

Transcript of Lecture Delivered By  
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The Material History of the Montaukett

It is a privilege to begin this municipal celebration -- East Hampton's observance of its 350th anniversary -- which is unprecedented in its depth and breadth of commemoration. After considering area geology and ecology, it is appropriate that this series address the next occurrence--the human peopling of the landscape.

To retrieve that story for our recent volume, *The History & Archaeology of the Montauk*, a variety of documentary records were used -- censuses, diaries, histories, public records, and ephemera such as newspaper articles. This is one of the most comprehensive accounts of a Native American group in the northeast. I believe this was possible due to the uniqueness of the situation here.

East Hampton was the only Long Island area which had a long-term resident Native teacher -- Samson Occom of Mohegan, who married Montaukett Mary Fowler. He created a higher level of European "literacy" for the Montaukett, although the Native people had their own form of literacy in individualized marks for signing documents, in their pictographic language carved in stone, wood, etc., and in sign language. But this more "educated" Native group, plus Occom's services as a scribe to transmit their concerns to the British Commissioner for Indian Affairs for the Northern Provinces, Sir William Johnson, created a situation which sets the Montaukett apart from other Island Native groups and created a more extensive documentary record as well. (1)

However, these rich documentary resources produce a limited view of the reality of their life. A more complete ethnohistoric account is possible through the analysis of their material record - visual materials, artifacts, the archaeological record, and oral accounts. I will focus on this record, illustrated by slides showing this evidence. (2)

As background -- the first known inhabitants of East Hampton were the aboriginal Montaukett -- a place name spelled a dozen different ways in early records. It was not a "tribal" name, but a place name which the colonists conferred upon them as they designated them as a "tribe." The meaning of Montaukett in William Wallace Tooker's *Indian Place Names on Long Island* is given as either the "high or hilly land" or the "fort country"-- both of which appear to fit Montauk topography and the presence of two fortified places. (3)

The Montauketts are members of the large Algonkian language family and peoples who inhabited the Atlantic Coastal Plain from Canada to the Carolinas; they spoke a variant of the language of the Mohegan-Pequot, across the Long Island Sound from them.(4)

The Native people of the Island and the Montaukett, who inhabited the eastern end of the south fork, appear to have done so at least 9- to 12,000 years ago. This could occur after the ca. 18,000-year-ago recession of the glacier that formed this and the contiguous

Manhattan and Staten Islands, as well as the string of islands leading to Cape Cod. These elevations became islands as the water rose about 350 feet with the melting of the glaciers, inundating the continental shelf. The evidence for this early inhabitation are the 15 known Clovis/Paleo chipped stone points of this period found on the Island, one of them from the Three Mile Harbor area. (5)

Artifacts of the next culture period, the Archaic, ca. 9,000 - 3,000 years ago, show that the Native people lived around estuaries, harbors, streams and ponds of this beneficent land, as well as made stone tools, hunted, and camped at inland sites. So far no evidence of the Late Archaic Red Paint Burial Cult has been found in East Hampton. Also, there was far more Native use of the land than this map shows; the evidence for this is in the 'gray' (unpublished) literature of the contract archaeologists. (6)

The Woodland Period beginning about 3,000 years ago was the lifeway of the Native people when 'discovered' by the first European explorers. It was characterized by the development of pottery and first use of the bow and arrow, as well as hunting whales (which could have been possible since Archaic times, when clam and oyster resources became available).(7)

There were also trade networks linking Island villages north to the Connecticut River Valley and south to the Delaware Valley and New Jersey; the Hands Creek site in East Hampton was part of it, judging from the New Jersey Abbott-style pottery and argillite blades found there. (8)

These culture periods included the extensive use of the Island's maritime resources -- fish, fowl, sea mammals, and shellfish -- as well as small mammals, nuts, berries, tubers and extensive vegetal resources. Attesting to the valuable fishing resources, Montauk Point was once known as Fisher's Point, and southern New England as well as local Native people came there to fish; this is how Samson Occom was introduced to the Montaukett. Because of this rich food base the gardening of domesticates here was late in time, less than 1,000 years ago (not long before the European 'discovery' of the region in the 1600s), and apparently not as extensive as elsewhere.

Maize (corn) horticulture is believed to have traveled to North America from Mesoamerica, but the squash family was indigenous to the midwest and southeast; the corn, beans, and squash cultigens apparently reached Long Island from the midwest, perhaps through extensions of the trade networks mentioned earlier. Archaeological evidence of maize horticulture on the Island is sparse, and I do not know of a "planting field" in East Hampton like that found by the first settlers in Southold, Setauket, Oyster Bay, etc.

However, long before these domesticates were cultivated here, native women are known to have nurtured many plants -- mallow, chenopodium, groundnuts (called 'sagaponack' locally), Jerusalem artichoke, etc. elsewhere and presumably here also. Evidence of the domesticated sunflower has been found in the southeast dating to over 4,000 years, and this is to the east of where domestication probably began, so there is little doubt it was

also on Long Island. (9)

Women were the first empirical genetic biologists, as they manipulated the wild plants to produce the characteristics they desired. The women also produced dyes and medicines using their extensive botanical knowledge. What is known of this has been published in the Suffolk County Archaeological Association's Vol. IV, Languages & Lore of the Long Island Indians, and Samson Occom's 1761 herbal curative list in Vol. III, 2d ed., The History & Archaeology of the Montauk. (10)

Another aspect of Native life is their cosmology; this was described by Samson Occom in the 1760s and printed in the Montauk volume. Visual evidence of the Native belief system throughout the Island exists on gorgets, slate plaques, cobbles, etc. The figure of the thunderbird found at Sebonac in the Shinnecock Hills represents a beneficent figure, as he brings rain, necessary for survival; the figure of the Great Horned Serpent from the Miller Place area represents evil forces. The turtle gorget from Nassakeag Swamp in Setauket probably represents the Algonkian origin myth, in which the earth is formed on a turtle's back.

Incised shells, deer ribs, and beaver teeth which indicate calendrical and other types of record-keeping were found at Mt. Sinai Harbor archaeological sites and published in SCAA's Vol. V, The Second Coastal Archaeology Reader. (11)

Petroglyphs carved on two boulders were found at Jericho, and a slate tablet with many images was found at Orient. Those images most related to the Montaukett are clay tablets in the East Hampton Library Long Island Collection, whose meaning is obscure. (12)

Another object which illustrates the cleverness of the Natives is this stone puzzle found at Montauk. (13)

The Contact Period in Montaukett life began with the European explorers who bumped into the end of the Island as it juts into the Atlantic. The first we know of is Verrazano in 1542, who coasted by but apparently did not land; he did leave us with a detailed description of the life and dress of the Natives of nearby Newport harbor which may be applicable to the Montaukett. Apparently their clothing was exquisitely embroidered "like damask" with colored porcupine quills. (14)

The next was Adrian Block in 1614, who may have landed (although there is no record of it), who named Block Island after himself, and created the first map of the Island, labeling the eastern Natives "Nahicans," a name not seen again in succeeding records. The subsequent Bleau and Visscher maps of 1635 and 1662 note them as "Matouwacks." (15)

Other early 1600s contacts were the Dutch trader Pieter Barentsen as well as the English Captain Southack, who wrote on his early 1700s map of the two forks "I commanded ye first ship that ever was at this place" on the Peconic estuary portion. He also located "Indian Town" on the Napeague portion of the map. This was the first of a number of

early maps which located Indian Town or Indian Plantation on the Montauk peninsula -- an important visual adjunct to the written record. The site appeared further east with each deed extracted from the Montaukett by the settlers taking another portion of their land. The Montaukett later complained in petitions to the New York State Assembly that they were told they were signing one agreement only to find later they were lied to, that they were plied with liquor before signing deeds (Town records reveal payment for the rum, confirming that), that the settlers killed their dogs and cut so much of their firewood that every winter elderly women froze to death. (16)

Besides being documents recording the loss of Montaukett land, this series of 16 deeds, 1648 to 1794, is a visual record revealing the 'marks,' or signatures, which indicate the pictorial literacy of the Montaukett, relative to the literacy of the settlers, many of whom signed with an X. The sachem Wyandanch's mark (a figure drawing) on a deed authenticated it; those deeds without it could be doubtful -- and there were many in the colonists' lust to 'buy' Native land with gifts. It was easier to pay Wyandanch than the many heads of bands living across the land. John Strong covers the loss of Montaukett lands extensively in the Montauk volume. (17)

The most dramatic material evidence of the contact between the first inhabitants and the colonizing Europeans is the Pantigo burial site, dating from ca. 1650-1750, soon after the 1648 founding of East Hampton. The seventeenth century contact with explorers and traders had brought diseases, mainly smallpox, against which the Natives had no immunity. This had decimated the population by about 90% throughout North and South America within a few generations. (18)

In addition, the lack of a hinterland in a linear island setting left nowhere to retreat except the mainland. It is not known how many of the Pantigo burials resulted from the new diseases, but there were other East Hampton Native burial grounds which were not excavated scientifically, as was Pantigo in 1917 by Foster Saville of the Museum of the American Indian. (19)

Although the deceased Montaukett were buried in the traditional flexed position without coffins (with some in the European extended position) most of the 39 recorded graves contained a majority of European trade goods (other graves were dug up by the owner of the site and neighbors and the contents with their information were lost to the public record.) The trade items had supplanted those of aboriginal manufacture; only from this archaeological evidence do we know the extent and the timing of European acculturation in the arena of material possessions. Other evidence in the Montauk volume indicates the Montaukett retained traditional wigwam housing (1880s), much of the hunting and gathering lifestyle (1870s), the use of herbal medicines, and traditional gatherings into the twentieth century.

One notable category of this mortuary record was trade beads, which had not been analyzed by Saville. Karlis Karklins of Parks Canada, an internationally recognized bead expert, and I analyzed the thousands of beads for the first time. He found that the Pantigo beads were more abundant than on any other northeastern archaeological site. He

discovered a few types not previously seen in his research around the world, and that they were mostly from Holland. This does not mean that mostly Dutch traders were here, as English traders used Amsterdam beads extensively as well. Karlis found the trade beads were the most common adornment in the burials; we found fragments of wampum 'belts,' presumably headbands or belts, and shell and copper alloy beads. Their arrangement gives evidence of the esthetic values of the Montaukett known in no other way. One burial was that of a leader, Wobeton, known from the Town Records as well as by this autographed English spirits bottle.

Another result of the mid-17th century Contact period was the construction by the Native people of a series of "fortified places," due to increasing interaction with the ever-encroaching traders and settlers. Again, it is mainly the archaeological record that reveals the shape (based on European models), size, siting, and use of these forts -- some more for trade, others more for defense. (20)

The fact that Long Island had more Contact period Native forts than any other area of the country will be told in detail in SCAA's up-coming Vol. VIII, The Native and Historic Forts of Long Island. The 'new' Montauk fort, on Fort Hill, the only one of the two found so far, will be in the volume; it is the only one to be shown on a map -- John Scott's 1658 map of Long Island, one of the earliest and the best for its time. (21)

As the Contact period became the historic or colonial era, the Montaukett and other Native people were drawn into the transplanted European economic sphere in order to buy the new 10. 'necessities,' such as gunpowder, flour, sugar, clothing, Dominy furniture, etc. A colonial economy has an insatiable need for labor for whaling, farming, herding, dairying, cheese and butter production, textile production, and craftware, hence servants and slaves. Of 90 Suffolk County wills probated from 1670 to 1688, 24 listed English, Negro, and Indian servants and slaves. Their value was second only to cattle owned. Of this 24, 2 or 8% were listed as "Indian captive servant" or "Indian slave girl." In the Montauk volume, Philip Rabito-Wyppensenwah points out that many of the enslaved Natives here were from the Carolinas and the Caribbean. (22)

Another form of labor for the Natives was being forced to produce huge quantities of wampum (shell beads) to pay fines levied upon them for infractions of local laws (which they often did not understand); the wampum was then used by European traders to purchase furs from the northern territories. Since the largest amount of whelk shell for making wampum is found on eastern Long Island beaches, the area became the "mint" of New Netherland. (23)

Further participation by the Natives in the new economy was service as militiamen in all the provincial campaigns before the French and Indian Wars and in the American revolution. They served out of proportion to their numbers in the population and left many Native settlements with a large number of widows; this led to intermarriage with Anglos, African-Americans, and other groups. The Montauk volume includes the muster rolls of the local militias in which they served and a painting of how the Natives dressed.

Most of the Montaukett worked for the East Hamptoners and helped make colonial life as comfortable as it was. They were gin (fence) keepers of the livestock pastured at Montauk and laborers for the Gardiners and others. The men used traditional woodworking skills to make piggins, ladles, and bowls for settler homes; they provided fish, oysters, and game for them. Stephen Pharaoh's pay is recorded for "bottoming" (rushing) Dominy chairs. As skilled shore whalers, Montaukett men were fought over by entrepreneurial East Hamptoners to be their crewmen. What today is labor law were rules enacted by the seventeenth century Town officials to control the cutthroat whaling labor practices of that day. (24)

The Native women used the spinning wheel to spin yarn, a necessity for all knitwear and weaving of essential cloth. They became expert makers of butter and cheese, which were major cash 'crops' for their masters. Baskets, scrubs, jellies, and fine hand work provided cash for themselves. They cared for the mothers and children of colonial families, and were encouraged by the society to be the sex objects of the men; hence the Montaukett descendants of some of the early settlers. (25)

Besides Native participation in the economic sphere, their souls were sought by the English and Scottish missionary societies to create more tractable workers. The first missionary in the 1740s was Azariah Horton of Southold and a graduate of Yale, who was not very successful. He recommended a successor; this was Samson Occom, a Mohegan who came first as a teacher, then was ordained in the Presbyterian Church after tutelage by the Rev. Samuel Buell. Their diaries are published in the Montauk volume; it is astounding that it took 200 years for Occom's "Diary" to be in print.

Occom was one of about 27 Native men educated in the European manner by Rev. Eleazer Wheelock and fellow clerics; he was one of the few to survive and the only one to have his portrait painted by the noted colonial limner Nathaniel Smibert. He also was pictured by other paintings, mezzotints, and lithographs; thus we know how this man of genius appeared -- an inventor of sensory teaching methods a hundred years before Maria Montessori, a composer of hymns still sung in the Presbyterian church, a skilled craftsman and bookbinder (examples in the Long Island Collection), an expert gamesman to feed his family, etc. He was the only Native clergyman to keep a diary, a source of so much unknown information on that time.

Recognizing that the Montaukett could not survive in the climate of genocide fostered by East Hampton government, Sam Occom, with leaders of the Mohegan, Pequot, and Narragansett, planned an exodus to the Oneida Territory of up-state New York to establish the Christian town of Brothertown. The first settlement was aborted in 1776 by Revolutionary War hostilities, but was begun again after the war in 1784.

Occom was the minister of the settlement and died there in 1792; his grave is unmarked but is thought to be in or near this Brotherton cemetery on Oriskany creek behind the house of his brother-in-law David Fowler. Mary Fowler Occom's brothers Jacob and David were also educated by Wheelock and played important roles as translators at the Treaty of Fort Pitt and other colonial parleys. It was David, teaching at Oneida, whose

tales of the abuse of the Montaukett moved an Oneida chief to grant them land. This 'doodle' on the back of a letter from David to Occom illustrates artistic ability not otherwise known.

Instead of a haven forever, within a generation the Brotherton lands were being trespassed upon by settlers from New England. A N.Y. State Assembly commission awarded one third of their land to the trespassers. The Brotherton were forced to move westward, finally to a spot in Wisconsin they named Brothertown. They were an 'Americanized' group who were highly productive in boat-building, lumbering, milling, and farming. They were the first tribe to become U.S. citizens, and did so to avoid President Andrew Jackson's drive to force all Indians west of the Mississippi. As a consequence of the partition of their reservation, they lost the land which had become their farms. However, the Brotherton continued their gatherings over the years and have recently filed for re-recognition as a tribe under the leadership of June Ezold, an advertising executive and descendant of Samson Occom. A genealogy of eleven generations of Montaukett and Brotherton and several hundred pictures of them is part of the Montauk volume.

By the nineteenth century tuberculosis had taken the place of smallpox and other European diseases as the scourge of the Native people. East Hampton church death records, which may be incomplete for the Montaukett, indicate that 14 of 39 Native deaths between 1825 and 1879 were of consumption, with the deceased ranging from 11 months to 58 years. This documentary record is captured visually in the sketches of the deathbeds of Stephen and David Pharaoh by Tile Club artists which appeared in several national illustrated newspapers of the 1870s. One of the Club members, Winslow Homer, made this sketch of David Pharaoh in 1874, and another, W.O. Douglas, created this life mask and carving of him, the leader of the Montaukett, as shown in the Montauk volume. (26)

As well as the usual farm and maritime work, nineteenth century economic activities of the Montaukett now included work in the developing factories of the area (known through ephemera and oral histories but not public documents); as guides for wealthy hunters and the sportsmen's clubs (known through oral history, ephemera, and the archaeological site of Montaukett Steve Murray's cabin in now Connetquot State Park. They delivered ice (no record except this photograph), provided livery service for the newly developing tourist industry (only this Edward Lamson Henry pastel and a lithograph document this), and produced wood and textile crafts still in early east end homes. The East Hampton Historical Society has a collection of this material culture (shown in the Montauk volume) -- the baskets, mortars, pestles, piggins, ladles, bowls, and scrubs which underpinned 18th and 19th century life.

That period of Montaukett lifeways has been retrieved somewhat by the archaeological record of Indian Fields, their last home (now Montauk County Park; soon to be renamed for Theodore Roosevelt's brief stay? Yet one more way to render invisible the original inhabitants?). The artifacts excavated by Edward Johannemann indicate habitation there from 1725 to about 1885. The excavation probably found the home of Charles Fowler (24

feet square of Anglo design with wood floors) and located other houses 30 feet square and 11 by 16 feet, as well as other structures 7 and 8 feet in diameter. The site's "Indian barns" showed four variations of storage shelters and a well/cool-storage structure. Faunal remains indicate that they ate a lot of turtle. (27)

Ceramic fragments found (4,539) indicate that more than half of their vessels were redware, the common ware of the early days. About 25% was pearlware, 17% white ironstone, 2% earthenware, and 1.25% porcelain. When this profile is calculated for other Long Island populations, it would tell us how the Montaukett compared economically and esthetically with other groups.

Maria Pharaoh's "Diary," the only such document about 19th century Native lifeways, describes their self-sufficient, happy homesteading lifestyle -- gathering, hunting, fishing, guiding sportsmen and selling crafts. This rare photograph in the Montauk volume shows the Pharaoh and Fowler families living such a life at Indian Fields before 1873.

After David Pharaoh died of TB, Maria and her children could not maintain the homesteading lifestyle. They were lured to move to Freetown, north of East Hampton village, by promises by Frank Benson that they could return in summer, would get a yearly annuity, and education for the children. The Benson family, who had bought Montauk peninsula from the Town Trustees, used it as a hunting preserve and planned to develop it. The promises were empty, the Montaukett homes at Indian Field containing their deeds and records were burned, and they were driven away from their ancestral home. Other Montaukett had moved away for better livelihoods to Eastville, a Native/African American settlement on the eastern side of Sag Harbor, while others lived in enclaves in Southold, Greenport, Amityville, and scattered through the Island.

Through the newspaper accounts and censuses scanned by Philip Rabito-Wyppensenwah for the Montauk volume, it is apparent that most of the Montaukett women worked as domestics and servants, and most of the men worked at odd job, as laborers, and as farm hands, although some were skilled carpenters, whalers and seamen, masons, coachmen. However, when they had their pictures taken, they dressed in their best clothes, as everyone did.

By the twentieth century the Montaukett had disappeared from the Town Records, appearing only in legal records (as in John Strong's account of the loss of their land (28), in newspaper articles, in oral histories (such as Maria Pharaoh's "Diary") and the visual record shown in the Montauk volume.

They attended school, were star athletes (John Henry Fowler was considered the Knute Rockne of Long Island), rode bicycles, dressed as 'dandies,' held powwows or gatherings, and wore their regalia as a way of maintaining traditions. Among them was Olivia Ward Bush-Banks, a teacher, journalist, author, and poet whose collected works have been published by Oxford University Press; she was of Montaukett descent, attended powwows, and used her heritage in her work.

The lawsuit begun in the 1870s to regain Indian Fields, which had been taken from them by the developer Arthur Benson and his family, was lost in 1910 (and the appeals in 1918) when Judge Abel Blackmar pronounced them no longer Indians. This photograph records the Montaukett's 1923 trip to the Bureau of Indian Affairs in Washington, DC seeking government aid for the return of their land; none was given in that time of rapid development. The current generation of Montaukett descendants, numbering in the thousands around the country and in the hundreds on Long Island, are organizing at the request of Robert Pharaoh and Bob Cooper, descendants of Maria Pharaoh, to seek Federal recognition and the return of their land. They are collecting genealogies and have sponsored powwows as part of the process to secure their heritage.

In addition, the research of over 30 scholars to provide this compendium of information on one Native group has made a valuable contribution to the multi-cultural history -- the real story -- of our most interesting Island.

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