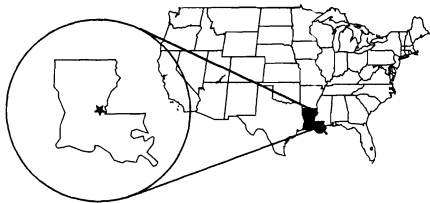


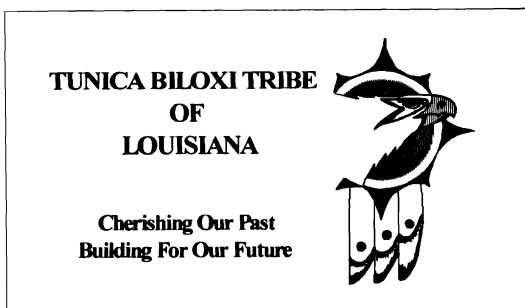
TUNICA-BILOXI



The Tunica and Biloxi Indians have lived on their reservation near Marksville, Louisiana, for over two centuries, during which the tribes, though speaking completely different languages, have intermarried extensively.

Traders and entrepreneurs of the first order, the Tunica once exercised influence over a wide territory encompassing present-day Arkansas, Oklahoma, Missouri, Tennessee, Louisiana, Alabama, and even Florida, where the Spanish under De Soto encountered them in 1541. But under severe pressure from diseases, famine, and warfare, the Tunica steadily moved southward, following the Mississippi River.

The Biloxi were a tribe on the Mississippi Gulf Coast at present-day Biloxi, Mississippi. They were the first people the French colonizers encountered in 1669. The Biloxi, like the Tunica, formed a strong alliance with the French, which brought them important economic and political benefits.



Through their commercial skills and adaptability the Tunica accumulated unprecedented quantities of European artifacts, primarily from the French with whom they established close political and military ties, but also from the Spanish. The discovery in the mid-1960s of the "Tunica Treasure", called the greatest archeological find in the Lower Mississippi Valley, led to a struggle which not only triggered the largest return of American Indian grave goods ever but laid the foundation of a new federal law, the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act. (The Act declares that grave goods and other

objects which are held by museums, federal and state agencies, and which are identifiable as to a particular tribe, must be returned to that tribe.)

The motto on the Tunica-Biloxi flag, “Cherishing Our Past, Building For Our Future”, summarizes four-and-a-half centuries of tribal history and highlights their lasting contributions to a key Native American belief: the reverence and preservation of ancestral remains. (Jefferson Hennessy, “The Tunica Triumph”, *acadiana* profile, *The Magazine of the Cajun Country*, Vol. 17 No. 1, pp. 10 ff, Sept./Oct. 1995.)

The flag was developed by the tribe in 1992. Its background is white. At the center-left are “TUNICA BILOXI TRIBE OF LOUISIANA” above and “Cherishing Our Past, Building For Our Future” below, all in black. At the right appears the head of an eagle, in white with black detail and a yellow beak. The forked-eye eagle design reproduces a well-known artistic motif from the Mississippian Period (700 A.D-1800 A.D.), widely used on conch shells, copper, and pottery. The eagle overlaps a white-bordered red disk symbolizing the sun, and a black-rayed design around the disk, separated by a white ring, alludes to the known but unseen power behind the sun. Three white eagle feathers with black trim and red dots edged in black hang below the disk.

The feathers recall an ancient Tunica-Biloxi myth in which a tribal priest wished to send a prayer to the sun, but didn’t know how to get it there. He called upon his friend the bear, who said—for in those days men and animals could understand one another plainly—that he could carry it only to the top of the tallest tree. Fortunately, the bear knew someone able to deliver the prayer all the way to the sun: Brother Eagle. And the eagle, according to the legend, circled ever higher and higher until he reached the sun—a beautiful woman. She said to the eagle, “Wait, give me one of your feathers, I will kiss it with my hot breath, and then you carry it back to the Tunica-Biloxi as a sign that I have chosen them as my people.” And that is why, to this day, the top of an eagle’s feather is still scorched black from the kiss of the sun. And that is also why the sun is symbolized on the feathers of the Tunica-Biloxi flag by the red dot on each feather. The flag is displayed

in front of the Tunica-Biloxi Museum, the tribal headquarters, and in the tribal council chambers. 🍀

[Thanks to Dr. William Day, Director of the Tunica-Biloxi Museum that houses the Tunica Treasure and serves as a shrine to tribal ancestors, and to Earl Barbry, Jr., Assistant Director of the Museum and son of the famed Earl J. Barbry, Sr., Chairman of the Tunica-Biloxi since 1978, whose leadership and success in improving tribal fortunes have earned him praise as “the strongest Indian leader of the century”.]