

(3) Technical Assistance Letter(s)

- December 12, 1986
- May 27, 1987
- June 14, 1996

Tribal Government Services - AR

DEC 12 1986

Mr. Kirby Verret
Star Route, Box 95-A
Golden Meadow, Louisiana 70357

Dear Mr. Verret:

In accordance with section 25 CFR 83.9(b), the Bureau of Indian Affairs Branch of Acknowledgement and Research has reviewed the documented petition for acknowledgment submitted by the United Houma Nation for any obvious deficiencies and significant omissions. While the petition narrative and the documentation in general are well compiled, there are some areas which you may wish to strengthen with additional research and documentation. In some cases the evidence submitted appears to be contradictory. Additional research and documentation would assist us in our evaluation. The following comments and questions are arranged according to the criteria which must be fulfilled before a group can be acknowledged as an Indian tribe.

25 CFR 83.7(a) Several documents in the petition suggest that the group may not be a tribe and that the group's membership may not be Indian. If possible, please clarify these differences. For example, Dalt Wolk, a social scientist, in 1975 said regarding intermarriage that it "left the fact of [their] being Indians [but] destroyed in the sense of tribe." He also said that the "Houmas were not Indians in any recognizable way" (Exhibit 53). Also, Jan Curry stated that Rosalie Courteaux was "the last leader of what was then a tribe" (Exhibit 60).

25 CFR 83.7(b) The petition could provide a more comprehensive description of the contemporary Houma community. In preparing such a description, the researcher should refer to the guidelines we provided and should keep in mind the definition of community in 25 CFR 83.1(c). Evidence should be provided of any communal endeavors, cooperative activities, institutions, and/or events which currently provide for community cohesion among the Houma. For example, if you have any predominantly Indian churches or annual celebrations, please describe them. Are there any social or geographical subdivisions within your group? Also if your group has any distinctive customs, it would assist us if you would describe them. Please include information about both inter- and intra-community celebrations, homecomings or other mechanisms for maintaining and/or renewing social relationships. It is apparent that there are many settlements where your members reside but it is not clear how these various individuals or groups of individuals maintain broader relations between settlements.

25 CFR 83.7(c) It is important that the petitioner demonstrate tribal political influence over its members throughout history. The petition presents evidence of a certain level of social integration between the various Houma settlements. Describe the process used by the informal leaders of each community to politically integrate the community. Could you please describe in more detail how the government in the villages relate to the group's centralized government both in the past and the present.

In 1941, the anthropologist Frank Speck pointed out the "non-integration of the Houma as a tribe, without headmen and council," and preferred to describe them as a "distended consanguineous family" rather than an integrated tribe. While Speck also stated that a "means was open by which to recognize and deal with these people as a unit" (i.e. their kinship bonds), he did not describe the existence of a Houma political system, based on kinship, governing the entire group (Petition p. 62). In addition when a Houma delegation met with Congressman Martin in 1922, people looked to Jean Baptiste Parfait, the local leader at Dulac-Grand Caillou, to be the principal leader but he declined the role since he did not see himself as a spokesman for all of the Houmas, and apparently there was no one else who could be viewed as such. The petition states (p. 141) that political leadership was customarily thrust upon the local settlement leaders and was thus "more an obligation than an honor." However, a 1942 article described Jean Victor Naquin as the "self-appointed mayor" of Isle Jean Charles (Exhibit 51). Would you please explain these inconsistencies, and please provide us with a list of leaders with their dates of leadership for each settlement and the group as whole for as far back as possible.

25 CFR 83.7(e) Submitted with the documented petition was an address list showing a total of 3,718 members. We had anticipated that the members would be substantially larger. In the materials submitted, there were some individuals with assigned numbers into the 6,000's. Apparently the address list does not include all members of the group. The regulations require that a group submit a list of all known current members of the group (25 CFR 83.7(e)). Children who are considered members of the group should be included in the group's membership roll. Please furnish us with a list of all current members. This list should include the following for each member: 1. full name of the member; 2. complete residential address; 3. the assigned identification number given to the member on the Individual History Chart submitted with the petition; and 4. complete date of birth or at least year of birth. This list should be certified by the governing body of the group. We cannot overemphasize the importance of submitting a complete membership roll. If recognized, the list submitted for acknowledgment purposes will become the group's base roll for Bureau purposes and, as such, will be binding on the group for some time to come except for minor corrections. Other questions are as follows:

1. According to the membership criteria, a person must possess 1/8 or more Houma blood. We would like to know, how this blood degree is computed?

2. The Constitution and By-laws state that the membership consists of all persons officially registered as Houma Indians at the time of the ratification of the Constitution. Is there a list of these people? If so, please provide a photocopy of the list. How does a person become officially registered as a Houma Indian?
3. By-laws, Article III, Section 2(B) states that "an application for membership shall be determined by membership guidelines that have been established by resolution of the United Houma Nation Tribal Council." Please provide copies of any guidelines that have been adopted. Photocopies of the formal resolutions should be submitted. If you have a list of persons voting, please provide a copy.
4. Please provide any photocopies of any former rolls of the United Houma Nation, Inc., that may exist.
5. The Constitution, Article II, states "jurisdiction shall extend to any parish." Is membership limited only to residents of Louisiana who meet the membership criteria?
6. It would be helpful to have copies of the governing documents of both the Houma Tribe, Inc., and the Houma Alliance, Inc., the predecessor organizations of the United Houma Nation. If the governing documents do not state what the membership criteria was for these organizations, could you please provide a statement of each organization's membership criteria if it is known. Please submit photocopies of all membership rolls that are in existence for the former organizations.
7. If at all possible, in addition to the above documents, we would appreciate one more copy of all the genealogical material such as Individual History Charts and Ancestry Charts. If there are any available membership rolls for the former organizations, we would appreciate photocopies of them.

We realize that our review will require more research on the part of your group but it would greatly facilitate our evaluation of your petition when your group is placed on active consideration. The Branch of Acknowledgment is not responsible for the actual research on behalf of the petitioner (25 CFR 83.6(d)). Once active consideration begins we may ask for additional information. If you have any questions, please contact Lynn McMillion, Branch of Acknowledgment and Research, Mail Stop 32-S1B, Bureau of Indian Affairs, 1951 Constitution Avenue N.W., Washington, D.C. 20245 or call Area Code (202) 343-3568.

Sincerely,

Sgd John D. Geary

Acting

Deputy to the Assistant Secretary
Indian Affairs (Tribal Services)

cc: Helen Cindrat
Governor Edwin W. Edwards
Attorney General William J. Guste
Sen. Russell B. Long
Sen. J. Bennett Johnston
Cong. John B. Breaux
Cong. Billy Tauzin
Diana Williamson, Governor's Commission on Indian Affairs
Jeanette A. Campos, Institute for Indian Development
Cindy D. Arcy, Friends Comm. on National Legis. and Indian Affairs
Billie D. Ott, Eastern Area Office
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