



# Deerpark Diary

Town of Deerpark 1863 School House Museum

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## Native American Month

November is designated as Native American Heritage Month which prompted the theme for this issue of Deerpark Diary. Our area was inhabited for thousands of years by Paleo-Indians and Woodland Indians before the Lenni Lenape settled here. Records of the earliest settlers have been unearthed by archaeologists dating back to the Stone Age. The early European settlers have provided information about the Lenni-Lenape who were friendly and helped the settlers through trade, agricultural use of this land and its natural resources.

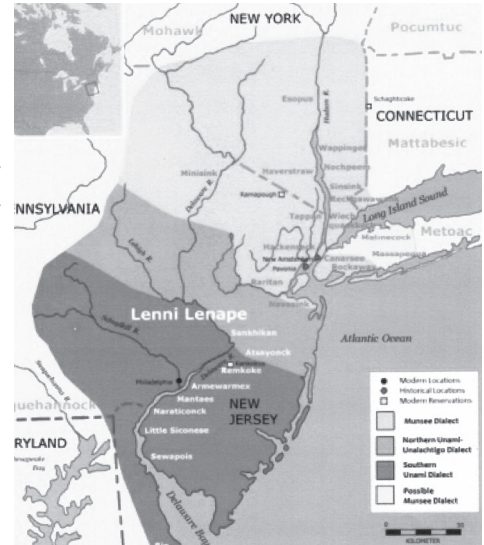
The cooperation between settlers and Indians changed during the French and Indian War when the settlers were asked to form a militia by the New York colonial government. This made an uneasy relationship between

the Indians and the settlers. In order to avoid conflict, the Lenni-Lenape, a peaceful society, moved west to the Susquehanna River area which was very similar to the Delaware valley. The war resulted in the solidification of the colonies which forced much the native population to move west.

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### Lenni-Lenape Indians

The indigenous people who inhabited the land which became Deerpark were the Lenni-Lenape. They were a nomadic people belonging to the Algonquian language family and the land they lived in was called Lenapehoking. This area includes present-day southeastern New York, eastern Pennsylvania, New Jersey and part of eastern Delaware. The Lenape were divided into three sub-tribes; the Unalachtigo (“People Who live by the Ocean”) inhabited the southern area; the Unami (“People Who Live Down River”) inhabited the central region; and the Minsie (or



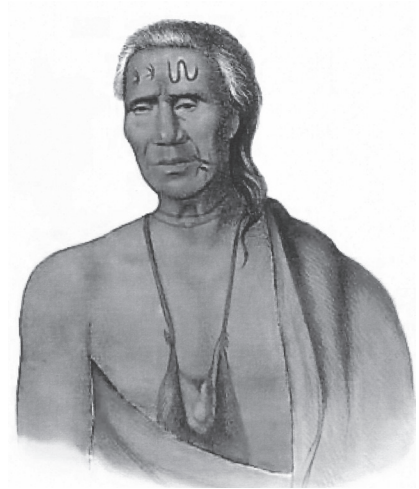
Munsee, (“People of the Stone Country”). The Minsie or Munsee people lived in our area. These sub-tribes were divided into three clans: The Wolf Clan; The Turkey Clan; and The Turtle Clan. Members from the three different clans lived throughout Lenapehoking.

Archeological evidence indicates that the Lenape inhabited this area long before the Europeans arrived. Artifacts have been found indicating indigenous communities occupying the area during the Woodland Periods, thousands of years ago. Although Lenape were nomadic tribes who followed their food sources, when food was plentiful in an area, villages were established near rivers and streams. This allowed easy access to fresh water and fish. It was also an easy way to travel



from place to place using canoes or dugouts. Oquekumsey, a Lenape village, was located near the Neversink River along Neversink Drive. Individual families lived in wigwams. Sometimes many members of one family lived in a longhouse.

The Lenape kinship was matrilineal. This means that the children in a marriage were members of the mother's clan. When a couple married, the husband, who had to be a member of a different clan, came to live with the wife's family. Hereditary lineage passed through the mother's clan. Men and women had equal rights within a marriage.



*Painting of a Lenape Chief*

There was a distinct division of labor between the men and women. Fathers, with the help of other male elders, were responsible for teaching male children to hunt, fish, and making tools, weapons, frames for the wigwams, dugouts and spears. Tools were made from the bones of animals, wood, stone and sinew. In the fall the men would go on an extended hunting trip to bring home enough animals and fish to last through the winter. Every-

thing from a hunt was used, including the bones for tools and sinew for sewing.

Mothers were responsible to teach their daughters how to cook, gather edible plants, tend the three-sisters garden, (corn, beans, squash) and care for children, weave, sew, preserve food, and tan hides. The women would smoke or salt the meat and fish to provide enough food for the winter. They also cleaned and tanned the hides to be sewn into warm clothing or used as blankets. Lenape women and girls wore knee-length skirts and tops made out of deer skins. Lenape men and boys wore breechcloths and leggings also made from deer skins. In the cold months everyone wore deer-skin moccasins and mantles or cloaks to keep warm. To add color to their clothing, jewelry and baskets, women and girls would forage in the forest for plants to use as dyes.

In the 17th century, the local Lenape Indians were trading with the Europeans for metal objects such as tools, pots, and guns. They did not have the skills to repair and maintain these items. Therefore, William Tietsoort, a blacksmith from Syracuse was contacted and persuaded to move to this area. He was given a tract of land to build his home and workshop in exchange for his skills as a blacksmith. Tietsoort was the first European settler in this valley. At the end of the 17th century Huguenot and Dutch settlers came to live among the Lenape. It was a peaceful relationship at first, however by the mid 18th century there were conflicts and the Lenape moved further west.

## Legend and Lore

Although much information about the Indians comes from written records, some of our knowledge has been handed down through the story telling of legends and lore. These stories were told over and over and became part of our history.



### How Cahoonzie Got its Name

Chief Cahoonshee, was the last Native American Chief to live in this area during the 1700s. Legend has it that when the other Lenapes moved west, he was an old man and decided to stay here where he had lived his entire life. Supposedly he had a magnificent presence and was well respected. His hair was snow white, he wore native garb and some say he was seven feet tall. The area where he lived was called Cahoonshee, which has been anglicized into Cahoonzie.

He died in the 1750s and was buried in the Second Baptist Church Cemetery in today's hamlet of Cahoonzie. When the church sold the property, Chief Cahoonshee's body was disinterred and reburied somewhere in an unknown area.

## How the Basha Kill Got its Name

This stream in the early days was famous for the abundance of fish it contained. It was renowned as a salmon stream, large numbers running up from the Ocean. Basha Kill was also known as Lysbets Kil so named after Elizabeth Gousolas who was a popular Dutch maiden.

Legend has it that an Indian woman, named Bashee, and her husband of the Wolf Tribe of the Lenni Lenape occupied a wigwam on the bank of the stream near Fort Westbrook. In some written historic notes, she was from royal lineage and beloved by everyone.



Bashee met a tragic death, having accompanied her husband on a deer hunt along the foot of the Shawangunk Mountains. He secured a deer and tying the legs together put the deer on her back with the legs around her neck, and started her home. While crossing the Kill on a fallen tree she slipped, the deer going on one side of the tree and her body on the other, with the result that she was choked to death. She lies buried in the Indian cemetery near the old fort.

Because she was so important in colonial society, the

Kill was named after her, bearing the anglicized name, Basha's Kill.

## Making Maple Syrup

The following legend was taken from an article in the March 15-19, 2003 issue of *The River Reporter*.

"The art of making maple syrup was discovered by the Algonquian Indians. Legend relates how a woman was preparing venison during the 'Season of the Melting Snow' and on her way to the spring for water, noticed a large cavity in a huge sugar maple tree, which was full of water dripping from a broken branch. She used this water to boil the venison and when her chief ate the meat he found the gravy sweet and delicious. He spread the good news how the 'Great Spirit' had guided his woman in making a delicious new food, which would make great warriors of all the braves of the Algonquian Nation. Soon all the women were sugar making (seensibaukwut) and the braves would perform the 'Sugar Dance' during the 'Season of the Melting Snow'."

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## Archeology

### Port Jervis Evening Gazette June 7, 1914

"Westbrookville, NY June 4—An ancient Indian turtle-shell suit of armor, around the body of a petrified Indian, supposed to have been a great chief and warrior as it is over six feet in length, has been unearthed in the old Indian Burying ground at Fort West-

brook, Westbrookville, by an archeologist visiting this region. It is thought the old chief was buried between 1753 and 1760. The shells are linked together with eel-skin thongs and the oil in them has preserved the thongs in good condition. About a peck of flint arrowheads, wampum, hatchet and some old English coins were also unearthed in the "find".

"The armor was constructed like a cloak, and made of shells as above stated. His leggings were made of "box turtle" shells, shoes of snappers, hat same, with eagle feather plumes. He had a shield with the mark of his tribe scratched thereon of the Lenape nation.



### *Archeology Tools*

"It will be on exhibition at Mr. Rhodes hotel for a few days for a short time, then sent to the U. S. Government museum at Washington for preservation by the finder."

## Huguenot—1958

The Swartwout / Space land was purchased in December 1989 by Orange County as part of an agreement with the state Department of Environmental Conservation to replace environmentally fragile wetlands that were damaged in New Hampton where the county planned to build a landfill.

On January 12, 1996, Orange County agreed that about 25 acres of this land in the Town of Deerpark is to be used for a town park. The county agreed to license the town to build ball fields, soccer fields, a parking lot and eventually an access road to the Neversink River. In addition there was the possibility of building tennis courts and a pavilion.

Prior to any construction on the property, it was brought to the attention of Orange County Department of Parks, Recreation and Conservation and the NYS-DEC, Region 3 that there had been archaeological studies of American Indian burial grounds completed on the Swartwout property.

In 1959, the site of an Indian village was discovered by the Orange County chapter of the NYS Archeological Association on the Swartwout property. Archaeologists worked on the site for two years carefully sifting through the soil and cataloguing what was found.



*Swartwout Archeology Site  
Dr. William Ritchie (left)  
Selwyn Gibbs (right)*

According to the Port Jervis Union Gazette, Saturday 18, 1958 “Lyman Vandermark labeled the find as one of the most impor-

tant early Indian discoveries in Orange County.... The first find was a fire pit surrounded by broken shards...So far the property has also yielded four skeletons... because of the significance of the discovery Society President Selwyn Gibbs of Middletown, said that the Curator of the New York State Museum –William Richie— would be invited to visit the scene with the hope that he could offer more information and advice on how to proceed with the valuable excavations.”

Other findings included an area where post holes dug in a circular shape. These post holes were dug for the construction of a wigwam.

Fortunately the ball fields and other recreational facilities were built on the Space section of the property, thereby abiding with Section 12-a of New York State Indian Law and the Federal Native American Grave and Repatriation Act of 1990 which protects Native American archaeological sites from any development.

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### Natural Dyes

Plants have been used for natural dyeing since before recorded history. The staining properties of plants were noted by humans and have been used to obtain and retain these colors from plants throughout history. Native plants and their resultant dyes have been used to enhance people’s lives through decoration of animal skins, fabrics, rafts, hair and even their bodies.



Colors for clothing, artwork and body painting are obtained from mineral pigments, clays, bark, roots, leaves, flowers, weeds, berries and vegetables.

The main method for extracting color is by boiling in water. Surprisingly, the color obtained is sometimes different from the original. When the color is the value and shade required, the item to be dyed is placed into the dye for a certain amount of time until the right color is obtained.



Before dyeing fabric or fiber a mordant bath is necessary to create a bond between dye and fiber. This increases the adherence of various dyes to the item being dyed. Mordants are water-soluble chemicals, usually metallic salts, such as alum, iron, copper, or tin.

For body painting, the Indians pounded natural sources into a dry powder. The powder was combined with animal fat for body painting or other mediums for art work.

(Editor’s note: Natural Dye tutorials are available on the internet.)

