



Teaching Hudson Valley Indigenous History

Created by Justin Wexler, 2023

Glossary of Terms

- **Algonquian:** Used by linguists to describe a widespread North American language subfamily that is classified within the primary Algic language family.
 - o **Algonquian** should not be confused with **Algonquin**, which is the colonial-era name of an indigenous community of the Ottawa River Valley in Canada.
- **Lenape:** From *lan-* ‘real, original, common’ and *-a-pe-w* ‘man’ and meaning ‘human being.’ The title used by local native peoples to describe themselves. Also spelled Lunaapeew.
- **Delawaran Languages:** a genetic subgroup of closely-related Eastern Algonquian languages that includes Mohican (upper Hudson Valley), Munsee (lower Hudson Valley, upper Delaware Valley), and Unami (Delaware Valley, Coastal Plain). All three languages descend from a common ancestral language and formed a continuum of Lenape dialects stretching from Delaware Bay to Lake Champlain.
- **Munsee:** a Delawaran language, most closely related to Unami, and once spoken in the lower Hudson Valley and upper Delaware Valley; the word derives from an important location (Minisink Island in the Delaware River). Still spoken as a first language by one elderly speaker on the Moraviantown Reserve in Ontario
- **Unami:** a Delawaran language, most closely related to Munsee, and once spoken on the western side of New York Bay, throughout the coastal plain of New Jersey, and in the lower half of the Delaware Valley. Translates as ‘downriver.’ Last spoken as a first language in Oklahoma in the 1990s.
- **Delaware Indians:** collective name coined by colonists in the 18th century for all speakers of Lenape dialects (derives from Delaware River Indians); similarly, the name River Indians was once used for all native people from the Hudson and Delaware Rivers
- **Mohican:** from *Mâ-hi-kane-w*, ‘Great-Ebb-Tide-Person;’ the name used by speakers of Mohican dialects for themselves. Similarly, the Hudson River was known as *Ma-hi-kanihtükw* – which loosely translates as ‘Great Estuary River’ – to its original inhabitants. The variant ‘Mahican’ is often used by linguists and ethnohistorians; Mohican has not been spoken as a first language since about 1940.
- **Iroquoian:** An entirely different language family that includes languages such as Mohawk, Seneca, Wendat, Tuscarora and Cherokee (among others). On the eve of colonization, Iroquoian-speaking communities were found to the west of the Appalachians (west of the eastern Mohawk Valley). Contemporary Iroquoian peoples in the Northeast refer to themselves as Haudenosaunee (a word that basically means “People of the Longhouse”).



Contemporary Lenape Communities

A century after initial colonization in the ~1620s, the ever-increasing settler population, pandemics, war, and environmental destruction made traditional livelihoods impossible in the region. Many Hudson Valley Lenape bands and families moved westward to protect their traditional way of life. This slow, multi-generational exodus started in the early 18th century and was almost complete by the time of the American Revolution, but would continue until about 1850; by this point, indigenous presence in the Hudson Valley was a thing of the past.

All present-day Lenape communities have existed in their current locations in Wisconsin, Ontario and Oklahoma since the middle of the 19th century or earlier; non-federally recognized groups or individuals claiming Mohican or Lenape heritage in the Hudson/Delaware Valleys today are frauds. Today, increasing awareness of their ancestral homeland means that contemporary Mohican/Lenape people visit the Hudson Valley with greater frequency. Moreover, over the tumultuous two centuries of movement westward, speakers of the Mohican, Munsee, and Unami languages intermarried. Subsequently, descendants of all three groups are found in all six contemporary communities:

- **Stockbridge Munsee Band of Mohican Indians** near Bowler, WI (<https://www.mohican.com/>) [the official government and main body of the Mohican Nation of the upper eastern shore of the Hudson River and descendants of the Wappingers of the lower eastern shore of the Hudson River to Manhattan]
- **Munsee-Delaware Nation Reserve** (aka Munseetown) near Muncey, Ontario (<https://www.munsee.ca/>) [the current seat of the tribal government originally from Minisink and the upper Delaware River and Highland Indians from the western side of the Hudson River]
- **Moraviantown Reserve** near Thamesville, Ontario (<http://delawarenation.on.ca/>) [largely descended from Unami communities of northern New Jersey and adjacent parts of Pennsylvania and Munsee and Mohican speaking people from the Hudson Valley]
- **Six Nations of the Grand River Reserve**, Ohsweken, Ontario (several hundred Lenape and Mohican descendants are found on the reserve) (<https://www.sixnations.ca/>) [largely descended from the Esopus Indians, Catskill Indians and their neighbors in the Hudson Valley]
- **Delaware Nation** (aka Delaware Tribe of Western Oklahoma) near Anadarko, OK (<https://www.delawarenation-nsn.gov/>) [largely descended from Unami speakers of the coastal plain of New Jersey, Delaware, and southeastern Pennsylvania]
- **Delaware Tribe of Indians** near Bartlesville, OK (<https://delawaretribe.org/>) [largely descended from Unami speakers of the coastal plain of New Jersey, Delaware, and southeastern Pennsylvania]



Recommended Published Resources

Dozens of books and articles have been written over the last two centuries about the indigenous inhabitants of the Hudson Valley and neighboring regions. It can be difficult to sift through so many sources in order to find the clearest, most trustworthy narratives about their history and culture. The following list includes the most objective and/or useful resources on the peoples of the Hudson Valley, including resources written by actual Lenape people:

History/Cultural Books:

- The Memory of All Ancient Customs by Tom Arne Midtrød
- The River Indians: Mohicans Making History by Shirley Dunn
- The Mohicans of Stockbridge by Patrick Frazier
- Munsee Indian Trade in Ulster County New York 1712-1732 by Kees-Jan Waterman
- The Delaware Indians: A History by C.A. Weslager
- A Study of Delaware Indian Medicine Practice and Folk Beliefs by Mohegan ethnobotanist Gladys Tantaquidgeon
- Medicine Generations by Mohican herbalist Misty Cook
- History, Manners, and Customs of the Indian Nations Who Once Inhabited Pennsylvania and Neighboring States by Moravian Missionary Rev. John Heckewelder
- Manhattan to Minisink: American Indian Place Names of Greater New York and Vicinity by Robert Grumet & Ray Whritenour
- The Lenape-Delaware Indian Heritage : 10,000 B.C.- A.D. 2000 by Herbert C. Kraft

For children:

- The Lenape or Delaware Indians by Herbert C. Kraft
- The Indians of New Jersey: Dickon Among the Lenapes by Mark Raymond Harrington (an excellent fictional depiction of early Lenape life, good for adults and for children)

Folklore:

Six books of authentic Lenape folklore exist:

- On the Turtle's Back: Stories the Lenape Told Their Grandchildren by Camilla Townsend & Nicky Kay Michael
- The White Deer and Other Stories Told by the Lenape by John Bierhorst, editor
- Legends of the Delaware Indians and Picture Writing by Richard C. Adams, 19th century Lenape poet
- Mythology of the Lenape: Guide and Texts by John Bierhorst, editor (this is more of an academic analysis than a book of stories, although it contains some)
- Turtle Tales: Oral Traditions of the Delaware Tribe of Western Oklahoma by Duane K. Hale, editor
- Winter Storytime by Rita T. Kohn

Other authentic stories can be read (or heard in the Unami language) in the Lenape Talking Dictionary at <https://www.talk-lenape.org/>