

The Totoket Historical Society, Inc.

**Prehistoric & Historic Indians  
Of the  
Northeast and North Branford**

by

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# Prehistoric & Historic Indians of the Northeast & North Branford

"The pioneer (Indian) settlement period in the Northeast, as in many other areas of the United States, occurred during late Wisconsin times, probably in the Valdres glacial substage. At that time, little bands of freely wandering hunters of the Clovis or Llano tradition, began to penetrate northward into a cold, moist, and bleak region where vegetation was slowly being reestablished through dispersion following the disappearance by down wasting and ablation of the Port Huron ice ....

"Interdigitating with the park-tundra on the south (of the St. Lawrence Valley) was an open forest dominated by spruce, fir, jack-pine, white pine and a few deciduous species. This was the habitat of browsing animals, including mastodon, caribou, woodland musk-ox, moose-elk, and some still extant species like the deer, elk, moose, bear, and wolf. This cool, moist, sparsely forested biome .... was probably the principal milieu of the Early Paleo-Indian hunter over most of the Northeast."<sup>1</sup>

Tiny bands of these hunters are presumed to have followed the migration of these animals and to have established camp sites along the larger rivers. Known sites in New England include one near Newburyport, Mass. and another in the extreme northern portion of Vermont, part of which was then partially covered by a large post-glacial lake. Scattered artifacts belonging to these people are found along the southern shores of New England, eastern Mass. and the Conn. River Valley. Several camp sites have been located in New York.

Archeologists believe with fair certainty that the occupation of this area by the Paleo-Indian Hunters was established some time between approximately 3500 and 5000 B.C. with a possible extension back to as early as 6000 to 9000 B.C.

<sup>1</sup>Ritchie, William A. and Funk, Robert E., Aboriginal Settlement Patterns in the Northeast, The University of the State of New York. 1913. P. 6.

Long Island, the southern portion of the Hudson River Valley and southern New England appear to have pretty much of a common Indian tradition. People of the Archaic culture (c. 4500-1300 B.C.) were sparsely scattered over the area hunting, fish and collecting vegetal foods. (Their artifacts include copper tools, gouges, barbed bone points and a large variety of chipped stone types. Ritchie and Funk point out the general absence of shell artifacts, smoking pipes, pottery agriculture, mortuary offerings and the total lack of copper ornaments.)<sup>1</sup> Ritchie & Funk, Aboriginal Settlement .... p. 37.

For a period of about 300 years (c. 1300-1000 B.C.), known as the Transitional Stage by Ritchie, new cultures appeared along the East Coast from the Chesapeake Bay region to central New York and Northern Massachusetts. These cultures introduced new forms of stone artifacts, carved soapstone and in the case of Orient (Long Island), Ritchie

"senses a pervading aura of high religious drama .... in which high places, the east, the sun, fire and red ochre figure as elements of a vigorous religious movement, apparently focused upon the perpetuation of life after death, and the care and welfare of the deceased."<sup>2</sup>

(The Woodland Culture as described by Ritchie extends from about 1000 B.C. to 1600 A.D. and is characterized by the development of ceramics, agriculture and village life.

Smoking pipes, copper ornaments, fishing nets, basket weaving,

<sup>2</sup>Ritchie, William A., The Archeology of New York State The Natural History Press, Garden City, New York, Revised Edition, 1969, p. 178

trading as far away as the Upper Grand Lakes, mortuary ceremonialism, ornamental pottery, dwellings, boats, cultivation of corn, beans and squash, wooden bowls and spoons, creation of fire at will, evidence of war and the genesis of tribal federations are characteristic of this period.)<sup>2</sup> Ritchie, William A., pp. 179-324.)

Surface artifacts have been collected in North Branford by a number of residents. There are several of these, most of which have been photographed and recorded by the Totoket Historical Society. The age of many specimens reaches back to the Archaic period (4500 B.C. - 1300 B.C.) It is therefore relatively safe to say that our community has been used by the Indians, at least, off and on by all but the very earliest of Indians, the Paleo hunters of big game.

Within historical times "The Qunniapiak Idians were a small somewhat scattered tribe speaking the Algonquin language and found by Europeans in actual possession of this beautiful region which still bears this name. These Indians with their neighbors the Pequots and Mohegans, were probably first mentioned by the Florentine navigator, Verrazano, who, .... examined this coast in 1524. Later mention is made by the Dutch explorer, Adrian Block, who made a chart of Long Island Sound, in the early part of the year 1614, ... "<sup>3</sup>

The initial purchase of Indian lands from the Quinnipiacs, led by Momauguin, was made by Theophilus Eaton and John Davenport and others on November 24, 1638. A few days later on

<sup>3</sup>Townsend, Hervey Charles, The Quinnipiac Indians and Their Reservation, New Haven Historical society Paper, Vol. VI, p. 151.

December 11, 1638, they made a second purchase from "Montowese sonne of an Indian Sachem living in Mattabesek (Middletown). <sup>4</sup> <sup>3</sup>

(Townsend, Hervey Charles •••, p. 169).

This acquisition was "about tenn miles in length from north to south, the bounds of which run alsoe eight miles easterly from ye river of Quinnypiok towards ye river of Quinticutt, and five miles westerly towards Hudson river."<sup>3</sup>  
(Townsend, Hervey Charles ••• , p. 169).

"A powerful inducement mentioned by themselves in the treaty, in which they conveyed them (the land) to the English, was the heavy taxes (Indian taxes were paid in wampum and skins) levied upon them by the Peguods and Mohawks. Another, more forcible still, was their continued dread of these formidable nations who had driven them from their country, and had reduced them to forty fighting men."<sup>4</sup>

Although legal (in terms of the settlers) purchase had been made from the Indians, the close proximity led to strife between the totally different English and Indian cultures.

"On Oct. 28, 1639, the civil affairs of the plantation (of New Haven) being settled, the planters took an early occasion to apprehend criminals, among whom was an Indian named Nepaupuck, who had formerly been accused of murderously shedding the blood of some of the English ••••

"The court having such convincing proof against the prisoner, proceeded to pass sentence upon him according to the fact and the rule of the Mosaic law; 'He that sheds man's blood by man shall his blood be shed.'

"Accordingly the prisoner's head was cut off the next day add it was pitched on a pole in the market place, and exhibited as the skulls of criminals were displayed •••• on the gate towers of London Bridge."<sup>3</sup> (Townsend ••• , p. 173).  
In addition to the conflict of cultures on the local scene,

<sup>4</sup>Branford Annals, Ref 900B, Totoket Historical Society Files, Edward Smith Library, marked p. 22

"Uncas, chief of the Mohegans, claimed title by conquest as far as Guilford, eastern bounds, and Foxon Wigwam at Stoney (Farm) River two miles above the village crossing, perhaps a hunting outpost of this Mohegan chief within the Quinnipiack region, where in the cattle path his people set traps, and in 1644 the Marshall was sent from New Haven to warn Uncas or his brother about it .... The best authorities brand Uncas as a bloodthirsty, drunken wreck, .... , and making every means in his power to prevent the efforts of the English from advancing civilization among the Indians."<sup>3</sup> (Townsend ... , p. 175).

In 1675 "it was also ordered that all small brush & brushwood within half a mile of the town (New Haven) plot should be cut down and cleared away, that it might not afford shelter to the Indians to creep in a skulking manner near the town."<sup>3</sup> (Townsend ... , p. 185).

"The most important occupation of the Indians in time of peace was hunting animals, which was done by means of bows and arrows, spears, clubs, stones and spring poles, with traps, snares and pits for fur animals. The skins obtained found ready sale to traders who annually made secret voyages to Long Island Sound for the purpose of supplying the increasing demand of the markets of Western Europe. The flesh of the animals, fowls and birds captured was also important for their diet, and the skins not sold were useful for clothing and for covering their wigwams, especially during severe winters, during some of which the frost penetrated the ground to a depth of four feet. The wigwams were made capacious enough, if need be, for one or more families; they were constructed of poles, each from ten to fifteen feet long, set in an oblong circle in the ground and drawn together at the top with hickory or grapevine ties, leaving a wicker mouth opening for smoke to escape over the circular stone fire-place in the center, over which was a soapstone cooking pot, a most important acquisition to their kitchen."<sup>3</sup> (Townsend, ... p. 206).

"Their canoes were 20 feet long and 4 feet wide, and were made without the help of iron. The aid of the fourth element (fire) was called in. They applied fire to the trunk of a tree left standing from" 'which the back had been taken the year before; the fire being more easily managed on the upright log, and when roughly hollowed out, the tree was burned down. The natives used in propelling the craft a broad-bladed paddle without a rowlock, as is commonly described in speaking of the Indian mode of rowing.

"The process of hollowing the tree by fire and rubbing the charred wood with a hard stick or stone frequently dipped in water was also applied to shaping the bow and stern; so that in navigating the canoe it might cut the water. De Laet mentions the Seguins, a more northern tribe than the Quinnipiacs, who made boats of the bark of trees sewed together. 'In these boats they descended the rivers. Undoubtedly these were the famous birch bark canoes of the northern Indians.'<sup>3</sup> (Townsend .... p. 20J and 208).

There are numerous references to specific local Indian locations or persons scattered through our histories, documents and literature that supplement the photographic evidence taken from artifact collections. "'Libbies Hill' is just north of the center of North Branford. The name comes from an Indian sachem who once lived near a spring of water which still bears the same title."<sup>5</sup>

"They (Branford) were not afraid of Totoket Indians, but of raiding bands of other tribes, who attacked Indians and whites both. The Mohawks were generally the assailants."<sup>5</sup>  
(Baldwin...p. 253-254).

The Rev. Warham Williams was the first minister of the Second Society of North Branford in 1750. He was "the grandson of Rev. John Williams of Deerfield, Mass., who was captured and carried to Canada by the Indians in 1704."<sup>5</sup> (Baldwin ... , p,316).

(Some place on the top of Totoket is a place called "the Dick lot," formerly occupied by "Dick Negro and Mary Lattomore Indian" who were married in the Northford Congregational Church on February 23, 1774.<sup>6</sup> Certainly, there must have been other remnants of the Induian people in town who were contemporaries of Dick and Mary Lattomore.

"The Quinnipiacs, after a few years contact with the settlers, appear to have made some progress towards civilization and had copied the English mode of cultivating their land (Townsend...p. 175-176).

<sup>5</sup>Baldwin, Rev. Elijah C., Branford Annals, New Haven Historical Society Papers, Vol. IV, p. 304 & 305

<sup>6</sup>Northford Congregational Church Records Vol. 1, p. 93

The population of the Indians in North Branford must have been limited as in East Haven, the center of Quinnipiac life. "...President Stiles tells us that about 1720 there were between Ferry (East Side) and Mr. Woodward's twenty wigwams (old Indian village), while in 1760 there was but one wigwam..."<sup>3</sup> (Townsend..., p. 218). Perhaps the pressure of population may have forced the Indians inland as there were in North Branford and/or Northford "more Indians than whites, till 1745"<sup>7</sup>

<sup>7</sup>Maltby, Rev. Jonathan, A Sketch of the Pilgrims & Some of the Puritan Fathers..., 1844, Totoket Historical Society files, p. 28