

THE ORIGINAL PEOPLE – INDIAN NATIONS

When Columbus first discovered land, on his great experimental voyage westward, he believed that it belonged to India. He therefore called the inhabitants “Indians,” and the same name was given to those who were subsequently found upon this continent. When the first Europeans set foot upon the soil of North America, the original people were found throughout all that vast region south of Labrador and between the Atlantic seaboard and the Mississippi river. Though they were divided and sub-divided into many tribes, and speaking a variety of dialects, the traditions of all the nations occupying that portion of the country as far south as the Roanoke and Ohio rivers, traced their origin back to two great primitive branches, known as the *Linni Lenape* and *Mengwe*. These two groups of nations were called by the Europeans, the *Delawares* and the *Iroquois*. The *Lenni Lenape*, or *Lenape*, received the name of *Delawares* from the English, and the *Mengwe* were given the application of *Iroquois* by the French. Among their derivative nations, the *Lenape* were also known as the *Wapanachki*, and this name was variously corrupted by Europeans into *Openaki*, *Openaji*, *Abenakis*, *Apenakis*, and *Abenakis*. The *Mengwe* were also called *Mingoes*; the last corruption originating among ignorant white men, was from them adopted by the *Delawares*, who applied it as a reproach to their *Mengwe* neighbors, between whom and themselves ill feeling, and sometimes great animosity existed.

By some writers, and particularly Mr. Bancroft, nearly all the nations included under the heads of *Mengwe* and *Lenape*, or *Iroquois* and *Delawares*, are called the *Algonquin* nations.

When the whites first became acquainted with these aborigines, they possessed many curious and interesting legends and traditions. In reference to their origin, there was a tradition among the *Lenape*, that many centuries previous their ancestors dwelt in the wilds of the extreme western part of the continent. That after a long dwelling there, they began moving in the direction of the rising sun, and, in the course of time, arrived on the banks of a great river, to which they gave the name of *Namoesi Sipu*, or River of Fish (Mississippi). Here they first met the *Mengwe*, who had also migrated from a country far to the north and west, and had reached the Mississippi at a point farther north. After stopping awhile the spies of the *Lenape* discovered that the country on the east of the great river was inhabited by a powerful people called “*Tallagawe*” or “*Allegewi*,” from whom some writers allege, may have sprung the names of the Allegheny river and mountains. The pre-historic race commonly known as the “Mound Builders,” which at one time occupied the greater portion of the Mississippi Valley, are generally supposed to be the people referred to in this tradition. In the transmitted story that mysterious people were represented as living in large cities, situated among the principal streams and surrounded by fortifications. Desiring to proceed farther eastward, the *Lenape* asked permission of the *Allegewi*, to cross the river and settle in their vicinity. This request was not granted, but the *Lenape* were eventually told they could cross the river and proceed eastward to a country beyond the *Allegewi*, when they accepted the proposition and commenced crossing. As soon as the *Allegewi* saw the great numbers of the *Lenape*, they became alarmed, and fell upon those who had crossed over, destroying them and warning the others not to attempt a further passage. The *Lenape* then sought the assistance of the *Mengwe*, and an alliance was entered into, the two nations agreeing to conquer and divide the country. A long and bloody war followed, lasting through many years, and in which there was great slaughter on both sides. The *Allegewi* fought valiantly and obstinately for their country, but at length the united nations prevailed – the *Allegewi* were conquered – and the last remnant of them were driven far to the southward. The conquerors took possession of the lands and divided it between them – the *Mengwe* taking the country around the great lakes, and the *Lenape* choosing the region lying to the south and along the Ohio river and its tributaries. They lived there many ages, as peaceful neighbors, but gradually moved along in an eastward direction. The hunters of the *Lenape* finally crossed the mountains and discovered the waters of the Susquehanna and the Delaware, and the great bays into which they flowed. They explored the country beyond the Delaware (now New Jersey) – called it the *Scheyichbi* country, and upon reaching the banks of the beautiful Hudson, they named it *Mohicannittuck*. After extensively exploring all the vast region, and several month’s absence, they returned to their country and communicated everything they had seen; describing the new discovery and a land abounding in game, fish, fowl, and fruits, and destitute of inhabitants. Soon they proceeded to occupy this country, and subsequently established themselves upon the four great rivers of the Atlantic slope – the Hudson, Delaware, Susquehanna and Potomac. They made the Delaware the center of their possessions, and named it *Wittuck* (river of the *Lenape*). They finally divided into three great bodies, the larger portion settling along the Atlantic and the eastern slopes of the Allegheny mountains, another along the eastern bank of the Mississippi, and the third continued to dwell on the west side of that river. The Atlantic branch became

subdivided into three tribes: the *Turtle* of *Unamis*; the *Turkey* or *Unalachtgo*, and the *Wolfe* or *Minsi*. The two former inhabited the coast from the Hudson to the Potomac, and the latter, called by the English *Muncey* or *Muncie*, dwelt in the interior more adjacent to the *Mangwe*. They extended from Minisnk, on the Delaware where they had their council-seat, to the Hudson on the east, and occupied the valleys of the Delaware and Susquehanna, and were scattered as far west at the valley of the Allegheny.

The *Mangwe*, like their neighbors, also gradually moved eastward, occupying the shores of the great lakes, and establishing themselves over all that country from Lake Erie to the Hudson, and from the headwaters of the Allegheny, Susquehanna, and Delaware rivers, northward to Lake Ontario, and even across the St. Lawrence; thus really embracing nearly all of the State of New York, a portion of Canada, and northwestern Pennsylvania. This they figuratively styled their “*long council house*,” within which, the place of kindling the grand council fire, was the Onondaga Valley, where delegates from all the tribes met in solemn deliberations. The existed as a confederation of tribes, and were usually known in English annals as the *Five Nations*. This alliance was composed of the *Mowhawks**, *Senecas*±, *Cayugas*‡, *Onondagas*†, and *Oneidas*||. They called themselves the *Ho-de-no-saw-ne*, or People of the Long House; implying that they were one family, sheltered by the same roof. In the course of time a bitter enmity had arisen between the *Mengwe* and the *Lenape*, and this confederation was formed by mutual protection and defense against their hostile neighbors. The dated the formation of this league only a few years previous to the time when the white man first landed upon their shores. In 1712, the *Tuscaroras*, having been driven by the white settlers from their hunting grounds in the Carolinas, were received into the *Iroquois* confederacy, which from that time became what is known as the *Six Nations*, and are reckoned the most powerful and celebrated of all the Indiana nations of North America. Each nation was sub-divided into eight tribes which bore the names of *Wolf*, *Bear*, *Beaver*, *Turtle*, *Dear*, *Snipe*, *Heron* and *Hawk*; and at the formation of the league these names were retained and all their laws and customs made with reference to this division into tribes. They appear to have lived up to the requirements of the confederation, in good faith and mutual accord. The *Mohawks* occupied the country nearest the Hudson river, and were considered as holding the post of honor, the guarding of the eastern entrance to the “long house.” The highest chief of that nation was also the leading war chief of the confederacy. The *Senacas*, who were the most numerous, and possessed the highest degree of warlike spirit and military energy, defended the western portion of the “house” while the *Cayugas* were guardians over the frontier of the Delaware and Susquehanna valleys. The grand council was under the watch of the *Onondagas*, to whom also belonged the office of Chief Sachem (or highest chief magistrate of the league.) The land of the *Oneidas* lay farther towards the north on Lake Ontario and the St. Lawrence. At the grand council-house the Onondago, all business relating to the confederation was transacted, and their deliberations were marked with good judgment and ability. The *Iroquois* council has been compared to the *Wittenagamott* of the Saxons, and Governor De Witt Clinton, of New York, spoke of them as the “*Romans of America*.”

Different causes are assigned for the final conflict and sanguinary war which ensued between the *Iroquois* and the *Delawares*. Jealousy and animosity had long existed, frequent contests had occurred and a constant strife was kept alive between the two great nations. When the disturbing elements finally culminated in the long and bloody struggle, the superior advantages the *Iroquois*, or *Five Nations*, possessed over their opposing neighbors is greatly to be attributed to the deliberations of the grand council at the “Long House.” The result was the final subjugation of the *Delawares*, and hence when the Europeans began the settlement of Pennsylvania, this nation was found occupying a subordinate position to that of their abler and more powerful rivals.

By the great *Iroquois* confederacy, the *Eries*, living south of the lake, which perpetuates their name, were exterminated, the *Hurons* were at one time driven to the head-waters of the Mississippi, and the tribes of Hudson’s Bay, of the distant Missouri, and the far south, were not removed from their attacks.

* *Mowhawks* – “*the fire-striking people*” – they being the first to procure fire-arms from the Dutch, the term arising from their flint-locks striking sparks of fire.

±*Senecas* – “*mountaineers*” – because they inhabited the hilly or mountainous parts of the *Iroquois* domain.

‡*Cayugas* – from the lake *Queugue*, on the shores of which they lived.

† *Onondagas* – from *Onondago*, signifying “*the hill-top*,” their principal town being set on a hill.

|| *Oneidas* – “*the pipe-makers*” – a name given them because they were most ingenious in making stone tobacco pipes.

The *Senacas*, as we have observed, were the most numerous, warlike and powerful of the *Iroquois* nations. They dwelt at the western door, and expected to defend the territory of the confederacy against the entrance of enemies from the direction of the setting sun. The region they occupied extended over Western New York and Northwestern Pennsylvania. They were spread over the head-waters of the Allegheny, the first white man found them here in considerable numbers among the hills and valleys of Venango county, and their great chiefs, CORNPLANTER, and GUYASUTHA are prominently connected with the traditions and early annals of this historic ground. Some villages of the *Delawares* were found along the river and its tributaries. They were of the *Wolf* tribe, called by the English *Munceys*, and by the French *Loups**. They had a village at Venango (now Franklin) and one on French creek, at what is now known as the Heydrick farm, called by the Custolga's Town, after their famous chief by that name, and where a number of celebrated chiefs are buried. Some tribes of *Shawanese*, and a remnant of the *Wyandotts*, also called *Hurons*, were also found along the Allegheny, and in portions of Northwestern Pennsylvania. Some of these tribes called the *Delawares* their grandfathers.

*Loup is the French word for Wolf.