Giant oak trees, old and bearded with the long, pointed daggers of Spanish moss are bountiful as one comes upon the Chitimacha Indian Reservation, known also as Indian Bend on Louisiana highway 326 near the town of Charenton, Louisiana. Here lives the oldest, and only recognized tribe of Indians in the State of Louisiana. The Chitimachas, who were in this area before the time of Christ, are the last remaining descendants of a once powerful tribe whose history is etched upon the pages of the State's history.

All researchers have stated that the Chitimachas were known to be a peaceful tribe until they were molested. They lived in peace and harmony with all neighboring tribes until 1699. In that year fighting broke out between the Chitimachas and the French and their Indian allies. The Chitimacha villages, numbering over twenty, were invaded. At the time, the tribe numbered over three thousand members and had between seven hundred and eight hundred warriors living on over seven thousand acres of land. Today, after many a defeat, bribe or cheat, their land has been reduced to only 183 acres. Their membership is now about six hundred, and there are forty-eight homes on the reservation.

Until 1932 the Chitimachas had no opportunity for education. That year their chief, Ernest Darden, gave a room in his house to be used as a classroom. In 1935 the United States government, realizing the neglected condition of these Indians, erected a one-room schoolhouse on the reservation. It is still operating on the reservation.
by the Federal government as an elementary school.

The few remaining Chitimachas are as reluctant to leave their motherland as were their ancestors. As the display here indicates, they are talented in their arts and crafts, and are known the world over for theirbasketry. Unfortunately, however, their arts, as well as their language, are being forgotten. Today only a few Chitimachas still speak their native language.

The tribe is still governed by a chief who is advised by a council of four members, elected by the tribe. The tribe does not receive any assistance from the Federal government. Nevertheless, they have come a long way from being the fishermen and hunters, living in small palmetto huts, who were known to the early French explorers over two centuries ago.

The tribe has begun to intermarry with other races, primarily because they are almost all closely related. It is not their choice to intermarry, but necessity demands it, if the Chitimachas are to survive.