

# Congaree Swamp Stories

## Featured Speaker Transcript

### **Pam Corwin - What Happened to the Congaree Indians, and Learning from Native American Artifacts, Culture, Foodways and Creation Stories**

**Pam Corwin:** Small Pox is the number one killer of Native Americans here in South- well, actually most Native Americans in the United States. And they killed off most of the population in the Congaree tribe, and the Congaree tribe is actually extinct today because of the many different things that Europeans brought over, including slavery. And I'm sure ya'll are familiar with slavery. When they came over, when there was a lot of warfare going on they would catch the Native Americans - the Congaree, and they would send them to the Bahamas, to the Caribbean area as slaves to work on the plantations there, so that dwindled the numbers even more.

During 1715, the Congaree fought against the colonists in the Yemassee war, the Yemassee War was a war here in South Carolina. There is a place called Yemassee, if ya'll weren't aware of that. That's what I was saying about that most of the natives were caught and they were enslaved and they were sent to the Caribbean. And over half the tribes were moved or killed, so the Congaree joined the neighboring Catawba tribe and they maintained distinction into the late 18<sup>th</sup> century, meaning they didn't join the Catawba and take over what they did- their culture. They kind of tried to remain different, but then their numbers kept dwindling and then of course, they went extinct. But some people still have - Does anybody know what genetics are? Do you know what genetics are? Science question. Well, some of the members of the Catawba tribe that live today actually have genetics from the Congaree tribe, so they're not fully Congaree - which is cool.

So what do ya'll know about native food? Do you know what they ate?

**Camper:** They would - they fished for fish and they ate fish and they hunted for meat?

**Pam Corwin:** Okay. Well, that gives us the meat part. What kind of fruits and vegetables did they eat?

**Camper:** Corn, squash, potatoes, tomatoes, watermelon, grains and rice?

**Pam Corwin:** Well, rice wasn't exactly native here. Neither were potatoes, but, go ahead...

**Camper:** They ate beans, sunflowers, melons...

**Pam Corwin:** Yep. All kinds of different stuff. Do ya'll know what persimmon is? I'm sure you've seen them around here. They're found here. They're little orange fruits that turn a purplish color in the Fall. Deer eat 'em. They started eating 'em. Alright, and then, I'm sure ya'll remember all the different fish that ya'll heard about. You catch all kinds of different fish in the rivers here, and then deer, and turkeys, small game, wild geese, ducks - those are seasonal. And they collected a lot of berries, and nuts and local fruits such as the persimmons. And before they settled down as a tribe, they were called hunters and gatherers when they first came over. And hunters and

gatherers were people who weren't settled, so they didn't farm. But then they eventually started farming so they became a tribe, which is a settled establishment.

And this is a cool interesting fact, I worked with fish called a sturgeon. Do ya'll know what a sturgeon is? They're huge! They get huge, they get really, really big.

Camper: Like a grouper?

Pam Corwin: A lot bigger than a grouper. These things get seven, eight feet, and they have these scutes, they have these boney scutes, like an alligator has, and that's what they protect themselves with. Well, the Native Americans, when they were going to war, they would take these scutes, and they would make this armor made out of this scutes. So when an arrow was shot at them, or something was shot at them, they would just repel. Of course, it wasn't good against bullets when the Europeans came over, but that was kind of cool.

And if you look at your handout, you can the kind of shelters they had. They had a waddle and daub house, or they had chickees. Chickees were more of Congaree of down of South Carolina in the lowcountry of South Carolina, because it was more swampy areas that were subjected to flooding or a lot of water. So, when you go to the beach, have you ever seen the houses up on stilts? You ever seen, like - they have like nothing on them and there's just, like, boards sticking up out of the sand, and houses on top of it?

Camper: Like a treehouse?

Pam Corwin: Well, you could say its like a treehouse. But a lot of stuff in Charleston like that...and they put them up on stilts. Well, the Congaree - that's how they built their houses most of the time, because the Congaree floods. They have a floodplain. And if you're on the ground and the flood comes, then all your house is going to be flooded, so what's the point of that? So they started building houses up above the water. They used mud, and all kinds of stuff. In the lowcountry, they used pluff mud, which is not fun. Let's see here, eh, it talks about that.

They also built it on stilts because as you just learned, snakes, and all kinds of stuff are all in this forest, and they don't want snakes or possums or anything getting into their house, so they would build it up and they never bothered them. The hogs never bothered them, while they were up on the stilts.

The location of the Congaree, does anybody know that? Do you know your river systems around here? What rivers do you know around here?

Camper: The Congaree River...

Pam Corwin: Alright, that's a given, go ahead...

Camper: South Saluda...

Pam Corwin: Alright, okay, that'll count, go ahead...

Camper: The Wateree...

Pam Corwin: Yep, the Wateree, and...what's the other one?

Camper: The Upper Santee.

**Pam Corwin:** Yep, Upper Santee. They are all rivers around here. They're all connected. They were all around river systems, and the Congaree River is actually named after the Congaree word, and that's why we know the Congaree today, but we know they existed. We found all their artifacts and everything.

Alright, and the last part is lore and beliefs. Do you know what that is? Do you know what the definition of culture is? What is it?

**Camper:** Culture is stuff that they do sort of like Halloween and Christmas and all that, and they celebrated by making all this stuff, and doing many things for it, and having feasts and all...

**Pam Corwin:** Okay, well, that's their holiday and observances I guess. Okay, culture...Anybody else want to give me a definition? Go ahead...

**Camper:** What they do for life?

**Pam Corwin:** Okay. Culture is what we call is "learned behavior." So, its something that they pass down from generation to generation, just kind of like your grandparents passed something down to your parents and then they pass it on to you. And its their beliefs - what they believe in, their religion, like you were talking about things that they do for holidays - some people don't celebrate Christmas. I mean, I don't think they did - the Congaree, but they had a thing - what we call "creation stories," and its kind of a way to explain how something exists or why something is the way it is, and its also a way to teach young kids lessons. And I have two books here that I brought that were written, and its part of the Indian Reading Series, and I'm going to read them to you, because their kind of old in thinking - they're falling apart. And I'm going to read you this one, and its a story - there's a lesson in it. This really isn't why a blue jay hops, but its how the Native Americans viewed it. I'll read it to you, and I'll show you the pictures.

It says "Long ago, at a big meeting, Raven boasts about his arrow shooting. He was the best shot in the world. This is what he told everyone. He prepared for someone to challenge him.

Skate Fish came along. He made himself as big as he could. Dancing, he teased Raven's marksmanship. He gave Raven three chances to hit him.

'Whiz.'

Raven's arrow shot forth. Laughing, Skate Fish turned sideways. Teasing Raven, Skate Fish spread himself out again.

'Whiz.' Another miss, another laugh. Once more again, Raven missed three times.

Then Blue Jay stepped forth. 'I can do that too,' he said. 'I'll give you three chances.' Blue Jay planned to copy Skate Fish. He spread himself out like Skate Fish and teased raven.

'Whiz.' Raven's arrow shot forth. Blue Jay turned sideways.

'Ping.' Right in the hip.

'Ow!,' screamed Blue Jay, and he forgot he wasn't skinny like Skate Fish, and ever since, because of his vanity, Blue Jay hops."

So that's a story that tells you, they see a blue jay hopping in the woods, they come up with a story to teach little kids that you shouldn't brag about something because it might change. And then Skunk, let's see... It says "Long ago, there was a skunk that lived near a village of people. When angered, Skunk could make an odor that was capable of killing his enemy. One day, a group of people from the village made Skunk very angry. Skunk began chasing them. The people became frightened and ran to the top of a hill. They knew Skunk would continue chasing them, so they thought of a plan to destroy Skunk. The people heated a rock. They planned to roll the rock down upon Skunk. Skunk came into view at the bottom of the hill and began climbing upwards. When Skunk was close enough, the people pushed the hot rock over the edge. It rolled down over Skunk

and burned him. Now this did not kill or harm Skunk, but ever since that day, Skunk is unable to kill any man or animal with his smell. And to this day, he wears a stripe caused by the burn.”

So they see the stripe on the skunk, and they thought of this story, and now he has stripe. Do you understand what a “creation story” is? How it teaches a lesson? Alright, so with that said, I’m going to get onto more of their culture.

Their culture consisted of ceremonial dances and clothing and what they wore, as part of culture. So I brought in some artifacts. I’m going to show you. Do you know what these are? Go ahead...

**Camper:** Shoes.

**Pam Corwin:** What kind of shoes?

**Camper:** Moccasins.

**Pam Corwin:** Moccasins, yes. These are hand-made, and these are seed beads, which are colored from the local plants around here. You can find different colors - purples, blues, reds, from flowers and stuff like that. And these are just sewed on. And of course, these were mine a little while ago, and I wore holes in the bottom. So... And if you smell something funky, its just cedar. Its to keep the moths out. This is hand-beaded. It took forever to finish. I did it when I was a little girl. But you can wear this on part of your ceremonial dresses - you know how they had the big chief headdresses. You know what those are? Had the big feathers and everything. Go ahead.

**Camper:** Chief hat.

**Pam Corwin:** Yeah. Its what chiefs wore, pretty much. And you would wear this with them, or after they acquired horses, they used to decorate their horses with this. But back in the day they did not have horses.

**Pam Corwin:** This...

**Off camera:** You made that?

**Pam Corwin:** Uh-huh.

**Off camera:** That’s really neat.

**Pam Corwin:** It took me probably about two years to make that, because you have to like - the loom is only so big and you have to - very focused.

But this is actually something that you put on your shoulders. And some people wore these when they got married. The Congaree would have wore these when they - the groom or the bride, they would have wore this when they got married. They wore different colors, because each different tribe had different colors, and they had different feathers... Go ahead.

**Camper:** Did you make that too?

**Pam Corwin:** No, my dad made this. My dad made this a long time ago too. But they would use, like bald eagle feathers were of course, prized. We don’t see too many bald eagles around here now. They used hawks’ feather and goose, and all kinds of different colors, like duck feathers -

they have the pretty colors...This is another one that you can drape across your shoulders. This was actually made for the man because it's a little shorter, and the man always wore the bright colors for some reason.

Camper: Who made that?

Pam Corwin: My dad.

Camper: How long did it take him to make it?

Pam Corwin: I don't know. I don't think I was born when he made that stuff. And this...Does anybody know what this is? What is it?

Camper: Something that they blow into and then they make some bubbles or something like that.

Pam Corwin: What kind of bubbles?

Camper: I mean...

Camper: Smoke?

Pam Corwin: Go ahead.

Camper: Pipe?

Pam Corwin: Yep.

Camper: And they make smoke come out of it?

Pam Corwin: Yeah, it's called a peace pipe. If there was a difference between people, they would use this as a way to get them to come together like at the medicine man's hut, or teepee, or his little house on stilts, and they would all smoke the peace pipe. It's called a peace pipe. And what you would do is you stick the tobacco or whatever they were smoking - peyote, into that, and then they would just smoke it, just like you would a cigarette, or like a pipe, like your grandpa's, or like your parents have pipes? Same thing. And they don't have filters or anything on here so its pretty nasty. And this is just a little bag that had the peace pipe on it. I'd started with the bead work - hadn't gotten done with it. And do you know what a lot of this stuff is made out of? Like his bag? You know what this is called? Go ahead.

Camper: Animal pelts?

Pam Corwin: Its animal pelts or leather. All kinds of different leathers. And this would be something that you can put your berries in. A lot of women would wear it on their hips when they would go out in the woods to collect berries. And some of this stuff is actually...And this is another thing that you can wear on your shoulders. Go ahead.

Camper: And you made that too?

**Pam Corwin:** Yep. I made this. This one took me a while to make. Do you see the beading? You can see the beads, the little tiny beads. And you'd wear those for ceremonies, because they believed in dancing. They loved dancing - just like you ya'll were doing out there earlier.

Alright, just like you said, this is a little chief hat. I wish someone would have brought a camera, because ya'll could have took pictures of each other with this on your head.

**Off camera:** I brought one.

**Pam Corwin:** Oh well, if ya'll want pictures, I have two of them/

**Off camera:** There ya go! Alright! Let's let Kierrah try it on because her and Maria are re-telling the Native American Story, and then afterwards we can all try it on. Is that cool? Okay. Here you go, Maria. Can you bring that over to Kierrah, please? Thank you.

**Pam Corwin:** This is actually handmade, made from deerhide. This is leather, and what we did here is we just tanned the leather - that means drying out, and added some oil, and stretched over this piece of wood - we hollowed out a piece of wood. And this is actually a drum (beats drum) and when they - their ceremonial dances and parties, as you would say...

**Camper:** Powwow?

**Pam Corwin:** Powwow. A lot of people don't know what that is. Good job! They would have their drums. And they would have quite a few, and they would just sit there and beat 'em by hand, just beat 'em by hand...Go ahead.

**Camper:** At Lower Richland High School, when my cousin had this thing for back to school he had few of them.

**Pam Corwin:** He did? It's a pretty good thing. I mean, it's really fun...Ya'll can beat on it and do whatever you want. Pass it around. It's not that heavy compared to a lot of drums, especially the ones you go marching bands or anything...those are pretty heavy. Those are pretty light. And you can do it with your hands or sometimes they would have the sticks with the little rubber ends.

Alright, excuse me. I'm going to show you a little bit of their clothing - yeah that's what it smells like - cedar, for mothballs. These are actually men's - they would be considered casual wear in the winter time or in the fall when it got colder. Do you know what chaps are? Cowboys wore 'em. Like leather chaps. They'd put 'em over their jeans. These are a type of chap, and what you would do is you would put them on like this, like you'd put underneath you, and then you would tie 'em.

**Camper:** Like those leather things?

**Pam Corwin:** The mocassins? The leathers - Oh, well yeah. These aren't leather, because it was just too hot in the summer to wear them, and they liked this pelt...they liked (unintelligible). So they would make it out of pelts, like you were just talking about. And they liked again, like bright colors. And also were really good weavers, and so these are kind of like suspenders. We actually got the idea for suspenders from the Native Americans. So they would just tie it onto their chaps and they would do like this, and they would tie it onto the front and onto the back, and that's what held it up. Just like suspenders. They didn't have the cool little flippy ones like we have now.

And let's see what else I've got in there. There's some pelts. This is actually a weasel. You can take - pass that around. And this is a belt that they would wear. And this is hawk feathers, and a pelt. This is a deer pelt.

**Camper:** What are those silver things?

**Pam Corwin:** These are called conchos. They believed in shiny stuff - they liked shiny stuff. They didn't originally, do what?

**Camper:** Why's they have that hole in it? I stuck my finger in it?

**Pam Corwin:** Oh, I don't know. So, you can feel that and pass it around too. Again, notice the bright colors. When Europeans first came, they would just trade for all these cool, shiny things. They didn't know the value of them. And they would put them on their waist. They also had bells that they'd put on their feet and their hands, and when they would dance, they would have this noise that would go along with the beat (shakes bells) - just like that. And if you ever listen to the music, you'll hear it. Just hear the same beat over and over. And they would also put on - that's a jawbone, a possum jawbone. And they had seashells. I don't know what's on here [end].