

Talk on Lenni-Lenape Indians

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Scott:

My sisters and I have been requested by the association to present a report on the Lenni-Lenape Indians. These Indians occupied the land adjoining the Pidcock-Thompson-Neely House during the time of John Pidcock.

The name Lenni-Lenape, as interpreted by an early Moravian missionary, means original people.

Their history begins when the Lenni-Lenape and the Iroquois were a united tribe. This tribe came from the west and made war with a tribe occupying the North eastern coast known as the Alligeni. During these battles the Iroquois avoided getting involved as much as possible and as a result the Lenni-Lenapes were always sent to battle.

When they finally won the land, the Lenni-Lenapes had become so weakened that the Iroquois became the dominant tribe. The Lenni-Lenapes settled in the Delaware River valley and eventually became known as the Delawares.

The Lenni-Lenapes divided into 3 sub-tribes. The northern most tribe known as the Minsi was the most war like of the 3. The Minsi lived at the headwaters of the Delaware River and defended the entire tribe from the Iroquois. The second sub-tribe was the Uhami. They lived further downstream in the area of John Pidcock and it was with these Indians that land negotiations were held. The third group was the Unalachtigo which had little if any relationship with the rest of the tribe.

The Lenni-Lenape. Indians believed that they had lived within the Earth and that they had first appeared on the surface as groundhogs, snakes and rabbits. For this reason they would not harm these animals. They believed that sharing everything was the will of the Great Spirit and that the tribe owned everything. This was why the Indians could not understand the sale and purchase of land as done by the white settlers.

Their main diet consisted mostly of meat, Indian corn, potatoes, pumpkin, cabbages, turnips, and beans. Fish also constituted a large part of their diet. They caught the fish by building small stone dams at shallow parts of the river. They would then channel the water through a small opening in which they would catch the fish. After catching the fish, they would build large fires on the riverbank with which they would smoke the fish for preservation.

The clothing of the Indians before the white man was made mainly of dressed skins and feathers. The older members of the tribe sometimes wore blankets made from wild turkey or goose feathers. They lived in rounded huts made of branches and thatched with mats of woven leaves. These houses were sometimes surrounded by a crude stockade for protection.

My sister Kerry will now tell you more about the Lenni-Lenape Indians.

Little European religion was introduced to the Lenape Indians. The whites degraded them and stole their belongings. Then the Rev. Thomas Companius, of Stockholm, a Lutheran clergyman, attached to the Swedish settlement from 1642 to 1649, started to preach to the Indians. The Quakers or Friends did nothing. Penn offered to provide interpreters for the Friends' Meeting to convey religious instruction to them, but it failed. A half century later, David Brainerd began his mission in 1742 he states that there was no other missionary in New Jersey. Brainerd formed the Society of Christian Indians in Burlington County. The congregation was reported as rioters and enemies of the State. So there were no more favors done for the Indians.

After the murder for revenge of the Conestoga Indians in 1755, the Lenni-Lenapes moved to the Susquehanna area and moved frequently thereafter.

In 1850 the Lenape Indians owned 315,000 acres for 1,500 people. In 1854 the land was taken away and the Indians were put on reservations.

The Lehigh County area was pleasant for the Indians. It had streams, game and forests. A lot of tools were made from Jasper found in the area.

Mr. H. C. Mercer, an archeologist, found a disc-shaped implement of limestone, 18 ½ ' under the ground. At 14' under, a tool of quartzite and a rude limestone arrow point were found, and at the bottom of a pit, plaster casts of weapons were found. The weapons had rotted away and only the mold was left. The arrowheads were the most plentiful of the weapons. The Indians traded some weapons for beads and things they needed.

The Indians had such strong muscles that they could shoot an arrow 200 paces which is about 600'.

The Lenni-Lenapes had a keen eye and aiming talent. They made spears, arrowheads, knives, awls, and drills by percussion and pressure. They manufactured weapons with bone, wood, and other stones. The oldest arrowhead is the lan cē ā lāte or leaf form. Scrapers are simple implements which are used for scraping skins and other surfaces. There were many ways to make tools and each tribe had different systems. The people had superstitions of where the arrowheads came from, many thought they fell from the sky.

My sister, Judy, will now give you some additional information on the culture of the Lenni-Lanapes and the Walking Purchase.

Smoking: The Lenni-Lenape Indians smoked very much and taught the Europeans this habit. Their tobacco was made of bark, leaves, twigs and roots of plants.

The Indians believed the pipe was a gift from the Greta Spirit. Later the pipe became a sacred object. No important ceremony was performed without the pipe. Soon afterwards it was named the "Peace Pipe".

Their pipes were made of stone, reeds or clay.

They made “ceremonial weapons” of a soft stone, because of the shape they were called butterfly stones.

No one knows the exact use, perhaps it was used as a good luck charm.

Pottery: The Indians made pottery with clay, it was nicely decorated and it held several gallons.

The Indians wore beads and belts.

They did not use metal because they did not know how to refine it.

The Walking Purchase: Although William Penn was known for his honesty, his son Thomas Penn was known as a great cheat.

One of his most disgraceful real estate transactions was the Walking Purchase which took place in 1737.

The Indians had supposedly given a deed of questionable authenticity to William Penn for land extending north from a point near Wrightstown as far as a man could walk in a day and a half.

The men chosen to walk were, Solomon Jennings, James Yeats, and Edward Marshall.

On Sept. 19th at sunrise in 1737, the walkers started out from a chestnut tree near Wrightstown in Bucks County PA.

At the sunset of the first day Marshall and Yeats reached a creek near the northern base of the Blue Mountains. Jennings had earlier become disgusted with the fraud and had stopped at the Lehigh River at a point between what is now Allentown and Bethlehem.

At sunrise of the second day Marshall and Yeats began again, but after a short time the strain became too great for Yeats and he collapsed, totally blind, into a creek. Three days later he died. Marshall however, continued until noon of the second day and finally stopped at the Tobyhanna Creek. Legend reports that in a final lunge he reached as far forward as possible and sank his hatchet into a tree.

In this way the Lenni-Lenape were cheated out of some of their best hunting and fishing land and as mentioned before they were eventually forced to the Central Pennsylvania area. Civilization had begun to take its toll; and a great Indian nation took its first steps into extinction.