Dustin Griffin 9-4-21

**Native Americans in Williamstown**

(Minus illustrations)

I suspect that many in this audience know at least a little bit about the history of Native Americans in early New England, but my guess is that only a few know more than a little about the presence of Native Americans in Williamstown. I want to begin with the big picture, probably familiar to most of you, and then narrow my focus to the history of Native Americans in Williamstown.

 It’s widely understood that long before white Europeans arrived in what is now western Massachusetts, Native Americans had been here for centuries, and indeed for millennia. Before “New England” was colonized in the 1620s by emigrants from *old* England, **[start screen sharing: slide 2: map of colonies]** and divided by them into religious colonies and later crown colonies, Native Americans inhabited the seacoast and the valleys along the rivers, including what was later called the Connecticut River and the Hudson River, as well as their several tributaries. The European colonists regarded the land as unsettled *wilderness*, mostly empty of people except for seasonal hunters, or at best very thinly inhabited by native tribes, and thus available to them for their *settlement*. Native American tribes regarded the land as their homeland. **[slide 3: tribal homelands]**

 The English were not the only Europeans in early New England. As all school children used to know, in 1609 Henry Hudson, an Englishman hired by the Dutch, sailed up what he called the “North River” (it was later named the Hudson River, after him) as far as present-day Albany. The Mohicans had long called the river the Mahicannituck (‘the river that flows both ways’ – because it is tidal) – **[slide 4: map of Mohican land]** Hudson was followed by Dutch “patroons” who established a trading post at Albany in 1614, and later by the British, who established a colony there in 1664. Meanwhile, to the north the French were exploring the St. Lawrence River Valley, founding Quebec city in 1608, and in 1609 reaching what was later called, after a French explorer, Lake Champlain. All of these early European colonists encountered Native Americans. Notably, the Dutch and the French, and later the British, traded with tribes of the so-called Iroquois Confederacy, including the Mohawks, based west of the Hudson River in northern New York state, and with the Algonquian-speaking Mohican (or Mahican)[[1]](#endnote-1) tribes in the Hudson River valley, from the Catskills north nearly to Lake Champlain.

 Among the latter were Mohican tribes who lived in permanent villages **[slide 5: map of Schaghticoke** ] at more than fifty sites near Schaghticoke, New York, along the Hoosic River, a little upstream from the point where it flows into the Hudson, and about 30 miles downstream from Williamstown. Archaeological evidence suggests that Mohicans inhabited these sites for as

much as 8000 years.[[2]](#endnote-2) They cultivated fields with tools made from stone and animal bone, and grew corn, beans, and squash. From the rivers they took fish and turtles.

Long before the Europeans arrived, hunters from these tribes traveled up the HoosicRiver **[6: map of Hoosic River]** in the winter to hunt in the hills and in the lowlands along the river for deer, bear, and wild turkey, and in the late winter for moose, to supplement the grain grown near their villages. In the spring they hunted beaver, to make pelts which they traded to the Europeans. In the summer and early fall they fished the Hoosic and its tributaries. They built seasonal encampments to serve as hunting lodges and workshops where they renewed their supply of projectile points, made from local chert or from flint that they would have carried with them.[[3]](#endnote-3) Archaeological evidence suggests that seasonal camps were established along the Walloomsac River (a tributary of the Hoosic) in the Bennington area as long ago as 5000 BC, and were used up until 1500 AD. One local historian suggests that Pownal “might have been the site of a small year-round village.”[[4]](#endnote-4)

 Now, I want to narrow my focus to Williamstown.

 Native American hunters also traveled further up the Hoosic River to the point where the Green River joins it, in Williamstown. **[7: map detail]** (A Native American name for the Green River may have been “Wampansac.”)[[5]](#endnote-5) Grace Greylock Niles stated that the Mohican chief Orcambreight had a “camp” on the Green River, but no other historian has endorsed that idea.[[6]](#endnote-6) Native Americans reportedly camped at the wide meadow beside the Hoosic River near what is now River Bend Farm, on Simonds Rd. An attraction of that site for them was the presence of nearby warm springs – today’s Sand Springs – which Native Americans considered to be healing waters.[[7]](#endnote-7) **[8: photo of trail near Sand Springs.]** A driveway near Sand Springs today is thought to follow the route of a Native American trail. Although there were apparently no permanent Native American settlements in Williamstown or northern Berkshire County, the Mohicans, because they hunted here annually, regarded what was later Berkshire County as part of their territory. When the descendants of the Mohicans, who live today in Wisconsin, invite organizations in Williamstown to publish a “land acknowledgement,” they describe the land here as part of the “ancestral homelands of the Mohican people.”[[8]](#endnote-8)

 Native Americans along the Hudson also traveled *through* the Hoosic River Valley – and present-day Williamstown – **[9: map of Hudson and Ct Rivers, via Mohawk Trail]** on their way east to other Native American settlements on the Deerfield and Connecticut Rivers, along what was later called the “Mohawk Trail,” apparently used mostly by Mohicans but also by Mohawks.[[9]](#endnote-9) Mohawks traveled east on the trail to fish for salmon in the Deerfield River, sharing

fishing rights there with the local Pocumtucks; they used it as a literal warpath in 1664 when they went to war with the Pocumtucks. Their weapons of war were the bow and arrow and the spear.[[10]](#endnote-10)

 I’ll now step back again and look at the regional picture.

 Beginning in the 17th century Mohicans sold tracts of their land along the Hudson River, first to the Dutch and then, after 1664, to the British. But they continued to claim the watershed of the Hoosic River as their hunting grounds.

 In 1600 there were perhaps 8000 Mohicans near Schaghticoke, but by the late 17th century there were far fewer, perhaps only 1000, and by 1700 only 500,[[11]](#endnote-11) their numbers reduced by smallpox (introduced by the European colonists) and by chronic warfare with the Mohawks. In 1672, when they made peace with the Mohawks, a small band of Mohicans began moving from the Hudson River valley **[10: map of Housatonic Valley]** some 60 miles southeast to their territory in the Housatonic River valley, where they established the village of Wnahk-tu-kook. **[11: slide: Mohican village]** Here’s a drawing of what it might have looked like.Later, in the 1730s, when British colonists pushed west from Boston and north from Connecticut, and laid out a new township near Wnahk-tu-kook, they called it “Stockbridge.” The Mohicans there became known to the British as the “Stockbridge Indians.”

 At the same time, upon the invitation of the colonial governor of New York, some 250 members of the Mohegan – no relation to the Mohicans – and Pequot tribes, whose homeland was in Rhode Island, **[12: map of King Philip’s War]** settled around Schaghticoke, after they were defeated in a war between the British and several linguistically-related tribes led by Metacomet, whom the British called “King Philip,” in 1676. (*During* that war, when Metacomet had sought an alliance with the Mohawks against the British, he reportedly traveled up the Connecticut River and then west over the old “Indian trail,” and would thus have passed through Williamstown on his way down the Hoosic River to Schaghticoke.) It’s plausible that the *survivors* of the war took the same route. **[13: slide of movement to Schaghticoke]** If instead they traveled up the Housatonic River valley and from there to the headwaters of the Hoosic, they would also have passed through what was later Williamstown. Those refugees from King Philip’s War who settled at Schaghticoke, where they joined several other related Algonquian tribes, may have included a chief whom the English named “Gray Lock,”[[12]](#endnote-12) who later led raids in the Connecticut River valley. (But there is no evidence that he ever visited Mt. Greylock, though it is named after him.)

 Some of the “Stockbridge Indians” were converted – “Christianized” – by Protestant missionaries, and adopted British dress and housing. **[14: slide of wigwam and log cabin]** Were they “forced” to give up their traditional style of dress and housing, along with their language and customs, by British authorities who wanted to “civilize” them? At this distance, it is difficult to say. According to an early account, in 1734 the missionaries were welcomed by the Mohican chief and the tribal council. An early missionary preached in their tongue, and translated parts of the Bible into “the Indian language.”[[13]](#endnote-13) But it seems clear that although Mohicans outnumbered whites in Stockbridge until the 1770s, the power-relations between Mohicans and whites were, as we might say, asymmetrical.

 Although their base was in Stockbridge, Mohicans apparently occasionally traveled to North County. According to one tradition still remembered in the early 20th century, the Mohican chief Konkapot **[15: sculpted bust]** traveled north from Stockbridge to drink healthful waters from three springs in South Williamstown, **[16: Google Earth, or map of South Williamstown]** later called “Indian Springs” after him.[[14]](#endnote-14) **[17: photo of spring]** (A one-time owner of the springs, Col. Prentice of Mount Hope Farm, claimed that it was he who named them, not after Konkapot but after “King Philip’s Spring” near the Mt. Hope in Rhode Island. But this is fanciful. Prentice also wrote a fictionalized history of the flight of one of King Philip’s defeated followers from Rhode Island to Williamstown.) **[stop screen sharing]**

 “Waubeeka Springs,” after which the present-day Waubeeka Golf Links was named in 1966, is a different spring, south of the golf course and close to Rt. 7. You might think that “Waubeeka” is a historic Mohican name that has somehow been preserved. The true story is more complicated. That spring used to be called the “Thomas Spring,” after a 19th-century owner of the land. But about 1950 somebody, probably the next landowner, Davie Deans, knew that Money Brook Falls on the slopes of Mt. Greylock was once called “Wawbeek Falls.” He wanted to sell his spring to the town for drinking water, and gave it the more marketable name, “Waubeeka Springs.”[[15]](#endnote-15) But where, you might ask, did the old name “Wawbeek Falls” come from? My guess is that it was named by Professor Albert Hopkins, who loved to give literary names, like Flora’s Glen, to local places in the woods and mountains. Hopkins could have found the name “Wawbeek” in Longfellow’s wildly popular 1855 poem, *Song of Hiawatha,* where it refers to a big black rock. “Waubeek” is not Mohican. It is apparently an Ojibwa word for “big rock hill.” But it’s a good name for the spring: there are in fact big rock outcroppings at Waubeeka Springs.

 Other prominent Native American place names in Williamstown – *Hoosic* and *Taconic* – are historic Algonquian terms, though their original language and meaning are disputed.[[16]](#endnote-16)

 From Indian Springs it is a short walk north to what is now Stone Hill Rd. in Williamstown **[start screen sharing: 18: photo of Stone Hill Rd.],** whichwas probably laid out along part of the route of a north-south Native American path, leading from Stockbridge north to the warm springs. **[19: Coffin map, detail]** Some Stockbridge Mohicans probably took the same path, or else a trail that tracked the Green River and then the Mohawk Trail, when they joined the British against an Abenaki force at Fort Dummer, near modern Brattleboro, in 1724. (EphraimWilliams, Jr., probably rode the same path in the early 1750s when he went back and forth between Stockbridge, where his family owned land, and Fort Massachusetts, a British fort along the Hoosic River in present-day North Adams, where he was the commanding officer.) But relations between Mohicans and whites were not uniformly friendly. A party of Mohicans from Schaghticoke, following the Green River and then the Housatonic, raided Stockbridge as late as 1755.[[17]](#endnote-17)

 Early reports written by French and British soldiers document that Native Americans fought alongside the French and the British in the long military contest between these two

colonial empires who were trying to establish and to expand the colonies of New France and New England. **[20: map of line of forts]** In 1746 a joint force of French and Abenaki attacked and burned Fort Massachusetts, just east of Williamstown. This raid served the purposes of both the French and the Abenaki, both of whom wanted to deter British settlements in the area. At the same time eleven Mohicans from Stockbridge, including a chief, John Poph-ne-honnuh-woh (also known to the British as John Konkapot), were on the payroll at Fort Massachusetts, where they served as scouts.[[18]](#endnote-18) **[stop screen sharing]**

 In 1751 a peaceful party of eight Native Americans from Schaghticoke traveled to Fort Massachusetts, where they met Col. Williams and told him that the fortified blockhouse in what is now Williamstown (then called West Hoosuck) sat on land that belonged to them – they claimed the entire Hoosic River watershed – and that the British would have to pay them for it.[[19]](#endnote-19)

Williams insisted that the British owned the land by “Right of Conquest” over the combined

French and Indian forces in the recent King George’s War – this was probably a bluff – but said he would report to the colonial governor.[[20]](#endnote-20) He did so, and was ordered to make “a thorough Inquiry respecting the Indian title to said lands, whether they belong to said Scaticook Indians or other Indians living near Hudson’s River, or at Stockbridge, And report to this Court as soon as may be.”[[21]](#endnote-21) If Williams ever reported back to the General Court, the report has been lost, and it does not appear that the Crown or the colony ever acknowledged that any Native Americans had a valid title, or paid them for the land.[[22]](#endnote-22)

 Five years later, in 1756, in a minor skirmish during the so-called “French and Indian War,” another joint force of French and Native Americans from Schaghticoke, including Abenaki, Algonquians, and Nippissing, encountered British farmers who had ventured out from the West Hoosuck blockhouse, **[start screen sharing: slide 21: West Hoosuck blockhouse]** located near the site of the old Williams Inn, and killed them and their cows before withdrawing at nightfall. But during the same years a band of some 45 Stockbridge Indians fought alongside the British near Lake Champlain **[22: map of activity of Rogers’ Rangers]** as part of a “ranger” force, recruited by Robert Rogers – the so-called “Rogers’ Rangers.”[[23]](#endnote-23) To join up with the Rangers, they might have walked north from Stockbridge, through Williamstown.

 A little later, during the American Revolution, some “Stockbridge Indians,” led by 18-year-old Hendrick Aupaumut (1757-1830), fought alongside the “patriots,” including a contingent from Williamstown, in several battles, among them the Battle of Bennington in 1777. **[23: drawing of Stockbridge militia man, from Wikipedia.]** Here is a drawing of a member of Aupaumut’s “Stockbridge Militia.” (It is said to be historically accurate: note that this soldier is fully clothed.)

 But in the decades before the Revolution “Stockbridge Indians” began transferring title to their land to white settlers, often in order to pay debts. The last of their land was sold after the Revolution, in 1783, and in 1785 some 300 Mohicans accepted an invitation from the Oneida tribe to migrate to near Oneida Lake, in northern New York State. **[24: map of Oneida reservation]** By 1786 only a handful of elderly Mohicans remained in Stockbridge. From Oneida they migrated in the 19th century to Ohio and ultimately to Wisconsin, where their descendants live today**. [stop screen sharing]**

 Were the Mohicans “forced” to relocate? It depends what you mean by “forced.” They were not driven or escorted out of Stockbridge by soldiers, as happened fifty years later to tribes in the south. They were not compelled to sign a one-sided treaty, as were many tribes in the west in the later 19th century. And after selling off their land to white settlers, they accepted a freely-offered invitation from the Oneidas. On the other hand, some of the land sales were shady at best, as argued in an important 1994 essay by Lion Miles **[start screen sharing: photo 25: title page of Miles]**, a Berkshire County historian – his grandmother lived in Williamstown. Miles analyzed

decades of deeds and showed that in the early years some whites illegally seized Mohican land, and in later years used arcane legal procedures to acquire it.[[24]](#endnote-24) (There’s another Williamstown connection: the single largest purchaser of Mohican land was Elijah Williams, younger brother of the deceased Ephraim Williams, Jr., who founded Williamstown. There is no evidence that Ephraim, Jr. was involved in land grabbing in Stockbridge, though his father, Ephraim Sr., was. **[slide 26: Stockbridge land deed]** Here’s a 1737 deed from a Mohican chief to Ephraim, Sr.) And in any case Native Americans did not share the European white settlers’ concept of land ownership. Mohicans traditionally considered the land to belong collectively to the tribe who used it and cared for it. Individual ownership of land – pieces of land that could be bought and sold – was a concept that they incompletely understood. Furthermore, the deeds were drawn up in the language of the buyers, using abstruse technical legal terms which the sellers probably did not fully understand. **[stop screen sharing]**

 If “forced” means something like compelled by economic and demographic circumstances, then the few landless Mohicans who remained in Stockbridge and removed to Oneida Lake were indeed compelled by those circumstances.

 It was after the Revolution too that a few Native Americans turned up in Williamstown. One may have been Philip Alcombright, who was reportedly descended from a Mohican chief in Stockbridge.[[25]](#endnote-25) He settled on Henderson Rd. just over the Vermont line in White Oaks, married and had several children, and died in 1870. Another was Johnson Holmes, said to have been “a well-authenticated Indian” who died in the late 19th century. He was survived by his wife, Phebe, said to be a “colored woman,” but townspeople in the 1890s did not know whether she was “African” or “Indian.”[[26]](#endnote-26) A third may have been Ann Eliza Porter, said to have been the daughter of Peter Case, a “full-blooded Mohawk.” She grew up in Bennington and married a Black man from Williamstown who ran a blacksmith shop in the 1830s and ‘40s.[[27]](#endnote-27) Some of her descendants lived in Williamstown well into the 20th century.

 Most of what is known about Native Americans in this part of New England, and in the Williamstown area, is based on written reports, by Dutch traders and early British soldiers merchants, and travelers who encountered them, and especially by missionaries such as Samuel Hopkins **[start screen sharing: 27: title page of Hopkins],** who wrote a “history” of what he called the “Housatonic Indians.”[[28]](#endnote-28) Beginning in 1734, when Stockbridge was founded, legal documents were drawn up, recording land transactions and other financial agreements between whites and Mohicans in south Berkshire County. Historians have generally concluded that some of these transactions were barely legal. One such document from 1767 **[28: photo of deed]** survives in the Williams College Archives: at a time when the British were not permitted to buy land directly, it is a contract whereby five Mohican men, acting as middlemen, agreed to buy a piece of land south of Stockbridge and then resell it to two British colonists.[[29]](#endnote-29)

 There are also early Native American accounts. So far as I know, no oral histories -- traditional stories handed down from one generation to another -- have survived to tell us about early Mohican life in Berkshire County. Some historians are beginning to pay more attention to oral history, but most are trained to prefer documents, written histories – and some histories written by Mohicans do in fact survive. About 1790 Hendrick Aupaumut **[29: slide of Aupaumut]** wrote a “History of the Muh-he-con-nuk Indians,”[[30]](#endnote-30) in English, in which he explained that the “chief seat” of the people of his nation was near Albany, and that they “owned and possessed” land in what became the states of New York, Massachusetts, and Vermont –another early land claim – but he does not make specific reference to the Hoosic or Housatonic River valleys, or to what became Williamstown.

 Some physical evidence -– projectile points, tools, and gravestones– has been recovered in Stockbridge, where Native Americans established permanent settlements and occupied them for more than a century. **[30: photo of Stockbridge collection]** It is on display in the “Stockbridge Indian Collection” in the Stockbridge Library. Other artifacts [**31: photo of Mission House artifacts**] are found at the Stockbridge Mission House museum. There is currently an exhibition at the Stockbridge Mission House on Mohican history, entitled “Mohican Miles.” A monument in Stockbridge marks the site of the old “Indian Burying Ground.” Much less evidence has been found in northern Berkshire County.[[31]](#endnote-31)

 **[32: word slide]** Native American artifacts in Williamstown

 **[Stop screen sharing]** Because the last native Stockbridge Mohicans to pass through Williamstown probably did so more than two hundred and fifty years ago, and because the structures they built would have been made of wood and bark and would long ago have rotted away, very little physical evidence of their presence here remains to be seen, even by a sharp-eyed observer. It would probably take a professional archaeological dig to find and analyze such evidence. If the Mohicans built any underground stone chambers in North County, for use as storage or as sweat lodges, remains of which have been found in South County, they have not been discovered in Williamstown. The shifting course of the Hoosic River has probably also washed away or buried evidence of riverside sites. Subsequent construction in modern times on the land along the river has disturbed the terrain and possibly concealed archaeological evidence.

 I’ll pause for a moment to comment on that slide: the very fact that I propose to look at “Native American artifacts *in Williamstown*” means that I am, inevitably, looking at them, and inviting you to look at them, from the perspective of European settlers, who did not establish the town of Williamstown until 1765. But those artifacts were left here, and maybe made here, long before the town of Williamstown existed.

 Throughout the 19th century it was common for farmers to turn up flint arrowheads and other projectile points when they plowed their fields in the spring. Archaeologists have identified a major flint quarry mine near Coxsackie, New York, about sixty miles southwest of here. It is likely that many projectile points later found in Williamstown were made from flint mined there.

Amateur collectors in the 19th century, notably Alonzo Whipple of Pownal, assembled substantial collections. Arthur Latham Perry, a Williams professor and a local historian who wrote in the 1890s, knew that the Mohicans had made “a sort of camp” at the site of River Bend Farm: as he wrote, “Indian arrow-heads and other Indian relics have always been found in its ploughed fields.” In 1887 one Williams student found “valuable relics of Indian occupation” there.[[32]](#endnote-32) During the 1880s Perry himself made a “collection of local antiquities,” which he deposited in Clark Hall on the Williams campus, but that collection has disappeared.[[33]](#endnote-33)

 One of the engineers who in 1914 designed the Mohawk Trail auto road, David Costello, many years later published a map **[start screen sharing: 33: Costello’s map]** showing the route of the old east-west Indian trail.[[34]](#endnote-34) In 1992, using the map, students in a winter-study course at Williams taught by Lauren Stevens were able to find traces of the trail along the Deerfield River. This led to efforts to restore the old Mohican-Mohawk walking trail, with long-term hopes of extending it from the Connecticut River to the Hudson River. In 1997 the first segment of what might eventually be a 100-mile trail was opened in Franklin County. Representatives of the Mohawk Council in Kahnawake, Quebec, attended the dedication in July 1997.[[35]](#endnote-35) Over the years additional segments between Deerfield and North Adams were opened. A section of the trail running through Williamstown on the south bank of the Hoosic River is being restored now as a bike path.

 Although there have never been any organized digs in Williamstown by professional archaeologists, projectile points continued to be found by amateur collectors into the 21st century. **[slide 34: Sand Springs arrowpoints]**. In 1907 the owner of Sand Springs unearthed several shaped stones, buried four feet down, that appear to be arrowheads, a spear point, and a tomahawk. When the Fred George family, a later owner of Sand Springs, undertook a construction project there in the early 1960s, they uncovered a number of arrowheads, but their collection has since been dispersed or lost.

 Let me pause again and reflect on the word “collection.” Collecting Native American “artifacts” is an inherently “colonizing” activity. That is, it is mostly descendants of white European settlers who think of cultural objects, like arrowheads, made by a displaced people as “artifacts,” to be collected and displayed as the relics of a bygone civilization. From another perspective, that of Native Americans and their descendants, they might be thought of as heirlooms, or as the patrimony of a living culture.

 By far the largest and most impressive local collection of stone projectile points and tools was made by Gordon Sweeney in the late 20th century. A longtime chef at Williams College, he made a hobby of collecting artifacts, including Mohican arrowpoints and tools, from sites along the Hoosic River, in Williamstown and Pownal. **[35: photo of Sweeney collection]** His collection is now found in the Pownal Library. It consists of hundreds of stone arrow and spear points, knives, gouges, drills, hammer stones, abrading stones, and a few pottery shards. Some are estimated to be as old as 2000 BC, some as recent as 700-1700 AD. Other local collectors, notably Mary Natalizia, a Williamstown resident and chair of the Pownal Library board, continue to find projectile points and flakes, **[36: photo of Natalizia points]** especially in freshly plowed fields along the Hoosic River in the early spring. But because less land in the watershed is being plowed these days, fewer artifacts are turning up.

 In the late 1990s, when the “Bennington Bypass” (the major highway interchange north of the center of Bennington) was being built, there were archaeological digs on Silk Road and the so-called “Cloverleaf” site. **[37: map of Bennington site]** Archaeologists from the University of Maine at Farmington found thousands of fragmentary remains, mostly stone flakes (local quartzite or chert or New York State flint) and fire-altered rocks, indicating the presence of what may have been a seasonal encampment, complete with hearths, storage pits, and a roasting pit,[[36]](#endnote-36) near the confluence of the Walloomsac River and one of its tributaries, Furnace Creek. Carbon dating indicates that the site may have been occupied more than four thousand years ago, possibly for no more than a single season. The inhabitants may have been distant ancestors of the Algonquian-speaking tribes. Most of the artifacts are fragments, but there are some intact projectile points.

 The Williamstown Historical Museum has a small collection of Native American artifacts. It includes **[38: photo]** a triangular arrowhead, found in a garden on Harmon Pond Rd. and **[39: photo**] a beautifully preserved notched projectile point found at the base of Pine Cobble; a flint stone cutting tool; and a tool made from animal bone used to scrape flesh off an animal hide. It also includes **[40: photo]** a flint spear point, found by local farmer Willard Chenail in a plowed field behind the Colonial Shopping Center between Rt. 2 and the Hoosic River that was examined by an anthropologist, and estimated to be 4000 years old.

 The Williams College Museum of Art also has a very small collection of projectile points, of which three are thought to be North American, though not necessarily found in this area. One 4 ½" spear point **[41: photo]** was said to have been dug up in a garden in 1857.[[37]](#endnote-37)

 The Bennington Museum has a small collection of Native American artifacts, most of them projectile points found in other parts of Vermont, but also including an intact stone mortar

**[42: photo]**, date unknown, found on a farm on Rt. 9 west of Bennington. It was perhaps used by Mohicans from Schaghticoke who had come up the Hoosic River to hunt.

 **43: Word slide: Representing Native Americans.**

 Archaeological evidence mostly tells us about the Native Americans in the Hoosic River watershed in the prehistoric period. And it’s difficult to extrapolate from a few projectile points to a living culture. Most people want or need something more. Beginning in the early 20th

century, history-minded residents recognized the presence of Native Americans in northern Berkshire County by commemorating it or recreating it, though they did not pay much attention to authenticity. In a 1909 Williams student parade, the 300th anniversary of Henry Hudson’s “discovery” of the Hudson River was recognized **[44: student parade]** by three students dressed as the “Indians” who later sold Manhattan Island for $24 of beads. When the “Mohawk Trail” auto road from Greenfield to North Adams was opened in 1914,[[38]](#endnote-38) promoters of the road tried to draw attention to the historical presence of Native Americans in the area, but their knowledge of history was elementary.**[45: photo of Pageant poster]** “The Pageant of the Mohawk Trail,” put on in North Adams in June 1914 to celebrate the opening, focused not on the Mohicans but on the Mohawks, with white actors in face make-up.[[39]](#endnote-39) In 1916 a “stone of remembrance” **[46: photo]** was erected near the intersection of Main St. and Fort Hoosac Place in Williamstown, marking the site of the West Hoosac Blockhouse, and the so-called “massacre” of three white English colonists by “the Enemy in Ambush.” (It’s still there, along with a separate plaque nearby, placed many years ago by the Williamstown Historical Commission, referring to the “scalping of three soldiers.”) In the 1920s Williams College students put on parades, in one of which a male student dressed as an “Indian maiden.”[[40]](#endnote-40) In 1939 the 1746 raid on Fort Massachusetts was reenacted by locals.[[41]](#endnote-41)

 In 1942 a regional artist, Stanley Rowland, produced a mural painting **[47: photo]** representing the meeting between Col. Ephraim Williams, Jr., and his chief Mohawk ally, Theyanoguin, known to the British soldiers as “Chief Hendrick,” at a strategy session just before the so-called “Bloody Morning Scout” at Lake George in early September1755 when Williams was killed. The mural was designed to adorn the new Williams alumni building on Spring St., erected in 1941. (It’s now known as The Log.) It depicted Col. Williams and the Mohawks in their respective battle dress, Williams fully clothed and two of the three Mohawks bare-chested. While the dress reflected romanticized depictions of “Indians”and the grouping suggested cooperation between allies, the physical placement of the figures – Col. Williams standing and pointing with his stick, one of the Mohawks kneeling on the ground before maps – suggested white dominance.

 During the 1953 celebration of the bicentennial of the chartering of Williamstown **[48: photo]**, one town leader dressed as a “Friendly Indian,” wearing a feathered headdress of the sort worn not by New England tribes but by Plains Indians familiar from Hollywood westerns. In 1965, at the bicentennial celebration of the town’s incorporation, the headdress was brought out again **[49: photo]**, and a tepee was set up **[50: Photos]** – even though Mohicans would have built long houses and wigwams rather than tepees. A troupe of students from Springfield College who called themselves the “Hosaga Indian Club” presented a “program of Indian lore,” performing “tribal dances” in “authentic costumes” – which again were based on the clothing of Plains Indians.[[42]](#endnote-42) Photographs of the performance are found in the collection of the Williamstown Historical Museum.Until a few years ago the exhibition of town history at the old House of Local History (now the Williamstown Historical Museum) included a mannikin **[51: photo, if available]** inauthentically dressed in buckskin.[[43]](#endnote-43) **[stop screen sharing]**

 None of these representations and misrepresentations of Native Americans attracted critical comment until recently. But beginning in 2015 questions were raised about the 1942 Stanley Rowland mural in The Log, and especially about the appropriateness, at a college concerned to embrace diversity, of the image of a bare-chested Mohawk kneeling before a

uniformed British officer. The mural was initially covered, then “contextualized” by means of explanatory wall labels, and the college engaged in extended discussions about the implications of choosing to represent a brief moment of military alliance between British and Native Americans in the larger context of 250 years of “Indian wars.” In 2020 the mural was finally moved to the college archives. This incident also served as a catalyst to direct attention to the historical presence of Mohicans in Williamstown and Northern Berkshire County.

 Now the town history on the Williamstown Historical Museum’s website begins with the declaration that “the region that Williamstown currently occupies was Mohican territory prior to English colonization.” The Museum’s “Who We Are” page includes a formal “land acknowledgement”:**[start screen sharing: 52: text from WHM website]** “It is with gratitude and humility that we acknowledge that we are learning, speaking, and gathering on the ancestral homelands of the Mohican people, who are the indigenous peoples of this land. Despite tremendous hardship in being forced from here, today the community resides in Wisconsin and is known as the Stockbridge-Munsee Community. We pay honor and respect to their ancestors past and present as we commit to building a more inclusive and equitable space for all.” In Field Park, words were recently added to two signs **[53: photo]** about the 1753 House, noting that the visitor to the house is in the “Homelands of the Moh He Con Neew (Mohican Nation).” Other versions of a “land acknowledgement” appear on other Williamstown or college websites.[[44]](#endnote-44)

 The clearest presence of Native Americans in Williamstown today **[54: photo]** is the Stockbridge-Munsee Tribal Historic Preservation Extension Office in a storefront on Spring St. Its primary focus is the repatriation of remains and of cultural objects now in museums or private collections. **[stop screen sharing]** Its former director, Heather Bruegl, who has recently moved on to a new job, is the curator of an exhibition entitled “Muh-he-con-ne-ok: The People of the Waters That Are Never Still,” at the Berkshire Museum in Pittsfield through January 9. The show emphasizes that the Mohicans are not a historic relic, but a living people, now based in Wisconsin. She had been working with Williams students on an archaeological dig in Stockbridge. Williams has recently begun offering a course in its American Studies Program on “Introduction to Native American and Indigenous Studies,” taught by a young assistant professor named Eli Nelson, who identifies as a Mohawk. Christine DeLucia, in the History Department, has written widely on Native American history, including a major book on King Philip’s War, and teaches two different courses on Native American histories.

 In 2016 five Williams students identified as Native American. So too do a few townspeople. Jeff Johnson, who grew up in Williamstown, and was recently elected to the select board, is part Native American and part African American.[[45]](#endnote-45) The 2010 US census suggests that

as many as 15 people in Williamstown identify as part Native American.[[46]](#endnote-46)

 Williamstown is probably paying more attention to the historical presence of indigenous peoples in northern Berkshire County than at any time in the last two hundred years. And although only a modest amount of physical evidence of that presence in Williamstown survives today, it is possible, through careful interpretation and contextualization of that evidence, and with the help of the Stockbridge-Munsee community, to reconstruct and understand something of the lives that the Mohican peoples made for themselves in this valley.

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Notes

1. Both spellings (Anglicizations of the Native American name “Muh-he-con-neok”) are common, but “Mohican” is now the preferred spelling of the their descendants. [↑](#endnote-ref-1)
2. For a concise history of Native Americans in the Hoosic River watershed, see Joseph Parks, Pownal: A Vermont Town’s Two Hundred Years and More (1977), pp. 1-6, and Lauren Stevens, *Dispatches from the Beyond Place: Tales of the Hoosic River* (2017), pp. 20-29. The “capital” of the Mohicans was at the village of Schodack, south of Albany. [↑](#endnote-ref-2)
3. Grace Greylock Niles says Mohicans used quartz and Mohawks used flint for projectile points (*The Hoosac Valley: Its Legends and Its History* [1912], p. 30). Niles devotes more pages to Native Americans in the Hoosac Valley than any other historian, but she draws no distinction between legend and history. [↑](#endnote-ref-3)
4. Parks, *Pownal*, p. 3. Parks thinks that Mohicans may have grown corn during the summers in Pownal fields. [↑](#endnote-ref-4)
5. Niles (*Hoosac Valley*, p. 519) does not make clear that the word comes from the Mohican language. [↑](#endnote-ref-5)
6. She says the camp was “on Indian Brook near the Council Elm on Green River”(Niles, *Hoosac Valley*, p. 29). [↑](#endnote-ref-6)
7. From about 1909 to 1960 the springs were called “Wampanoag Springs,” the name apparently selected by the owner to attract tourists. [↑](#endnote-ref-7)
8. See footnote XX, below. [↑](#endnote-ref-8)
9. For an early journalistic account, see William Browne, “Indian Trails and Early Road in Southern Vermont and Western Massachusetts,” *North Adams Transcript*, August 14, 1935. [↑](#endnote-ref-9)
10. See Hendrick Aupaumut’s “History of the Muh-he-con-nuk Indians,” in note 6, below. [↑](#endnote-ref-10)
11. *Handbook of North American Indians*, ed. William Sturtevant, vol. 15, *Northeast*, ed. Bruce Trigger (1978), p. 206. [↑](#endnote-ref-11)
12. So named by the English because of a streak of gray hair, he was probably a Waranoke chief whom the Abenakis called Wawanolewat. [↑](#endnote-ref-12)
13. *Samuel Hopkins, Historical Memoirs Relating to the Housatonic Indians* (1754, repr. 1911), pp. 13, 17-18. [↑](#endnote-ref-13)
14. Letter to the *Berkshire Eagle*, Feb. 24, 1881 [need to confirm]; *North Adams Transcript*, Aug. 3, 1925. The tradition is not mentioned in Lion Miles’ *Life of John Konkapot* (2009). [↑](#endnote-ref-14)
15. Deans bought the land and spring from Robert Steele in 1948. In 1950 the spring was still being called “the Thomas spring” (*North Adams Transcript*, February 11 and 16, 1950), but in 1952, it was referred to as “Thomas or Waubeeka Spring” (*Transcript,* February 9, 1952). [↑](#endnote-ref-15)
16. “Taconic” apparently derives from “Taghkonic,” which may be the name of a Lenni Lenape chief. In a 2015 letter to the *Berkshire Eagle* Lion Miles asserted that “Hoosac/Hoosic,” originally used to describe a mountain shaped like an upside-down kettle, derives from a Mohican word for ‘kettle’ (*Berkshire Eagle*, Sept. 22, 2015). [↑](#endnote-ref-16)
17. See a Sept. 3, 1751 letter from Williams to Spencer Phipps, Lt.-Governor of Massachusetts Bay, reprinted in Perry, *Origins in Williamstown*, pp. 243-44. [↑](#endnote-ref-17)
18. An account book from Fort Massachusetts covering the years 1747 and 1748, now in the William Williams Papers in the Williams College Archives, lists him as Ensign John Pohpnahonnuwoh. [↑](#endnote-ref-18)
19. In 1745, when the British were building Fort Massachusetts in present-day North Adams, a group of Native Americans told the carpenters that they could not complete the fort until the British had paid for the land. Lt. John Catlin promised “to negotiate for the land” (Niles, *The Hoosac Valley*, p. 128). Although Native Americans traditionally did not regard land as something that could be bought and sold – see below – those from Schaghticoke were probably familiar with the practice, which had been going on for half a century along the Hudson River. [↑](#endnote-ref-19)
20. The 1748 peace treaty restored pre-war borders but did not settle all territorial claims. [↑](#endnote-ref-20)
21. Phipps referred to matter to the General Court, which on January 23, 1752 voted that Williams and an official from the colony of New York report back (*Journals of the House of Representatives of Massachusetts Bay Colony, vol. 28, 1751-52,* p. 113, and repr. in Niles, *Hoosac Valley*, p. 536). [↑](#endnote-ref-21)
22. See Wyllis Wright, *Colonel Ephraim Williams: A Documentary Life* (1970), p. 50. [↑](#endnote-ref-22)
23. Rogers’ Rangers included two companies consisting solely of Stockbridge Mohicans. [↑](#endnote-ref-23)
24. Lion Miles, “The Red Man Dispossessed: The Williams Family and the Alienation of Indian Land in Stockbridge, Massachusetts, 1736-1818,” *New England Quarterly*, vol. 67, no. 1 (1994), pp. 46-76. [↑](#endnote-ref-24)
25. According to Niles, *The Hoosac Valley*, p. 416, though this may have been legend rather than history. In 1921 William Stocking, who lived in White Oaks from the 1880s to the 1920s, remembered a “Daniel Ancunbright” (one of Philip’s sons) with “part-Indian blood.” [↑](#endnote-ref-25)
26. Perry, *Origins*, p. 551. Danforth (*Boyhood Reminiscences*, p. 36) also remembered Holmes. Phebe Holmes (c. 1800/05-85) and Johnson Holmes were married in 1824. She may have been married earlier to Isaac Reed (1803-81). In 1860 Phebe Holmes was living in Williamstown at the home of Prince and Electa Jackson. [↑](#endnote-ref-26)
27. According to a descendant of Ann Eliza Case Porter (*North Adams Transcript*, November 13, 1980). [↑](#endnote-ref-27)
28. Samuel Hopkins, *Historical Memoirs, Relating to the Housatunnuk Indians* (1754), a copy of which is found in the Williams College Archives and Special Collections. [↑](#endnote-ref-28)
29. The contract was acquired in 2004 as a gift from a donor. [↑](#endnote-ref-29)
30. It was first printed in *Stockbridge, Past and Present*, ed. Electa Jones (1854), pp. 15-23. It is reprinted in *American Indian Nonfiction: An Anthology of Writings, 1760s - 1930s*, ed. Bernd Peyer (2007), pp. 63-74. In the 1790s Aupaumut provided diplomatic services to the U. S. government. [↑](#endnote-ref-30)
31. The Arvid E. Miller Memorial Library and Museum in Bowler, Wisconsin, is the official repository for the Stockbridge-Munsee Mohicans.[Add on whether they have any artifacts from Williamstown.] [↑](#endnote-ref-31)
32. Arthur Latham Perry, *Origins in Williamstown* (1895), p. 150). Niles (*Hoosac Valley*, p. 30) reports that “implements of war, soil-cultivating tools, and symbols of worship have been unearthed throughout the Hoosic and Housatonic valleys.” She went on to say that “every burial ground,” including River Bend Farm and Sand Spring Grove in Williamstown, “has revealed its customary ‘weapons of rest’.” [↑](#endnote-ref-32)
33. Perry, *Origins*, p. 355. [↑](#endnote-ref-33)
34. David Costello, *The Mohawk Trail, Showing Old Roads and Other Points of Interest* (1975). There is a copy in the atlas case and the Archives and Special Collections at Sawyer Library, Williams College. [↑](#endnote-ref-34)
35. In recent years, according to Darren Bonaparte, director of the Historic Preservation Office of the St. Regis Mohawk Tribe, the Mohawks have expressed continuing interest in establishing a “stronger presence” in northern Berkshire County (*Berkshire Eagle*, May 10, 2019). Some Mohawks reportedly claim that the “Mohawk Trail” passes through ancestral Mohawk territory. [↑](#endnote-ref-35)
36. The artifacts are now at the Vermont Archaeological Heritage Center in Barre, with a few on display at the Bennington Visitors Center, north of the town. For a brief description, see the newsletter of the Vermont Archaeological Society (vol. 81, June 1997), and for a technical account see Belinda Cox, Ellen Cowie, and James Petersen, “The Cloverleaf Site: A Late Archaic Settlement on the Walloomsac River in Southwestern Vermont,” *Journal of Vermont Archaeology*, vol. 3 (2000), pp. 17-32. [↑](#endnote-ref-36)
37. They were apparently donated to Williams in 1913 by Francis E. Leupp, Class of 1870, who had served as a Commissioner of Indian Affairs in the Dept. of the Interior from 1896 to 1909. [↑](#endnote-ref-37)
38. For the history of the Mohawk Trail, see Lauren Stevens, “Heydays along the Mohawk Trail,” *Walloomsack Review*, 14 (2014), pp. 36-45. See also Jane McGahan, “The Blaine Site,” *Bulletin of the Massachusetts Archaeological Society*, vol. 44, no. 1. (1983), pp. 21-28. [↑](#endnote-ref-38)
39. *North Adams Transcript,* June 18, 1914. See also Robert Quay’s 2004 senior thesis at Williams, “Mohawks, Model T’s, and Monuments.” [↑](#endnote-ref-39)
40. Both are included in a 2017 exhibition on representations of Native Americans in the Chapin Gallery in Sawyer Library, Williams College. [↑](#endnote-ref-40)
41. *Williams Record*, Dec. 9, 1939. [↑](#endnote-ref-41)
42. Kendall McGowan, “Another look at the 1965 Bicentennial,” *Williamstown Historical Museum Newsletter*, vol. 23, no. 1 (Winter 2021), p. 4.See an advertisement for the performance, with an “Indian” in headdress in the *North Adams Transcript*, May 27, 1965. [↑](#endnote-ref-42)
43. The Mahican Mocassin Shop in Pownal, run by Charles Gray (1932-2016) from 1960 to 2016, sold hand-made mocassins until a major fire in 2012. [↑](#endnote-ref-43)
44. See the websites of Williamstown Rural Lands and the “Allyship Workshop” at the Williams College Davis Center. Signs at the trailheads of local hiking trails now have “land acknowledgements.” [↑](#endnote-ref-44)
45. Jeff Johnson, recently elected to the select board, is part Native American (his grandmother was a member of the Micmaq tribe, whose homeland was in the maritime provinces of Canada), part African-American (another of his ancestors, who by 1830 was living in Dalton, had once been an African-American slave), and part white. Richard Alcombright, former mayor of North Adams, is not descended from the Philip and Daniel Alcombright who lived in Williamstown in the 19th century. Richard’s greatgrandfather, Thomas John O’Connell, died in 1910. His greatgrandmother then married John H. Alcombright (1873-1951), and her children took Alcombright’s name. I have also been in touch with a woman whose grandmother, born in Williamstown in 1896, had a Mohawk ancestor, a Black father, and a French grandmother, but claimed that she was Mohawk and French, and decided to pass for white. [↑](#endnote-ref-45)
46. According to City-data.com, there were 15 Native Americans in Williamstown (0.2%). Censusviewer.com reports only three Native Americans in “Williamstown Center.” One 2010 census report reports 60 (0.8%). [↑](#endnote-ref-46)