In 1607, about forty Native American tribes lived in what is now Virginia. John Lederer, a German traveler, observed that their “songs comprise[d] the mysteries of their religion and the great deeds of their ancestors.”

British fiddle traditions crossed the Atlantic in 1618. The earliest known U. S. election campaign song is “God Save George Washington” (1780). Eight presidents were born in Virginia; every one had a campaign song. Soldiers created the first distinct form of American music during the Civil War.

In the early twentieth century, Norfolk’s Attucks Theatre, one of the only theaters in Virginia that was financed, designed, and built by African Americans, showcased stars such as Cab Calloway, Bessie Smith, and Duke Ellington.

Old-time songs from Virginia commemorate historical events. “The Cyclone of Rye Cove,” tells the story of a tornado that leveled a schoolhouse in Scott County in 1929. “Coal Miner’s Blues” relates the perils of miners and the suffering of their families in 1930s Virginia.

The Crooked Road, Virginia’s 253-mile-long heritage music trail, was established in 1974 to connect instrument makers and musicians in the rural southwestern part of the state.

Since its inception in 1982, seven Virginia musicians and dancers have received the prestigious National Heritage Award for their invaluable contributions to the U. S. cultural landscape.

In 2007, representatives from the eight state-recognized tribes of Virginia performed in Gravesend, Kent, England. They were the first Native American delegation to visit England in over 250 years.