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April 16, 2010  
Chapter Entry #7

### Pregnancy and Birth in the Hudson River Valley

The Dutch settlers kept extremely detailed and informative records of Native American women's experiences with pregnancy and childbirth. Their use of natural resources combined with their knowledge of the land impressed the Europeans, and even borrowed various methods of medicinal care.

During the course of her pregnancy, a woman was cognizant to refrain from any activity that could cause harm to the fetus. She also ate healthy foods, illustrating Native Americans' knowledge that the provisions and woman ingested had an effect on the child. When the woman felt labor pains, a drink "made of a decoction of roots that grow in the woods," was prepared for her, and she would retreat into the woods alone to deliver her child.<sup>1</sup> If the woman bore a male, the child, despite freezing temperatures, was immersed in water which was believed to make them strong fighters and hunters. During childbirth, a Native American woman was rarely sick, and attributed any feelings of pain to the climate or way of living. Also, mothers nursed their own children, and took any course of action to ensure their children were safe.

It is evident that Native American women of the Hudson River Valley were not only knowledgeable of their surroundings, but also were exceptionally hardworking and affectionate mothers. Their ability to bear children with no aid illustrates their strength, and their desire to be their children's primary caregiver.

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<sup>1</sup> James Axtell, *The Indian Peoples of Eastern America: A Documentary History of the Sexes*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1981) p. 22.