



Haverford Township Historical Society



NATIVE PEOPLES IN THE HAVERFORD TOWNSHIP AREA

Adapted by Richard D. Kerr

[Note: The following account is adapted from a draft manuscript prepared in 1996 by Randolph Shipley Klein for the Haverford Township Historical Society (and in its collection), as well as the public Wikipedia entry for "Lenape."]

For centuries, the Delaware Valley was an animal kingdom, an area of floral delights, a land untouched by human beings. That ancient pattern changed as long ago as 10,000 to 16,000 B.C. A very natural process brought the first people to the region and drew some through the area now defined as Haverford Township. The origins of this great migration began tens of thousands of years ago. It commenced thousands of miles away, indeed half way around the world in Asia.

These first Americans continued to follow food supplies and fan out into the northern continent. Others pushed southward, even through the narrow isthmus which connects the northern continent to the one in the south. As the centuries passed, many gradual changes occurred. Bodies adapted, languages proliferated, and lifestyles, cultures and technologies developed. Long before the Norsemen, Columbus or other Europeans "discovered" the New World, an amazing human presence was already in place.

These native Americans lived in a variety of different communities, using tents or other structures which complemented a very mobile life based on hunting and gathering, to small fishing and farming villages. Around the 14th or 15th centuries A.D., among the many native peoples of North America were the Lenape, who occupied the region extending from the present-day State of Delaware up to the lower Hudson Valley. They became known as "Delaware Indians" to the European colonists.

The Lenape lived in a "matrilineal" society, with family "clans" identified by their maternal lineage rather than paternal. The clans aggregated into larger "bands." Among the Lenape there were three language groupings, the Munsee in the northern range of their region, the Unami-Unalachtigo dialect in the central area, and the Unami in the southern range (including present-day southeast Pennsylvania). Hereditary leadership passed through the maternal line, and women elders could remove leaders of whom they disapproved. Traditionally, the Lenape had no concept of landed property. But clans had "use" rights. Agricultural land was managed by women and allotted according to the subsistence needs of their extended families. "Matrilocal" residence further enhanced the position of women in society. Under this custom, a young married couple would live with the woman's family, where her mother and sisters could also assist her with her growing family.

At the time of European contact, the Lenape practiced agriculture, mostly "companion planting." The women cultivated many varieties of the "Three Sisters": corn, beans and squash. The men also practiced hunting. The Lenape clans were living in fixed settlements, using the surrounding areas for communal hunting and planting until the land was exhausted. In a common practice known as "agricultural shifting," the group then moved to found a new settlement within their territory. The Lenape practiced large-scale agriculture to augment a mobile hunter-gatherer society in the regions around the Delaware

River. The Lenape were largely a sedentary people who occupied campsites seasonally, which gave them relatively easy access to the small game that inhabited the region. They developed sophisticated techniques of hunting and managing their resources. By the time of the arrival of Europeans, the Lenape were cultivating fields of vegetation through the “slash and burn” technique. This extended the productive life of planting fields.

It is believed that their settlements in this area were along the Schuylkill River, and that they traversed what is now Haverford Township only on their extended seasonal hunting forays. They constructed small outpost shelters for this purpose, in areas where they returned to hunt on a continuing basis. Karakung Creek, now called Cobbs Creek, derived its name from a Unami term, believed to mean “the place of the wild geese.” Many Lenape arrowheads have been found within the township.

When William Penn and the first of his Welsh Quaker settlers arrived by ships in 1682 and 1683, he in effect already possessed control of the Pennsylvania colony by the designation of King Charles II. Nevertheless, as a believer in inclusiveness and pacifism, Penn signed a peace treaty with the Lenape, as well as two land purchase treaties. It was a good faith effort that in the final analysis could not be sustained, as the European settlements grew and pushed inland. In the decades immediately following, some 20,000 new colonists arrived in the region, putting pressure on Lenape settlements and hunting grounds. Although Penn endeavored to live peaceably with the Lenape and to create a colony that would do the same, he also expected his authority and that of the colonial government to take precedence. His new colony effectively displaced many Lenape and forced others to adapt to new cultural demands. Penn gained a reputation for benevolence and tolerance, but his efforts resulted in more effective colonization of the ancestral Lenape homeland than previous ones.



Benjamin West's famous painting "The Treaty of Penn with the Indians" was painted in 1771-72. You can see the original at the Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts in Philadelphia. (image from Wikipedia)

William Penn died in 1718. His heirs, John and Thomas Penn, and their agents were running the colony, and had abandoned many of the elder Penn's practices. Trying to raise money, they contemplated ways to sell Lenape land to colonial settlers. In the mid-1730s, colonial administrators produced a draft of a land deed dating to the 1680s. William Penn had approached several Lenape leaders in the lower Delaware to discuss land sales further north. Since the land in question did not belong to their purview, the talks came to nothing. But colonial administrators had prepared the draft, the one that resurfaced in the 1730s. The Penns and their supporters tried to present this draft as a legitimate deed. Lenape leaders in the lower Delaware refused to accept it. What followed was a "convoluted sequence of deception, fraud, and extortion orchestrated by the Pennsylvania government that is commonly known as the Walking Purchase."

In the end, the Lenape who still lived on the Delaware were driven off the remnants of their homeland under threats of violence. Some Lenape groups eventually retaliated by attacking Pennsylvania settlements.

Explore for More... Native Peoples in the Haverford Area

Read a Wikipedia entry for a general overview of the Lenape:

<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lenape>

Read about the "Walking Purchase" land grab of 1737 (also from Wikipedia):

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Walking_Purchase

More on Benjamin West's famous painting is at "Penn's Treaty with the Indians":

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Penn's_Treaty_with_the_Indians

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