

History of West Virginia before the Civil War

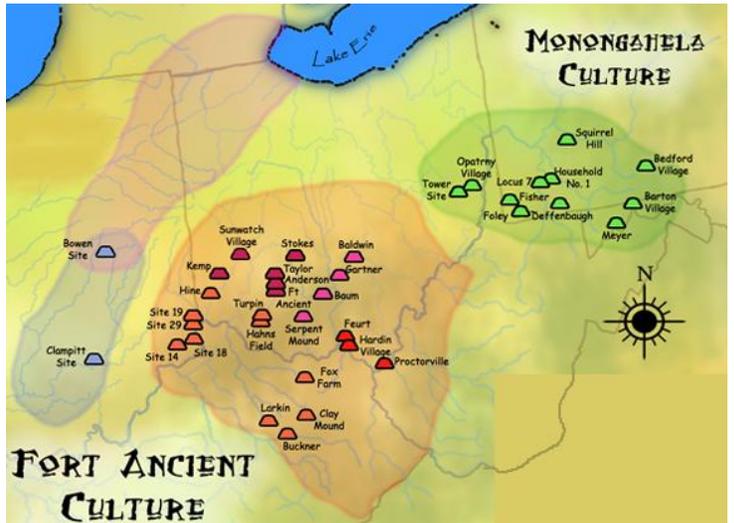
The Period from 1000 to 1700 A.D.

Most Native American settlements in West Virginia before the year 1500 are located along the larger rivers: the Ohio, Monongahela, or Kanawha. The more mountainous areas in what is now southeast West Virginia were hunting grounds not claimed by any tribe.

These people lived in dome-shaped bark-covered wigwams. For food they hunted and grew corn, sunflowers, and squash.

At first they settled in small family households and settlements of no more than 40 to 50 individuals. These small scattered settlements were moved frequently.

By 1200 the small villages began to combine into larger settlements of up to 300 people, which were occupied for longer periods, possibly up to 25 years. Buildings became larger multi-family dwellings. Settlements moved to a new location after one or two generations, when the natural resources surrounding the old village were exhausted. Many villages added defensive palisades to their boundaries.



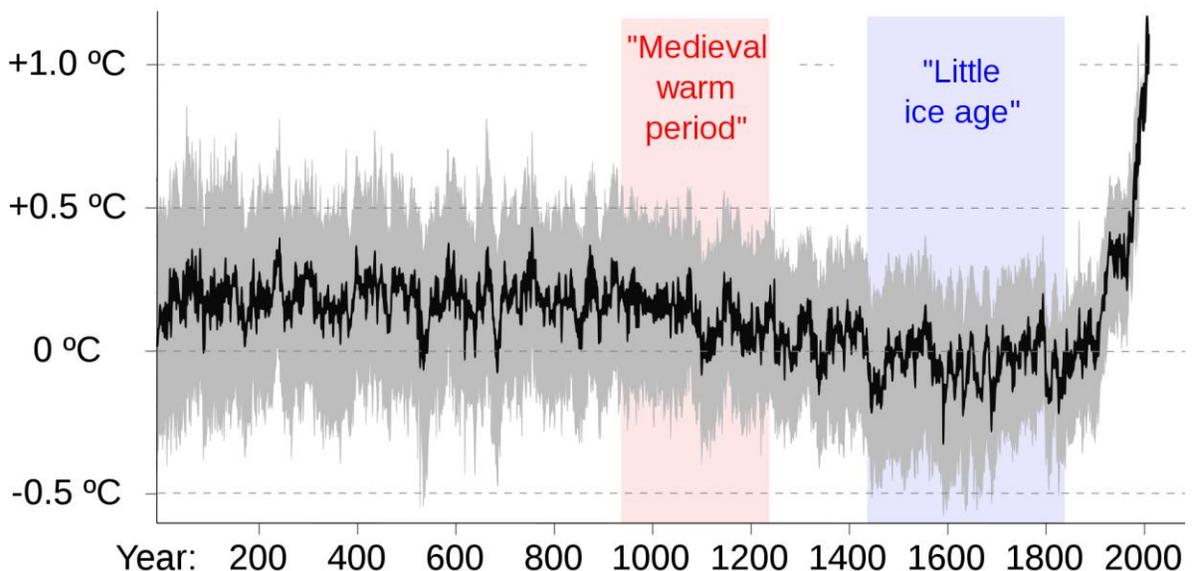
Villages were laid out around an open oval central plaza. The plaza was the center of village life: a place where ceremonies and other social events were held, such as the game “chunkey” which was played by rolling a disc-shaped stone across the ground and throwing spears in an attempt to land the spear as close to the stopped stone as possible.



In the period 1400 to 1550, villages became larger, with populations as high as 500. Archaeologists have speculated that the larger villages and palisades are evidence that after 1450, warfare and intergroup strife increased, leading the people to consolidate their villages for better protection.

It appears these cultures peaked about AD 1300. Studies of human remains indicate people after this time having poorer health and shorter lives. The colder weather of the Little Ice Age may have caused inter-group battling over food and farmland. The crops would not have prospered as well during this colder period, causing food shortages for populations that had increased.

Global Average Temperature Change



Because of trade with other groups, these inland tribes may have contracted infectious diseases from coastal peoples, who were directly exposed by their contact with Europeans. As the Native Americans did not have immunity, the new diseases resulted in high fatalities in widespread areas.



In any event, evidence suggests these cultures were already in decline by the time the earliest records were made by Europeans in the 1600s. Those records indicate the area was inhabited by Shawnee tribes. Some scholars believe the Shawnee to be descendants of the earlier cultural groups, but this is uncertain.