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Early Native American Tribes of the Hudson River Valley

A critical portion of the Hudson River Valley's history encompasses the indigenous tribes that dominated the forested land. These diverse Native Americans had a systematic lifestyle and culture prior to Henry Hudson's journey along the Hudson River, and demonstrate sophistication beyond what the Europeans perceived. Upon their encounter with the Native Americans, Europeans noticed their unique culture, yet were wary of its foreign nature.

The earliest tribes included the Mohicans who lived in the northern part of the valley and the Munsee and Wappinger who inhabited the opposite shore of the river, south of present-day Kingston and Rhinebeck.¹ These tribes were part of the Algonquin Confederacy and interacted with each other on various levels including trading goods and relations inter-tribe relations. According to Evan Prichard, author of "Native New Yorkers," and a professor of Native American history at Marist College, the Munsee were a deep-rooted and cohesive tribe, while the Wappingers encompassed a variety of tribes.² These early inhabitants of the Hudson River Valley referred to the Hudson as "Mohicanituk" or "The River That Flows Both Ways." The Native Americans were cognizant of the Hudson River's vital role as a source of food and transportation before the Europeans arrived.

Extremely proficient farmers and hunters, the Native Americans took advantage of the area's myriad resources to sustain their united communities. The Mahicans consisted of the

¹ Jennifer Meiers, "Native American Traditions Deeply Ingrained in Valley," *Poughkeepsie Journal* (September 2009).

² *Ibid.*

Soquatuck, the Horicans, the Pennacooks, the Nipmunks, the Abenakis, and the Nawaas. In particular, the Mahicans developed a successful and applicable form of government, illustrating their ability to form cohesive groups and realization of the need for structure and order in their inclusive society. Their government was a democracy, and their leader, or sachem, was selected by the nation. Other important Mahican positions included a hero who demonstrated bravery, an owl who had a remarkable memory and a skilled orator, and a runner who delivered messages.

Consequently, it is evident that the Native Americans of the Hudson River Valley had a strong sense of identity, demonstrated through their unified communities and organized society. Culture amalgamated the Native Americans, and aided in their establishment of a rich and diverse people.