and the larger community to celebrate Puyallup heritage.

## Economic Initiatives

### 1. Business Ventures

- The Puyallup Tribe has invested in various economic ventures, including casinos and entertainment facilities, which provide funding for community services and programs.
- These enterprises have created jobs and contributed to the tribe's economic independence.

## 2. Environmental Stewardship

- The tribe has taken an active role in environmental conservation efforts, particularly concerning water quality and fish habitat restoration in the Puget Sound region.
- Collaborations with local and state agencies have focused on preserving the natural resources that are vital to the tribe's cultural and economic well-being.

## Conclusion

The Puyallup Tribe has a rich and complex history that reflects resilience in the face of adversity. From their early days as a thriving community of fishers and gatherers to their struggles for recognition and rights in the modern era, the Puyallup have demonstrated a commitment to preserving their culture and asserting their sovereignty. Today, they continue to navigate the challenges of contemporary society while honoring their traditions and fostering a sense of community among their members. Through ongoing efforts in cultural revitalization, economic development, and environmental stewardship, the Puyallup Tribe remains a vital part of the Pacific Northwest's cultural landscape.

## Frequently Asked Questions

### **What is the origin of the Puyallup Tribe's name?**

The name 'Puyallup' is derived from the Lushootseed language, meaning 'the generous people.' It reflects the tribe's historical connection to the land and their welcoming nature.

### **What were the primary resources and livelihoods of the Puyallup Tribe before European contact?**

Before European contact, the Puyallup Tribe relied on fishing, particularly salmon, as well as hunting, gathering, and trade. They utilized the rich natural resources of the Puget Sound region for sustenance and cultural practices.

### **How did the arrival of European settlers impact the Puyallup Tribe?**

The arrival of European settlers led to significant disruption of the Puyallup Tribe's way of life. This included loss of land due to treaties, exposure to new diseases, and changes in resource availability, which greatly affected their population and culture.

### **What was the significance of the Medicine Creek Treaty of 1854 for the**

## Puyallup Tribe?

The Medicine Creek Treaty of 1854 was significant as it established a reservation for the Puyallup Tribe and recognized their rights to fish in their traditional waters. However, it also led to loss of land and resources, sparking future conflicts.

## What efforts have the Puyallup Tribe made in recent decades to preserve their culture and rights?

In recent decades, the Puyallup Tribe has worked to preserve their culture through education programs, cultural events, and legal actions to protect their fishing rights. They have also engaged in economic development initiatives to strengthen their community and sovereignty.

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