COUNCILWOMAN O'CONNOR'S

WOODBURY HISTORY LESSON

"CELEBRATING THE FIRST NEWJERSEYANS":

THE LENNI-LENAPE

"Treat the earth well: it was not given to you by your parents, it was loaned to you by your children. We do not inherit the Earth from our Ancestors; we borrow it from our Children."
Tribe Unknown

When Woodbury was known as "Piscozackasing" or "Place of the Black Burrs"

Approximately 10,000 years prior to the arrival of the 'white men,' Native Americans appreciated and thrived off the land while living in relative peace. One such group is the Lenape tribe, also referred to as Lenni-Lenape. They inhabited much of what we now refer to as New Jersey, Delaware, southern New York, and eastern Pennsylvania.

The geographic area that we now know as Woodbury was referred to as "Piscozackasing" or 'place of the black burrs.'

Many believe this name refers to the vegetation in the area which included the burrs of the chestnut trees prevalent at that time.

The Unalachtigo branch of the Lenni-Lenape Indian tribe (Lenni-Lenape literally means "Men of Men" but is translated to refer to the "original people") were deeply rooted in the Gloucester County area. Beginning in the 1600's, arriving European settlers referred to this population as "Delaware Indians'' referring to the river and bay along the banks and tributaries upon which most of them lived.

Unalachtigo refers to "people who live near the ocean."

The Native Americans made efficient use of the land they lived in and respected- Southern New Jersey, which, at that time, was covered with open forest. Their territory was crossed by four major trails from the Delaware River to the ocean. Intermediate trails were part of their landscape that enabled inter-village visiting. Without natural barriers, travel and communication was easy with their neighboring tribes.

The land sustained the population, and their activities were driven by the season. During the summer, they would migrate to the shore to catch oysters and clams. At the onset of fall, they would return to their village to harvest their crops. The cold winter months found the Unalachtigo hunting deer and other animals. While during the spring season they would plant crops around their permanent settlements.

The Lenape planted and harvested vegetables, many we use today, including corn, squash, and beans. The women would make clay pots and bowls for cooking.

Their shelter was generally rectangular housing (longhouse) that measured approximately ten by twenty feet. Several families would live in these larger structures, with the benches serving as seats during the day and beds for the evening.

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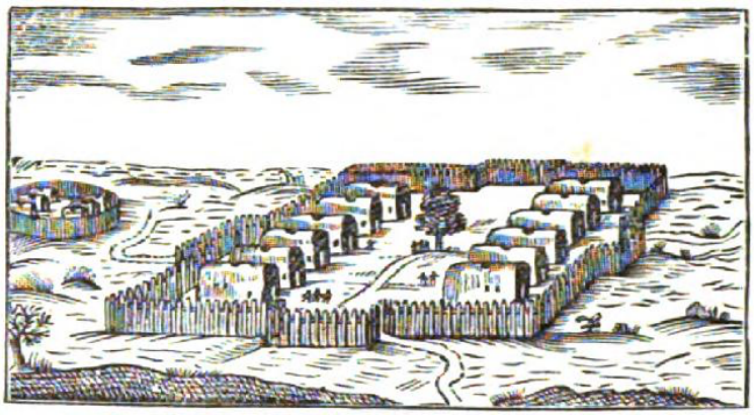
Smaller shelters were called wigwams. These would generally house a small family and were made of wooden frames which were covered with woven mats and sheets of birchbark.

Native American villages were strategically located near a stream or river to provide the villagers' water for bathing and a transportation avenue for their canoes.



Nanticokelenapemuseums.org

Recreation of a wigwam that would have housed a small family.

Photo courtesy of the Chadds Ford Historical Society

Life changed drastically for the peaceful Native Americans around the 1600's when foreign explorers arrived.

The Europeans arrived with goods that were unfamiliar, yet attractive, to the tribe members. Trade developed between the parties with the Lenape offering the Europeans items such as beaver pelts which would later be fashioned into a beaver hat which was 'all the rage at the time. In return for the bounty from the Native American's fur trade, the newcomers would offer the Lenni-Lenape items such as metal tools, utensils, cloth, and rum.

These sailors and explorers also brought unwelcome diseases – smallpox, influenza, and measles – epidemics that threatened the health and lives of the native population.

PENN'S TREATY WITH THE INDIANS

"We will live in love with William Penn and his children as long as the creeks and rivers run, and while the sun, moon and stars endure."
Chief Tamanend

For the local Lenni Lenapes, William Penn's rising influence created what they hoped would be a cooperative relationship.

In 1682, Chief Tamanend and other indigenous leaders of the Lenni-Lenape clan met with William Penn under a great and towering elm tree. William Penn gave his word of honor to the Native Americans that he would provide them equal treatment and that the two parties would live 'in a state of perpetual peace.'

Known as the "Treaty of Penn with the Indians" it endured for over70 years.

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Oil Painting by Benjamin West of the "Penn Treaty"

Chief Tamanend (1625-1698) was known as

"The affable one" and was one of the respected chiefs

of the clans that made up the Lenni-Lenape nation.

A DWINDLING AND DECIMATED TRIBE

As history has outlined, peaceful coexistence was not sustained between the Native Americans and the newcomers.

Much of the land of the Lenni-Lenape tribes was taken away in deals without their full understanding of the destructive implications. Tribe members began to move north and west to get away from "the whites."

Many who tried to sustain their culture and lifestyle succumbed to diseases like smallpox, measles, and tuberculosis. By the 1700's, the New Jersey native population was reduced to one-quarter of their strength when the first Europeans arrived on their land.

In 1758, Lenni-Lenape leader Teedyuscung met with the New Jersey Governor Francis Bernard. They negotiated a peaceful settlement and the tribe renounced all their rights in the State of New Jersey, with the exception of hunting and fishing privileges.

At that time, their tribe was reduced to approximately 200 natives who, through the agreement, created a permanent home for the Lenni-Lenape in Burlington County. Missionary John Brainerd supervised the settlement and helped the tribe reestablish its culture as they adapted to their 'new normal' in a settlement referred to as "Indian Mills."

It is reported that Brainerd 'would have died among the Indians he loved, had war not broken out and a British army captured the area, causing him to be removed." After Brainerd's 1977 departure, the fate of the Indians was once again, in jeopardy. The Oneida tribe, principally located in Northern and Central New York state, offered refuge to the remaining Lenape.

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Some tribe members took advantage of their offer of hospitality while a few remained behind and integrated into the local communities in South Jersey. More adventuresome members joined with the Cherokees and Osages, west of the Mississippi and Oklahoma.

Interestingly, it is believed that there are currently thousands of descendants of the Nanticoke and Lenape Indians that live in New Jersey and are working to reclaim their legacy.

According to their website (www.nlltribe.com) they pronounce that they are the ancestors of those "who remained, or returned, to our ancient homeland after many of our relatives suffered removals and forced migrations to the mid-western United States or into Canada."

Headquartered in Bridgeton, NJ, they maintain their own tribal culture and governing body, and (prior to COVID restrictions) a yearly ceremonial "pow-wow" celebration.

American Indian Tribal governments set their own standards for citizenship. Most common for enrolled citizenship are lineal descent, blood quantum, or relationship-based requirements, or some combination of the three.

Do you think you could be a descendant of the original people of this land?

Contact the Nanticoke-Lenni-Lenape Tribal nation to inquire about their standards for citizenships. "Most common for enrolled citizenship are lineal descent, blood quantum or relationship-based requirements, or some combination of the three."

As their website proudly proclaims, 'WE ARE STILL HERE!"

Contributions to August's History Lesson are by Councilwoman Karlene O'Connor and Researcher & Author Donna Clementoni.