



The Lenapes: A study of Hudson Valley Indians

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Part 1

The Lenape: Prehistory

When the Europeans came to North America they saw a civilization unlike their own. The Europeans saw the Indians as a useful tool in order to become wealthy and prosperous. They exploited the Indians and their land. However, prior to the Europeans appearance to North America there were men and women who roamed the land freely without fear of the white man and his culture.

The Indians of the Hudson Valley spoke a language known as the Algonquian. This Algonquian civilization is said to have been migrants similar to the habitat in Northeastern Asia. They crossed to North America and moved South to the Great Lakes. Then they proceeded to move into the Northeast. " Historically, the upper and middle Hudson Yalley was occupied by Algonquian-speaking groups of the Mahican confederacy" (Funk 361). These Indians were known to have been in the Northeast area for at least 11,000 years. The climate during this movement produced severely cold winters and brief summers.

The Hudson Valley tribes were part of the Algonquian confederacy. Comprised in this Algonquian band were the Delaware, Mahican, and Wappinger. All three tribes had further sub-divisions of smaller tribal bands. The three tribes were similar in culture, customs, and language. Furthermore, because of their multiple similarities, there is still confusion among scholars as to which bands belong to which tribes.

The Delaware tribe was the largest of the three Algonquian speaking tribes. The term Delaware comes from the name of the river where many of these indigenous peoples lived. They referred to themselves as the Lenni-Lenape, or "true men" (Waldman 78). There were three major sub-divisions in the Delaware tribe: Munsee (wolf), Unami (turtle), and Unalacitgo (Turkey). These three divisions had further sub-divisions. The general populous of Algonquian speaking tribes referred to the Delaware as 'Grandfather' because they considered Delawares' territory as the Algonquian original home land. This geographic region was located west of the Hudson River stretching south past the present day city of Philadelphia.

The next tribe of the Algonquian band was the Wappingers. They occupied the land east of the Hudson River and shared the same life styles of the Delaware. The Wappinger lived between Manhattan Island and Poughkeepsie, now the southern part of New York State. The Wappinger were flanked by their two Algonquian neighbors, the Mahican to the north and the

Delaware to the south. The Wappingers traded with both the Delaware to the south and their northern neighbor, the Mahicans.

The Mahicans or Mohegans inhabited the northern end of the Hudson Valley, mainly New York. Their capital was located near present day Albany. Mahican and Mohegan were both different variations for the Algonquian word "wolf". Unlike their Algonquian allies, they were enemies with their neighbors to the west. The Mahicans were in direct conflict with the Mohawks, that were part of the Iroquois Nation. The Mohawks would often invade the Mohican villages from the west.

The Delaware, Wappinger, and Mohican were principally forest hunters and fisherman. They gathered shellfish and various wild foods for their nutrition. The Mohicans were masters of spears and clubs, nets and traps. The Algonquians were big game hunters in which they used various types of clovis spear points and chipped stone. The Algonquian also had many methods of farming. They were known to have planted corn, beans, squash, staple crops, and gathered maple syrup. The Indians also produced lanceolate points which were used as knives and scrapers. These tools were used on barren ground caribou and other forms of game. Over a large period of time, these Indians would split into various different tribes throughout the Northeast. These particular sub-tribes were bound together under a strong headman.

Spiritually, the Algonquian and their subsequent sub-tribes believed in the "Great Spirit" or "Manitou". The "Great Spirit" was considered the supreme being, and lived in everything. They believed they were indebted to that supreme being for everything that was available to them: the water, the bushes, trees, animal life, the moon and the stars. These tribes would hold special ceremonies in which they would worship the "Great Spirit" and other various spirits in order to achieve guidance and strength. They would pay homage to the "Great Spirit" and recite visions during the "Big House" ceremony. This sacred ceremony, was thought to benefit all people, to avert natural catastrophe, and to hold the members of the tribe together. Spiritual power was attributed to a log carved statue known as the Manitoh Kan, which served as an imitation or representation of the "Great Spirit". The tribes did not have a separation between spiritual and secular things, all was spiritual.

The culture and life of the tribes were based on their own specific beliefs. Nevertheless, the individual beliefs of the Delaware, Wappinger, and the Mohican did not deviate too significantly to create any gaping differences. The Mohicans often engaged in warfare against the Mohawks for territorial hunting rights, There were also warriors, who roamed the Northeastern area armed with weapons like spears, tomahawks, clubs, and the bow and arrow, However, according to Marist College Professor Thomas Wermuth "they were not in competition with one another." The reason for this was that the Indians had a sound sense of cooperation and community. The three Algonquian tribes all traded goods among each other.

The architecture of these tribes was arranged in an area that was best suitable for them. Many Algonquian bands were small villages located near the Hudson River. They lived in long bark lodges as well as domed wigwams that they covered with bark or mats of woven plant material. The houses that they made were six meters in diameter which were adjusted around an open central "plaza." They developed many different methods for using the land around them. They set up water drainage systems and relied on the changes in the natural environment for their livelihood. They also used their methods of agriculture to prevent sediment deposition or erosion. Every eight to twelve years they would relocate willingly and not return until the land

and its resources renewed themselves.

There are indications that the Indians were enterprising prior to the colonists' arrival to the New World. The Northeastern Indians used mnemonic devices as money and as guarantees of promises or agreements in intertribal councils. These devices consisted of seashells from the Atlantic Ocean and various other objects. This form of money was called "wampum." From archaeological excavations there is also evidence that the Indians traded with one another. The Indians used shell beads, copper, corn and other products coursed along the New York region's rivers and footpaths. These means of trading were quite frequent in the Hudson Highlands. However, the coming of the Europeans, especially Henry Hudson, put an end to this amiable and customary way of life.

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Part 2

The Lenape: Contact with the Dutch

The Indian tribes of the lower Hudson Valley, the Delaware, Mahican and the Wappinger, were drastically affected by the first European contact and interaction: the Dutch traders and colonists. The Indians met their unpreventable demise through the fur trade, disease and the disruption of their entire way of life upon the arrival of Europeans interested only in expansion and trade. The following is a brief account of initial white man contact with these natives and its results.

In 1609 Henry Hudson was hired by the Dutch East India Company to explore a route around Siberia to the Orient. Unsuccessful there, he disobeyed orders to return and headed westward to investigate the possibility of a passage through North America. Hudson and his sailors discovered the Delaware Bay, and did not find the desired passage. He continued northward and sailed up the New York Bay and into the Hudson River and again found that there was no strait to be found. However, Hudson encountered his first Native Americans after anchoring along the Hudson River. He and his crew fished and bartered with the Indians, the natives offering no violence. Hudson made his way back down the river cautiously trading with the natives that they encountered. (Kenney 14) Hence was the initial encounter with the white man that the Natives of the Hudson Valley experienced. When news reached Amsterdam of the high quality of furs that Hudson had traded with the Indians of the Hudson Valley, officials there sent more ships to trade these furs with the Natives and the fur trade in the Hudson Valley began.

In 1613, two Dutch traders attempted an alliance with the Mahican tribe in order to establish a trading post opposite a Mahican village. This sparked hostility and competition from the Mahican rivals, the upstate Mohawks. The two tribes were constantly warring over exclusive trading privileges with the Dutch. The Mahicans became so preoccupied with trade and fur trapping that they offered little resistance to Dutch colonization. (Trigger 202) More and more Dutch colonists and traders triggered more hunting and trapping on the part of the Indians. This unstable exchange was detrimental to the Hudson Valley Indian.

The fur trade initiated by the Dutch created an awareness of territoriality among the Indians in the Hudson Valley. There was competition and disputes over trapping territories. For example, "by favoring a particular local Indian as interpreter and/or spokesman for the group the traders stimulated the emergence of a band chief with the authority to divide communal lands." (Bowdoin) Prior to the fur trade with the Dutch and later with other Europeans, the Mahican and the Delaware only killed animals for food and shelter. Never was there a concern for land ownership or cause for disputes with other tribes. Peaceful trade existed between tribes as archaeological evidence finds they traded pottery, shell beads and native copper. (Bowdoin) However the

Mahicans became so preoccupied with trapping for as many furs as possible for the increasing amounts of Dutch settlers and traders that they eventually expired their own territories of furs. All the natives got in return for their efforts were European luxuries such as cloth and liquor. The increasing amount of Dutch colonization and exploitative sale of Mahican land moved the Mahicans slowly from the Hudson River area. An example of such negotiations is the notorious sale of Manhattan Island to the Dutch from the Manhattes, a Wappinger tribe (the Wappingers were relative to the Mahican tribe), for an amount equitable to twenty-four dollars.(Josephy 22) Amateur Dutch traders were also the first to introduce firearms to the natives which proved to be exceptionally harmful.

Mahican concentration on trapping for the fur trade instead of hunting animals for their own use was detrimental to their health and their existence. While the men were busy hunting and trapping, it kept them from performing their regular tasks like providing meat, furs and other products from the animals to their families. The preparation of the fur pelts was added to the daily tasks of the women, while they were usually in the gardens and gathering food. This created an imbalance of responsibility imposed on the sexes as well. The unpreventable loss of economic dependence, decay of native crafts and chronic malnutrition were all the damaging effects of the fur trade. (Bowdoin)

Despite their inherent exploitation of the Indians of the Hudson Valley, the Dutch were intent on gathering as much information as possible about the tribes they encountered, who they referred to as Wilden, or wildmen. Many letters from colonists that went back to the Netherlands included detailed descriptions of the native persons, their clothing, houses, food, domestic habits and social customs.(Kenney 25) The traders had little or no knowledge of Indian dialect beyond that of what they used for trade, so the descriptions were purely external and visual. Some traders took native women as wives and some did make an attempt to learn the language and ways of the people, but in most cases it did not stop them from joining the Dutch in battle against the Indians when war finally broke out.

Initial Dutch contact with the Native Americans was nothing but detrimental to them. By 1640, epidemic diseases such as small pox, measles and typhus wiped out approximately ninety percent of Indian populations in the Hudson Valley. The fur trade and Dutch colonization lured the Indians from their native practices and customs to the entrapment of European luxurious commodities. Finally, white contact with the Indians lead to many years of harsh wars and unfair treaties.

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Part 3

The Lenape: Wars and Diplomacy

Before the arrival of the white man in the Hudson Valley the tribes of that area got along with little conflict. However, when the Dutch sailed up the Hudson River, this all changed. The presence of the foreigners resulted in an increase in intertribal warfare, as well as warfare that was directed toward these foreigners. The catalyst to this activity can be said to be the The Fur Trade that was started by the Dutch. The Fur Trade in the Hudson Valley region was characterized by intertribal warfare.

The Dutch made it profitable for tribes to trade their furs so hunting and trapping flourished during this time. Due to the increase of hunting and trapping, tribes such as the Iroquois decimated the animal population within their territory, thus restricting their participation in the Fur Trade to a minimum. This, however, resulted in tribes moving into the territories of other tribes, such as the Iroquois moving into Wappinger territory. What ensued was warfare between the two tribes initiated by the desire for profit which was offered by the Dutch and their Fur Trade. At this point the Dutch remained neutral, letting the tribes fight among themselves, however, this would change when the area became more populated by Dutch settlers.

As the Fur Trade was winding down due to a depletion in furs, the Dutch began to need more land for agriculture because of its increased population. In an effort to obtain more land the Dutch began to push the tribes out of their territory which resulted in warfare between the Dutch and the Indians who resided in the Hudson Valley region (Waldman p. 95). As the Dutch developed thriving settlements in New Amsterdam and Fort Orange, they began to squeeze the Hudson Indians out. Pressure from the Dutch often became violent when the Indians would rebel, and fail to comply with commands put forth by the white man.

One such example of this behavior was the **Pavonia Massacre of 1643** (Waldman p. 248). The Pavonia Massacre began when a group of Dutch soldiers brutally killed a band of Wappinger Indians. Due to this incident, the Wappinger Tribe sought revenge upon the Dutch. This incident would escalate into a full scale uprising that would not be put down for another year in 1644. This process was also repeated during the **Peach Wars of 1655** (Waldman p.80). The Peach Wars were similar to the Pavonia Wars in that they both began with Indians seeking revenge upon the Dutch. In this case the revenge was derived from an incident in which an Indian woman was murdered for picking peaches in a Dutch farm. Wappinger Indians sought

swift revenge upon the foreigners which turned the incident into a major conflict.

During this time the Dutch army was lead by Peter Stuyvesant. Stuyvesant was a firm believer in the idea of cleansing the Hudson River region of all Indians in order to make room for the Dutch settlers (Waldman p.248).

The Indian tribes of the Hudson Valley also played a role within the French and Indian Wars. The cause for this war was control of North America, and it lasted nearly one hundred years. During this time the Wappinger and Delaware Tribes joined forcRes with the French in order to defeat the efforts of the Iroquois Tribe and Britain. Eventually the more powerful armies proved to be the Iroquois and the British and Britain assumed control over North America (Josephy p. 313). Local wars such as the Peach Wars often came to end when a treaty was signed between the white man and the Indians.

These treaties were written to place the guidelines for the Indian policy of the federal government. It could be said that these treaties defined the standing of the tribes, and the amount of control that could be exercised by the federal government. The treaties signed address a variety of different issues that needed to be resolved. Some guaranteed hunting and fishing rights, while others intended to regulate commerce. Many treaties that were signed took land away from the Indians, while others still called for an end to hostility and beginning of peace.

The most famous treaty that was signed with the Delaware Tribe was the treaty of friendship, with William Penn (Sturtvant p. 198). This treaty which was signed in 1682, was the first treaty to be signed with the white man. This act by William Penn earned himself trust and friendship from the Indians. Penn protected the Indians rights to land, as well as for freedom of religion. Unfortunately, this example that was set by William Penn, was quickly forgotten, and from then on treaties were characterized with unfair dealings by the white man (Axtel p. 77).

For Hudson River Valley Indians, their way of life was doomed from the first time that the European foreigners sailed into their region. From that point on the white man exploited the Indians while taking control of their land often through the use of force. The Indians were further taken advantage of when treaties were signed often greatly favoring the side of the European. It was in this way that the Europeans stole the homelands away from the rightful owners, the Indians.

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Part 4

The Lenape and the Moravian Missions

Another aspect of European interaction with the Lenapes was missionary activity. Although there had been very limited Presbyterian missionary activity among the Lenape in Stockbridge Ma., the most prevalent and successful missionaries were the Moravians, or United Brethren, in the eighteenth century. The Moravians, a protestant sect under the leadership of Count Nikolaus Zinzendorf, began working with the Lenape Indians in the 1740s, during the period known as the Great Awakening, and continued into the early nineteenth century. They established thirty-two mission towns in North America, including one in Pine Plains, that were populated by converts and missionaries, and in 1743 a group of Moravian missionaries travelled from their settlement in Bethlehem Pennsylvania. to work with a group of Lenape converts near Poughkeepsie.

The traditional missionary goal was to civilize and Christianize the heathen Indians, and although the Moravians goal was the same, they demonstrated an ability to accept and respect the Lenape culture. The Moravians worked in cooperation with the Lenape, and as a result, the most significant sources of Lenape ethnographic data are Moravian records. The primary works came from David Zeisberger and John Heckewelder, who both had a good grasp on the Delaware language. David Zeisberger began working with the Lenapes in the mid-eighteenth century and he eventually became an adopted member of the tribe, and served on their chief council. He translated several religious works into the Delaware language and wrote several treatises on Delaware culture and religious practices John Fleckewelder served as an assistant to Zeisberger, beginning in 1777 and in addition to writing several works on the Lenapes and Moravian missionary activity he assisted the new US government in understanding Indian life and language.

The Moravians, as previously mentioned, were a Protestant or Lutheran sect which originated in Austria and they lived lives of piety and pacifism. Their pacifistic philosophy got them into trouble with the British and they were eventually forced out of Dutchess County. The British had approached the Delaware for help fighting the French and the Native converts had embraced pacifism and therefore couldn't fight. The British jailed the converts and the missionaries and tried them for treason, and although the missionaries claimed that they were a Protestant sect, and therefore subject to religious toleration, the British did not accept this and they had to leave. The missionaries and the converts migrated westward and northward settling in Connecticut, Ohio, and Canada. There are still Delaware Indians in Ontario today, residing

in Morarviantown.

An important aspect of the Moravian missionaries was their emphasis on temperance. The Moravian missions provided comfort and help and in many instances they saved lives. Alcohol abuse was becoming a problem and the missions offered help. In fact, Dr. Larry Hauptman made the analogy that the missions were very much like modern day drug rehabilitation centers. Many of the Lenape converts were looking for support more than conversion. Conversion was a complex issue because Native American religion and culture are inseparable. Moravian records show that a number of converts considered themselves living at a cross section of the two cultures and would often return to Lenape traditions and political alliances in times of trouble (Gavaler 218)

The impact of colonial expansion, land dispossession, and the trading of goods, specifically alcohol, was obviously destructive to the Native Americans. Although sometimes the Delaware turned to the missions for help and shelter, there was another phenomenon that attempted to deal with colonial influence, and that was prophetic movements. "Prophets and prophecy are an integral part of Native American religions." A prophet or messiah traditionally arises to give hope and direction in times of adversity" (Champagne 675) In the late eighteenth century, a time when the Delaware were threatened by British domination, and continual colonial expansion, several prophets arose to deal with these issues. One is referred to as the militant prophet, Neolin (enlightened one). Neolin had a dream in which the Great Spirit told him that because the Indians gave up their native traditions and accepted goods from the Europeans, the path to heaven was blocked (Champagne 1043) He advocated a tribal coalition that would push back the encroaching British. It is believed that Pontiac an Ottawa chief, was influenced by the Delaware Prophet and unsuccessfully attempted to battle the British.

Another prophet was referred to as the church-building prophet and according to his vision, which applied only to the Delaware, he reorganized and centralized the Delaware religious ceremonies. The traditional rituals became part of the Delaware religious order known as the Big House Religion. The Big House Religion celebrated Lenape dream visions which was a central part of their spiritual life. The last Big House Religion ceremony was held in 1924.

The relationship between the Moravian missionaries and the Lenapes was a complex one. The missionaries were paternalistic and benevolent yet their ultimate goal the christianization of the Lenapes, meant the destruction of the Lenape spiritual tradition. The Lenape spiritual and cultural traditions are so entwined that to let go of one is to lose the other.

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Part 5

The Effects of Contact on the Lenape:

Contact with the Dutch had a profound and devastating impact on the Lenape people. This area, which once was the center of a thriving population of Native Americans, is left with very few traces of their existence. Descendants of the Lenape people are few, and most do not live in this area, although their ancestors did for centuries before contact.

Four factors contributed to the decline of the Lenape people, and in fact, these same hardships were faced by most Native Americans. The first was disease, which decimated the Indian populations because they had no immunity to European diseases. The second factor was wars with the Dutch (and later the British) and with neighboring tribes who took the side of the Dutch. The third factor was massacres, which though relatively few in number were psychologically damaging and had demographic effects as well. The fourth factor was a loss of livelihood through a decrease in the animal population and a loss of land.

Henry Hudson sailed up the Hudson River in 1609-10. By 1624 the first colonists had arrived. It took only nine years for the first smallpox epidemic to hit, between 1633-35. Since the Lenape people, like all Native Americans, had no immunity to European diseases, these epidemics proved fatal. Although there are no statistics for this epidemic, it is safe to assume that a large number of Lenape people died from this first epidemic. It was common for epidemics to eliminate entire villages. This was the first in a long series of events that would deplete the numbers of the Lenape.

In 1643 the Mohawks (part of the Iroquois Confederation) made a peace treaty with the Dutch and shortly thereafter attacked a band of Wappingers Indians. When this group fled to a Dutch shelter at Pavonia, they were executed. This atrocity, often referred to as the Pavonia Massacre, resulted in the deaths of 80 men, women, and children. After they were beheaded, the Dutch soldiers responsible for their deaths played kickball with the severed heads.

In retaliation for this brutal attack, the Wappingers joined with the Mahicans in what is now called Governor Keifts' War (since he was Governor of New Amsterdam when the Pavonia Massacre occurred). Although the Wappingers and Mahicans enjoyed a victory in this war, which took place between 1643-45, they nonetheless lost men, which further depleted their population.

The Esopus Indians had their share of battles in the Peach War, which began because a Dutch farmer killed an Esopus woman who stole one of his peaches. Fought between the years 1655-64, the war ended only because Governor Stuyvesant, the new Governor of New Amsterdam, took some Esopus children hostage.

In 1677, the Esopus Indians signed a contract with the Huguenots in which they agreed to sell a large portion of land for some European goods. The goods received included kettles, axes, stockings, gunpowder, lead, wine, blankets, and shirts, among other items. These simply prove that by this time there was great demand for European goods, especially weapons and alcohol, which helped decimate the Indian populations in the area.

In 1683, the Wappingers Indians signed a similar contract with Francis Rombout and Gulian Verplanck. The contract resulted in the loss of large parcel of land in return for items such as gunpowder, lead, wampum (beads), tobacco, beer, hatchets, knives, guns. This contract also shows the dependence upon European goods and the extent to which the Wappingers would go to obtain them.

Another problem that the Lenape people faced was food supply. Because of the fur trade, what was once a seasonal collection of furs became a frequent slaughter. As a result, the animal population dwindled (especially beavers). Since the Indians relied on these animals both for food, clothing, and for trade, they felt the impact of this animal shortage. Some Lenape starved to death as a result. Others were forced to trade their land for goods such as clothing and food.

By 1700, the Hudson Valley had already lost 90% of its indigenous population from death and migration. The remaining population was forced from their land. Throughout the late Seventeenth and early Eighteenth centuries, the amount of land accessible to the Lenape was decreasing as a result of sales to small settlers and through coercion or fraud.

For example, Livingston Manor was purchased from the Wappinger Chief Tatemshiat and the female Esopus Chief Mamanachqua between 1683-85. Although the chiefs agreed to sell only 2,000 acres, Livingston managed to increase the amount to 100,000 acres.

The Esopus Indians were better able to resist encroachment onto their land, however. With help from nearby allies, they managed to deter settlers from occupying the area. This work for a little while, as settlers were frightened by the sight of armed Indians upon their arrival. But this was only a temporary solution.

In the late Seventeenth century, there were two additional smallpox epidemics and an outbreak of malaria. These diseases once again decimated the local tribes. Robert S. Grumet claims that "scarcely more than 3,000 Indian people were living in the Hudson Valley at the dawn of the Eighteenth century." His figure counts all Hudson River Valley Indians, meaning all of those from Albany to New York City. The populations of the Munsee- speaking tribes was even smaller by this time.

The Indians that survived the war, massacres, and the loss of their land were living in remote areas where settlers had not taken over. But an incident in Esopus terrified them enough to force them to leave. This incident involved white settlers arriving to occupy land in the Esopus area. Upon hearing of 'an impending French and Indian attack upon the Ulster county frontiers...[they] massacred several Indian families in their wigwams at Walden during the fall

of 1745.” The Wappingers tribe heard about this attack and decided that they had had enough. They migrated to Pennsylvania, but returned for a peace settlement in 1746. The leader of the Wappingers, Daniel Nimham, argued for their rights and even traveled to England, but to no avail. The lands were taken away all Hudson Valley Indians by 1758.

The only choice the Hudson Valley Indians had was to migrate. They traveled to five areas primarily: Ontario, Wisconsin, Oklahoma, Kansas, and Ohio. When they settled in these areas, they lost their tribal distinctions, and they all became known as Munsee.

The Hudson Valley Indians suffered the fate of all Native Americans. Their numbers diminished over the years due to war, disease, massacres, and the acquisition of their lands. Although they were the original inhabitants of this area, hardly any traces of their existence remain. It is estimated that in 1950 there were only 525 Munsee speaking people left. Their original population is difficult to determine, but is estimated to have been 10,000.(Grumet, 15) This total decimation of the original inhabitants of this area (and our country) is nothing less than a tragedy.

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