

THE LENNI LENAPE
OR DELAWARE INDIANS

BY
EDWIN ROBERT WALKER

The Lenni Lenape or Delaware Indians

In commencing this address I shall take the liberty of paraphrasing the opening of Sir Walter Scott's charming novel "Ivanhoe," and say:

In that pleasant district of North America formerly known as Nova Caesarea or New Jersey, and latterly as New Jersey, there extended in ancient times a large forest covering the greater part of the beautiful hills and plains which lie between the Atlantic Ocean and the river Delaware. The remains of this extensive wood are to be seen at this day in the deciduous trees of the northern and the ever verdant pines of the southern section of our state. Here haunted of yore the stag and the doe, here were fought several of the most desperate battles of the War of the Revolution, and here also flourished in ancient times those bands of roving savages whose deeds have been rendered so popular in American story.

These aborigines are familiarly known to us as the Delaware Indians. They were known to themselves as the Lenni Lenape. I shall call them indifferently "Lenape" and "Delawares."

The name bestowed upon New Jersey by the Indians was "Shéjachbi," (pronounced as if spelled "Shá-ak-bee.") They claimed the whole area comprising New Jersey. Their great chief Teedyescung stated at the conference at Easton, Pennsylvania, in 1757, that their lands reached eastward from river to sea.

When I was a boy I presumed that the word “Delaware” was an Indian name, evolved by the savages themselves and by them bestowed upon the river and bay. I was well grown up before I learned that the word was originally three words “De La Warr,” and that it was the name of an ancient English family ennobled in the time of Edward II, who reigned from 1307 to 1327. The particular scion of that ancient house for whom the Delaware River and Bay and the State of Delaware were named, was Thomas West, Lord De La Warr, born July 9, 1557. He succeeded his father in the peerage in 1602 and interested himself in the plans for the colonization of Virginia; became a member of the Council of Virginia in 1609, and the next year was appointed governor and captain general for life. He sailed for Virginia in March, 1610, arriving at Jamestown in June following with additional emigrants and supplies, just in time to forestall the abandonment of the colony. He returned to England in 1611 and sailed again for Virginia in 1618, but died on the voyage.

It was from the lordly title of this distinguished nobleman and adventurer that we get our present name “Delaware.” It is undoubtedly of Norman origin, that is, “De La Warr” is.

I cannot claim anything original for this address. Much has been written about the Indians and I have read much of what has been written. What follows has, of course, been drawn from the sources of information in works upon the Indians to be found in most of the extensive libraries.

The word Lenni Lenape is not pronounced as it is spelled,—that is, the last word is not. That, phonetically, would be Len-apee, but it is to be pronounced as though spelled Len-au-

pay,—Lenâpé. The river known to us as the Delaware they called the Lenape Wihittuck, meaning river or stream of the Lenape.

The Lenape were divided into three sub-tribes, (1) the Minsi (2) the Unami and (3) the Unalachtigo. “Minsi” means people of the stony country, or mountaineers; “Unami,” the people down the river, and “Unalachtigo,” people who live near the ocean. The three sub-tribes had each its totemic animal from which it claimed a mystical descent. The Minsi had the wolf, the Unami the turtle and the Unalachtigo the turkey.

Whence came the Indians? Rafinesque, in “The American Nations,” says that the annals of the Lenni Lenape contain an account of creation, telling of Kitanitowill, a God, the first and eternal being, who caused the earth, water, sun, moon and stars. This legend also tells of a bad spirit, Makimani, although the theory about an Indian satan seems not to be accepted by some historians,—and it seems that such a being was not believed in by the Lenape when the white men first went among them.

These annals of the Lenni Lenape given by Rafinesque tell also of a flood and the passage of the Indians and their settlement in America. From whence they passed does not appear, and doubtless this mystery is destined to remain forever unsolved.

In 1822 Rafinesque procured in Kentucky a record pictured on wood giving some of the legends of the Lenape Indians. This record is called the Walam Olum or Red Score. The original is not in existence so far as is known, but a manuscript copy made by Rafinesque in 1833 is preserved. The first accurate

reproduction of this, figures and text, was published in 1885 in "The Lenape and their Legends," with complete text and symbols of the Walam Olum, by Dr. Daniel G. Brinton, of Philadelphia.

Dr. Brinton thus summarizes the narrative of the Walam Olum:

"At some remote period the ancestors of the Lenape dwelt probably in Labrador. They journeyed south and west to the St. Lawrence, near Lake Ontario. Next they dwelt for some generations in the pine and hemlock regions of New York, fighting often with the Snake people and the Talega, agricultural nations, living in fortified towns in Ohio and Indiana. They drove out the former but the latter remained in the Upper Ohio and its branches. The Lenape, now settled on the streams in Indiana, wished to remove to the East to join the Mohegans and others of their kin who had moved there directly from northern New York. So they united with the Hurons to drive out the Talega from the Upper Ohio, which was not fully accomplished for many centuries, some Cherokees lingering there as late as 1730."

The Indians almost universally believed the dry land they knew to be a part of a great island surrounded by waters whose limits were unknown and beyond which was the home of the Light and Sun. The Delawares believed that the whole was supported by a fabled turtle, whose movements caused earthquakes, and who had been their first preserver; their legend in that respect being as follows: Back in the far distant past there was a great overflow of water, submerging the earth, and but few people survived. They took refuge on the back of a turtle. Presently a loon flew by, which they asked to dive and

bring up the land. Trying, but failing in the immediate vicinity, he tried afar off and returned with a small quantity of earth in his bill. The turtle, guided by the loon, swam to the place where the earth was found and the survivors there settled and repeopled the land.

It will probably be a matter of some surprise to most of you to learn that there is authority for believing that New Jersey was a wilderness, uninhabited by human beings until the year 1396, when King Wolomenap (Hollow Man) led his people into the Delaware Valley where they settled and overran New Jersey.

The Reverend Mr. Beatty, in his mission from New York in 1766, to the western Indians, received from a person whom he credited, the following tradition, which he had from some old men among the Delaware tribe: That of old time their people were divided by a river, and one part tarried behind; that they knew not for a certainty how they first came to this continent, but gave this account: that a king of their nation, when they formerly lived far to the west, left his kingdom to his two sons; that the one son making war upon the other, the latter thereupon determined to depart, and seek some new habitation; accordingly he set out accompanied by a number of people, and after wandering to and fro for the space of forty years, they at length came to the Delaware where they settled three hundred and seventy years before, that is, before 1766, which goes back to 1396. The way they kept account of this was by putting a black bead of wampum every year on a belt which they used for that purpose. Rafinesque gives a list of Lenape Kings and says their annals tell of Wolomenap (Hollow Man), the 77th, and that he was king at the falls of the

Delaware (Trenton); the first one there, according to the legend.

The earliest white travelers in this part of the country looked upon the natives as simply savages and little different from the wild beasts about them, and did not trouble themselves to study their institutions or traditions, and that has been done in comparatively recent times.

The Indians found here by the first explorers and travelers were splendid physical specimens, well built and strong, with broad shoulders and small waists, dark eyes, white teeth, coarse black hair, of which the men left but a single tuft on the top of the head to accommodate an enemy's scalping knife. There were few that were crippled or deformed.

History tells us of at least one Indian who was not straight,—of stature, I mean,—and that was Billy Bowlegs, a Seminole chief, who fought in the Florida wars. But he was not a Jersey Indian.

The Indians had a habit of anointing their bodies with oil and the fat of beasts and fishes which they claimed protected their skins from the fierce rays of the summer sun and the penetrating cold of winter.

As they lived mainly by hunting and fishing, their habitations, which were called "wigwams," were temporary structures which could easily be removed when occasion required. They generally slept on skin or leaves spread on the bare ground, and some had crude board floors, which inspired Roger Williams to indict these lines:

“God gives them sleep on ground or straw,
On sedge mats or on board,
When English beds of softest down
Sometimes no sleep afford.”

From these humble lodgings no one was ever turned away and the generous hospitality of the Indians was noticed with admiration by travelers. The Indian's dinner generally consisted of meat and vegetables, cooked in the same vessel, which was rarely, if ever, cleansed. His breakfast generally consisted of maize, that is, Indian corn, pounded in a mortar till crushed and then boiled. This was his ach-poan, whence comes the name “corn-pone,” which we all know, and, I may say, all like. Their thirst was quenched by drinking the broth of boiled meat, or by drafts of pure water. They had no intoxicating liquors until the advent of the white man. Their only stimulant was tobacco, which they smoked in pipes manufactured by themselves. They had no cigars, and the festive cigarette was entirely unknown to them, in fact was then unknown to everybody.

The Lenape did not depend solely on the trophies of the chase for their subsistence. They were, to a comparatively large extent, engaged in agriculture and raised a variety of edible plants, corn, beans, sweet potatoes and squashes, among them. A hardy variety of tobacco was also cultivated.

The art of the potter was not unknown to the Delawares, and their skill in bead work and feather mantles, and dressing animal skins, excited admiration. Their weapons were mostly of stone, but there was considerable native copper used for arrow heads, and also for pipes and ornaments. They had

paints and dyes made from vegetables and minerals found in their neighborhood.

In making a canoe they would fell a tree by means of their stone axes or by burning into the trunk at the base and would hollow out the trunk by fire, or in later times, would make a framework and cover it with bark and thus make a vessel large enough to carry a dozen or more men and to bear a thousand pounds or more of freight, and yet it would be so light that two or three men could carry it.

Although they were usually clad only in the skins of animals they had learned to make a coarse cloth from the fiber of nettles and other plants which they twisted and wove with their fingers. They made rope, purses and bags in the same way, and had needles made of small bones and wooden splints, with which they were quite dexterous. Like all primitive people the Indians were very fond of ornaments and adorned themselves with shells and beads and other articles skillfully and decoratively fashioned by themselves. The white beads made by the Indians were called "wampum" and the blue, purple or violet ones "suckanhoch." They were made of shells and other suitable materials. Used first merely for ornamentation, this wampum came to be so much in demand that it assumed the character of currency, and it was so used by the white settlers as well as the Indians as neither had any other kind of money. Some white men tried to make wampum but their crude product was promptly rejected as counterfeit.

As the straight-limbed and erect Indians had no intoxicating liquors, pimpled noses were not to be found among them. Nor did they use profane language, so far as I have been able to

learn. What a contrast between them and some of their white brethren! The late W. Clark Russell, in one of his inimitable sea stories, thus describes the English captain of a vessel: "His face was purple with grog blossoms, his legs were bent like the tines of a pitch-fork and he was charged to the throat with a fo-castle vocabulary," which is, as you may have heard, redolent of profanity.

The Indians were never very numerous in New Jersey, at least not after the advent of the white settlers. It has been estimated that in 1648 there were in the various tribes about 2,000 warriors all told, which would make a total population of about 8,000. After this time they disappeared rapidly. In 1721 they were said to be few and friendly,—the fewer the more friendly, doubtless.

Kalm, a Swedish traveler, who spent some time here in 1747, observed that the disappearance of the native population was principally due to two agencies,—smallpox and brandy. It will be remembered, I believe, by everyone, that intoxicating liquors were sold to the Indians by the whites even in defiance of colonial statutes forbidding it. The practice of violating excise laws, which we have every reason to believe still goes on, appears, therefore, to be of ancient origin and to be founded upon considerable historic precedent.

The cupidity of the early settlers led them to sell liquor to the Indians and countless evils ensued. One day in 1643, at Pavonia in this state, an Indian who had become intoxicated through the Dutch plying him with liquor, was asked if he could make good use of his bow and arrow. For an answer he aimed at a Dutchman thatching a house and shot him dead. An

Englishman had been killed a few days before by some Indians of the Achter Col village. The whites were exasperated and demanded the surrender of the murderers, which was refused, being contrary to Indian custom. Some of the whites trespassed on the Indians' cornfields, and when resisted shot three of the savages dead. A war seemed imminent, and in alarm many of the Indians fled for protection to the neighborhood of the Fort on Manhattan Island. The Dutch took advantage of this opportunity, and on the night of February 25, 1643, one party slaughtered their unsuspecting guests on the Island, while another party came to Pavonia and attacked the Indian village there, when the women and children were all asleep. The ferocity displayed by the whites on this occasion was never exceeded by the Indians. I will spare you any detailed account of the horrible tragedy, and will only add that as the result of the night's butchery about eighty Indians were killed and thirty made prisoners. Eleven tribes arose to avenge this cruel slaughter, but were no match for the well-armed whites, and a thousand Indians were slain. Peace was concluded at a conference, April 22, 1643, Oratamy, sachem of the Indians living at Achinheshacky (Ach-in-hesk-acky), who declared himself commissioned by the Indians, answering for them. Yet, more trouble followed, but in 1645 another treaty was made between the whites and the Indians, Oratamy making his mark thereto. In 1649 a number of leading Indians made further propositions for a lasting peace, the principal speaker being Pennekeck (the chief behind the Col), in the neighborhood of Cummipaw,—probably a considerable village of the Hackensacks. Chief Oratamy was present but said nothing. However, his superiority was recognized by the gift of

some tobacco and a gun, while the members of the tribe received only small presents.

During the ten years from 1645 to 1655, there were occasional encounters between Indians and whites, ten to fourteen of the latter being killed in that period in the vicinity of New Amsterdam.

The whites were constantly encroaching on the natives everywhere, and in the neighborhood of Pavonia a considerable settlement of Dutch had grown up. The Indians became restive as they saw their lands slipping away from them, and finally seem to have planned the extirpation of the invaders. Very early on the morning of September 15, 1655, sixty-four canoes, filled with five hundred armed Indians, landed on Manhattan Island, and the warriors speedily scattered through the village. Many altercations occurred between them and the Dutch during the day. Toward evening they were joined by two hundred more Indians. Three Dutchmen and as many Indians were killed. The Indians then crossed over to Pavonia and to Staten Island, and in the course of three days destroyed buildings and cattle, killed about fifty whites and carried off eighty men, women and children into captivity. It was the last expiring effort of the natives near New York to check the resistless advance of the Swannekins, as they called the Dutch.

For a time the Indians believed they had the advantage, and proceeded to profit by it with great shrewdness. They brought some of their prisoners to Pavonia and treated with the whites for their ransom, demanding cloth, powder, lead, wampum, knives, hatchets, pipes and other supplies. Chief Pennekeck

finally sent fourteen of his prisoners over to the Dutch authorities and asked for powder and lead in return; he got what he wanted and two Indian prisoners besides. The negotiations continued, until Pennekeck had secured an ample supply of ammunition, and the Dutch had received most of their people back again. To the credit of the Indians it should be said that no complaint was made of the treatment of their captives.

The authorities of New Netherlands were greatly disturbed by the brief but destructive war just mentioned, and as a precaution against the recurrence of such an event advised the erection of a block-house of logs, in sight of the Indians, near Achinheshaky. Affairs seem to have gone smoothly between the Dutch and the Hackensacks thereafter.

When the English conquered New Netherlands in 1664, they were careful to cultivate the friendship of the Hackensack chief, and Governor Philip Carteret wrote two letters in 1666 to Oraton, as he called him, in relation to the proposed purchase of the site of Newark. The chief was very old at this time and unable to travel from Hackensack to Newark to attend the conference between the whites and the natives. And so there passed from view that striking figure in the Indian history of New Jersey. It is said that he was prudent and sagacious in council, prompt, energetic and decisive in war, as the Dutch found to their cost when they recklessly provoked him to vengeance.

The few glimpses we are afforded of this Indian chieftain clearly show him to have been a notable man among men in his day, and that he was recognized as such not only by the

aborigines of New Jersey, but by the Dutch rulers with whom he came in contact. Mr. Nelson says that the name of such a man is surely worthy of commemoration, even two centuries after his spirit has joined his kindred in the happy hunting ground of his race. He was unaware, or had forgotten, that there is a public hall in Newark called "Oraton Hall" in honor of the great chief.

The names, number and position of all the New Jersey tribes have not been ascertained, but it is known that about 1650 the tribe occupying the area around the Falls of the Delaware, quaintly written "ye ffalles of ye De La Ware," where Trenton now stands, was named "Sanhican." Their chief was Mosilian, who commanded about 200 braves at the falls. An artificial stream of considerable beauty, paralleling the Delaware River and running along the southwesterly boundary of the city, built originally to supply water power to mills, but now disused for that purpose, has been named Sanhican Creek.

The Sanhicans were noted for the manufacture of stone implements, making beautiful lance and arrow heads of quartz and jasper. There are several vocabularies of their dialect extant.

Each tribe had a sachem or head chief. After the death and burial of one, the subordinate chiefs, called sagamores, met with the councillors and people, the new sachem being agreed upon, they prepared the speeches and necessary belts. They then marched to the town where the candidate was and one of the chiefs declared him to be the sachem in place of the deceased. The common chiefs were chosen for their personal merit,—their bravery, wisdom or eloquence, and the office was

not hereditary. When one was elected a sachem or chief, his name was taken from him and a new one bestowed at the time of his installation. He could be deposed at any time by the council of his tribe and his office was vacated by removal to another locality.

The council of each tribe was composed of the sachem and other chiefs, experienced warriors or aged and respected heads of families, elected by the tribe. The executive functions of the government were performed by the sachems and chiefs, who were also members of the council, which was legislature and court combined. Here matters concerning the welfare of the tribe were discussed and offences against the good order of the tribe were considered; crimes committed against individuals were not regarded as sins, and they were settled between the persons and families concerned, upon the principle *lex talionis*.

There are exceptions to all rules, and the rule of the Indians that they would not revenge wrongs upon individuals but would leave their kin to do so, seems sometimes to have been departed from, as will appear from the following: In 1671 two Dutchmen were murdered on Matinicunk (now Burlington) Island in the river Delaware, by Indians, because Tashiwycan, whose sister was dead, said that he would requite her by killing Christians, which he and another Indian proceeded to do. This was reported to, and considered by, the whites in council, who were informed that two sagamores of the nation of the murderers promised their assistance to bring them in or have them knocked in the head. This scheme of vengeance was carried out, and two Indians sent by the sachems to take the

murderers, came upon Tachiwycan's wigwam in the night and one of them shot him dead, and they carried his body to New Castle where it was hung in chains. The other murderer, hearing the shot, bolted into the woods and was never caught.

Each tribe had its totem, generally an animal, which was a sort of heraldic device like the coat of arms of an armor-bearing family. Each totem of the Lenape recognized a chieftain, a sachem. These were "peace chiefs." They could neither go to war themselves nor send or receive the war belt. War was declared by the people at the instigation of "war captains," valorous "braves," who had distinguished themselves by personal prowess, and especially by success in forays against an enemy.

Every Indian boy was trained in the craft of field, wood and water. They were early taught to use the bow and arrow, to fish with hook and line,—hooks of bone and lines of hemp,—to spear fish with a forked pole and to trap them by means of a brush net. As the boy grew older he learned to wield the stone hatchet, known to the whites as a "tommy- hawk." He was now expected to distinguish himself in the hunt, especially in the killing of deer, the noblest game of man,—white or red.

We are told that the Indians were wonderful archers. Presumably most of them were, and probably some of them were not. I suppose they had their William Tells and Sir Walter Tyrrels.

We all remember the legend of William Tell's great feat in archery in 1307 when an Austrian bailiff demanded homage of him which Tell refused, and for which he was sentenced to

death, but was given the chance of ransoming himself by shooting an apple from off his son's head at very long range, a feat which he triumphantly performed.

The misadventure of Sir Walter Tyrrel was, that on August 2d, in the year 1100, William II, surnamed Rufus or the Red Rover (from the color of his hair), was hunting in the New Forest accompanied by Sir Walter Tyrrel, a French gentleman. A stag suddenly started up and Tyrrel let fly at him an arrow which struck a tree, and, glancing off, hit the King in the breast, killing him instantly. Sir Walter immediately put spurs to his horse, gained the channel coast and embarked for France, where he joined the Crusades as a voluntary penance for his involuntary crime. There is a fine old English ballad commemorating this regicidal tragedy, the refrain of which is: "Instead of a royal stag that day a King of England fell."

When a mere boy the Indian would be permitted to sit at the council fire and hear discoursed, by the sages of his tribe, the affairs of state. When old enough to go on the war-path he was taught the war-whoop, *kowamo*, and how to hurl the war-club, and to use the tomahawk.

The Indians were fairly accurate in the computation of time. The Lenape did not have a fixed beginning to their year, but reckoned from one seeding time to another, or from when the corn was ripe. They had a word "grachtin" for year and counted their ages and the sequence of events by yearly periods. The records of their people, preserving the memory of events, myths and fables, were kept on marked sticks. At first they were marked with fire, but latterly they were painted, the colors as well as the figures having certain meanings.

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