

Christine Caiazzi
March 8, 2006
HRVI Paper II
The Mohican Indians

The Mohicans: Overview of their Presence in the Hudson River Valley

The Mohican Indians, also known as the Mahican Indians, are indefinitely linked to the history of the Hudson River Valley region. As written about by James Fennimore Cooper, a famous New York author, in his book, "The Last of the Mohicans," the Mohican tribes found home in the Hudson Valley Region, Massachusetts, and Connecticut. Towns located up and down the banks of the Hudson River derive their names from the Mohican tribes. However, the tribal names prove only one of the many ways in which the Mohican past is evident in the Region.

There exists a certain amount of confusion surrounding the Mohican Indians, in part, due to an inaccurate representation of the tribe in classical works such as Cooper's "The Last of the Mohicans." Cooper writes of the Mohegan Indians (originally a separate tribe from the Mohicans), but places them in the Mohican territory, with Mohican names. The Mohican Indians were originally divided into several different tribes-- The Pequots, Montauks, Narragansetts, Niantics, Wappingers and Nipmucs. These were all originally separate tribes, but following colonization by the Europeans, they intermarried and made pacts with one another for their own protection, their survival threatened not only by war

and conflict over land, but the Europeans infliction of new diseases on the Native Americans as well.

The Mohican tribes lived a distinct lifestyle from most other Native American tribes. Instead of living in tee-pees or long houses, the Mohicans traditionally lived in wigwams. Wigwams were shelters built of bent tree saplings for structure and brush cover on top. For transportation over long distances, Mohicans were skilled at constructing canoes out of hollowed out trees. One Mohican invention, that parents around the world still use today, are baby carriers-- known to the natives as cradleboards. Children were strapped onto the cradleboard and carried by the mother wherever she went. This is how the children were carried when the tribe moved to different locations.

Though the Mohicans were originally hunters and fishers, through the years and with increased European settlement, the Mohicans learned to grow maize and cultivate vegetables such as squash. The Mohicans were highly skilled fishers. They created weirs; these being underwater fish traps, that trapped fish to a confined area underwater. They would then use spears or arrows to kill the fish. The primary game of the Mohicans in this region was deer, elk, muskrats, moose, beaver and bear. In the winter months, the Mohicans created snowshoes to trek through the deep snow in search of hibernating bears.

In the Hudson River Valley specifically, there are several towns with names originating from Native American Tribes. Of the tribes of the Mohican Nation, the most famous are the Wappinger Tribe, which lent its name to Wappinger Falls, and the Peekskill Tribe, which lent its name to the town of Peekskill. Many of the main roads in

towns such as Peekskill and Wappinger Falls were originally the footpaths of the Native Americans in the region. When the Europeans started moving westward and taking more land, they developed those footpaths into carriage and horse paths, which later became the popular roads driven today. Though it is misleading to suggest that the Mohicans were more prevalent in the Hudson Valley than other Indian nations, they left some of the most obvious and strong evidence of their early presence in the Valley.