

## **LENAPE VILLAGES OF DELAWARE COUNTY**

By: Chris Flook

After the signing of the Treaty of Greenville in 1795, many bands of Lenape (Delaware) Native Americans found themselves without a place to live. During the previous 200 years, the Lenape had been pushed west from their ancestral homelands in what we now call the Hudson and Delaware river valleys - first into the Pennsylvania Colony in the mid-1700s and then into the Ohio Country around the time of the American Revolution.

After the Revolution, many Natives living in what the new American government quickly carved out to be the Northwest Territory, were alarmed of the growing encroachment from white settlers. In response, numerous Native groups across the territory formed the pan-tribal Western Confederacy in an attempt to block white settlement and to retain Native territory. The Western Confederacy consisted of warriors from approximately forty different tribes, although in many cases, an entire tribe wasn't involved, demonstrating the complexity and decentralized nature of Native American political alliances at this time.

Several war chiefs led the Western Confederacy's military efforts including the Miami chief Mihšihkinaahkwa (Little Turtle), the Shawnee chief Weyapiersenwah (Blue Jacket), the Ottawa chief Egushawa, and the Lenape chief Buckongahelas. The Western Confederacy delivered a series of stunning victories over American forces in 1790 and 1791 including the defeat of Colonel Hardin's forces at the Battle of Heller's Corner on October 19, 1790; Hartshorn's Defeat on the following day; and the Battle of Pumpkin Fields on October 21. On November 4 1791, the forces of the territorial governor General Arthur St. Clair were crushed at the Battle of Wabash River, where almost 1,000 Americans were killed, or wounded.

However, the gains were short lived. General Anthony Wayne later defeated the Western Confederacy at the Battle of Fallen Timbers on August 20, 1794. In August of 1795, the Confederacy chiefs signed the Treaty of Greenville, which established new boundaries between Native and American worlds.

Numerous bands of Lenape were spread across the Ohio country, Pennsylvania, and Canada. The bands that were allied with the Western Confederacy were essentially homeless - living in what is now Fort Wayne and along the Auglaize River in Ohio. By the late 1790s, the Miami invited these bands to live along the west fork of the White River, primarily as a buffer against the white settlers that were pouring across the Ohio River into the southern areas of the Indiana Territory. The Lenape accepted the offer and established a series of fourteen villages over the next several decades. The villages varied in size from seasonal hunting camps to large settlements of several hundred residents and the villages didn't all exist at the same time.

In Delaware County, we know of three Lenape villages along the river from the 1790s until 1821. The first of which was known variously as Wapicomecoke, Old Town, or Buckongahelas' Town. It existed at, or near the intersection of Inlow Springs along Burlington Drive. The village was the principal settlement of Unami-speaking Lenape band led by Chief Buckongahelas. There were approximately forty families at Wapicomecoke, at least until 1805. Both John and William Conner lived here briefly around 1800.

Downriver on the bluff overlooking the bend at present day Minnetrista, the Munsee-speaking Lenape established Wapicomekunk (also known as Tetepachsit's Village, Talapoxie, or Munsee Town) and was initially led by Chief Tetepachsit. Most of the other inhabitants of the White River Lenape villages spoke Unami, but the residents at Wapicomekunk spoke Munsee - one of two main Lenape languages.

The third village was Owenachki approximately on the bluff at the intersection of Indiana State Road 32 and Priest Ford Road. This village was also known as Hockingpomsga's Village after the titular chief of the settlement.

Although not in Delaware County, the other village sites along the river included: Killbuck's Village, Wapimintschi (Moravian Mission), Wapiminsink (Chief Anderson's village), Nancy's Town, and Greentown - all in what is today Madison County. In what we call Hamilton County, Lenape lived at Strawtown, Sarah's Town, the Upper Delaware Town, and Conner's Trading Post. Just inside of the Marion County line, Lenape lived at Brouillette's Village.

The Shawnee Chief Tecumseh and his brother the Prophet Tenskwatawa, also had a seasonal hunting camp somewhere near the present day border between Madison and Hamilton counties. The DAR marker along Burlington Drive suggesting that the Shawnee brothers lived at Wapicomecokes is unfortunately inaccurate.

Most of these villages were burned during the War of 1812 by unknown entities. The American Colonel Bartholomew led a force to inspect the village sites in June, 1813 and found them abandoned and burned. A month later, Colonel Russell went through the area and noted the same. The Lenape had abandoned their villages and moved to Ohio for safety. In an attempt to keep the Lenape neutral during the conflict, Harrison requested that William Conner move the tribe to Piqua, out of harm's way. While some warriors fought with the British and Tecumseh, most Lenape stayed neutral and lived out the war in Ohio until their return in 1814. How the Lenape villages were burned and under what circumstances remains a mystery.

After the War of 1812, it became clear to the Lenape chiefs that staying in Indiana wasn't a realistic option, prompting them to sign a treaty at Fort St. Mary's in 1818. However, Chief Anderson had invited a group of Brotherton Native Americans from the state of New York to live along the river prior to signing the treaty. The Brotherton, also known to early settlers as York Indians, had cultural, linguistic, and familial connections to the White River Lenape. Several families arrived early only to find that their invitation was effectively abrogated, as the territory was being ceded to the Americans.

The Brotherton that had made the journey, however, formed a small village at the bluff overlooking the confluence of the White River and Buck Creek in present day Yorktown. The Brotherton families received land grants in the treaty at St. Mary's and eventually sold their land. When Oliver Smith platted his community, he named it Yorktown in honor of the 'York Indian' village that previously existed at the same location.

Finally, it's likely that the Miami had several hunting villages, or other seasonal encampments along the Mississinewa River in northern Delaware County. While the records seem to be inconclusive at best, we do know that Miami settlements existed all along the Mississinewa and that early white settlers in Delaware County note trading activities with Native populations in this area.

While the Lenape lived a relatively short period in Indiana as compared to say, the Miami, they certainly left their mark. The place names of Muncie, Delaware County, Yorktown, Anderson, Buck Creek, and Strawtown all serve as an homage to east-central Indiana's Lenape inhabitants.