



## **King Philips War Statement by Stockbridge-Munsee Mohican Tribe**

*Submitted in participation with the 2014-16 US Department of the Interior National Park Service American Battlefield Protection Program Grant to Town of Montague, MA for:*

*“Battle of Great Falls (Wissatinnewag-Peskeompskut), May 1676” project*

### **Presence in Connecticut River Valley prior to King Philip’s War**

Though many limit Mohican territory as stretching from the Hudson River Valley area to an eastern limit of the Housatonic River, the Mohican tribe views its lands as historically having extended across Western Massachusetts as far as the Connecticut River Valley. This mountainous area drew our tribe as traders and hunters where there was abundant game and fish and rich planting fields.

Several examples exist that demonstrate this Mohican presence Western Massachusetts:

- One example is a 1724 deed where Mohican peoples in the southern Berkshires agreed to allow the colonists to use a “certain tract upon the Housatonic River” while reserving for themselves some lands, including the place called *Skatehook*. In 1762, many of the same Mohicans sent a petition to the Massachusetts Legislature protesting an act which had authorized the formation and public sale of ten new townships in the Berkshires. The petition insisted that the Mohican people were the true owners of the land.
- Another land deed in 1763 concerned the sale of all unsold Mohican land bound east on the Westfield River, i.e. west of Connecticut River.
- Also a later exchange of letters during King Williams War between Gov. Stoughton and Fletcher in 1695-7 is good evidence that River Indians (Mohicans and Schaghticokes) were present and even residing in the Connecticut River Valley, trading, hunting, and going to war. No doubt they were there previously during peacetime as well.
- Just south of Stockbridge, there is documentation of Mohican people who stopped at a large heap of stones, “already ten cart-loads in size.” Tribal members placed additional stones each time they passed, explaining to Sergeant in 1734: “their fathers used to do so, and they do it because it was the custom of their fathers.” This demonstrates that the tribe had traditionally lived in the area long before the later Stockbridge mission settlement (1735-85).

Within this area our tribe regularly encountered and interacted with the primary inhabitants of the Connecticut River Valley, the Pocumtuck, a closely-related Algonquin people. The Pocumtuck, interrelated by a common language and dialect, allied with our tribe during the political tensions with the Mohawk, who also desired access to the mountainous area between the Hudson and Connecticut Rivers.



There is also evidence that the Pocumtuck may have been considered one with the Mohican people, especially by 1675 (during King Philip's War) when Mohicans had made such a declaration that scattered tribes such as along the Housatonic and Hudson River now constituted one Nation.

## **Mohican involvement during King Philip's War**

Our tribe chose to remain neutral during King Philip's War, and as such to our knowledge we did not have a direct involvement in the Battle of Great Falls/ Wissatinnewag-Peskeompskut. Many have speculated that our tribe's choice was due to a geopolitical calculation following an attempt to involve the Mohicans in the War:

In December of 1675, King Philip and more than a thousand of his men traveled to Schaghticoke, New York, a Mohican settlement north of Albany. He settled into winter quarters there as a guest of the Mohicans. He made efforts to recruit Mohicans to join him in taking up arms against the English, and to secure additional supplies. He stayed with our tribe over the winter months. By February, a report was delivered to New York Governor Edmund Andros that Philip had gathered 2,100 warriors at Schaghticoke. Fearing that the Massachusetts war would spread to New York, Andros worked with the Mohawk to attack Philip's army in late February while he was still with the Mohicans. The surprise attack by 300 Mohawk, longtime geopolitical rivals to our tribe, killed about 460 of the approximately 500 men with Philip. Another band of about 400 scattered, and others were captured. Historians have argued that this single event at Schaghticoke was "the blow that lost the war for Philip." He managed to return to New England but any hope of a Mohican alliance was over, and his supply of ammunition and men was greatly diminished.

At least one Mohican had been taken by the Mohawk during this winter 1676 raid. Governor Andros demanded that the one Mohican captive be turned over to him and then set him free. Later, in April of 1677, John Pynchon, as a New England representative, met with the Mohicans at Albany to express gratitude for their neutrality, declaring them "friends and neighbors" to the English.

It seems that especially after the 1675 Schaghticoke raid that our tribe calculated that siding with Philip and the Algonquin alliance would pose too great a risk in our position with the English in New York, and that remaining neutral would ensure the best chance at survival.

## **Aftermath of Battle of Great Falls:**

In May 1676 just after the attack at Peskeompskut, a portion of Connecticut River Valley Algonquin tribes, primarily our kin the Pocumtuck, emigrated from Massachusetts, came to the Province of New York and settled about 18 miles North of the city of Albany at a place named Schaghticoke to seek refuge with the Mohicans. Schaghticoke derives from an Algonquin word "pishgoch-ti-goch" and means "a place where the river forks." Although some bands of Pocumtuck likely managed to remain in the



Connecticut River Valley until the 1800s, most of their remaining tribe moved west and settled among the Mohicans, intermarrying and in effect merging as one tribe.

This settlement in Schaghticoke was done at the invitation of Governor Andros. The invitation can be read as strategic in that the location of Schaghticoke was conveniently located near Albany. He assumed that the Schaghticoke Native peoples would buffer the French-allied tribes from attacking English settlements around Albany. Soon, Mohicans living at Schaghticoke were completely outnumbered by the more than 200 families from Massachusetts that settled there.

Oral traditions relate that Andros held a meeting called a Witenagemot (peace council) with Albany's magistrates, ministers and Native leaders. Sachems from the Kanienkehaka, Mohican and Connecticut River Valley jointly planted an oak tree to serve as a symbolic tree of peace to protect the Schaghticoke Indian Settlement. Mohican settlements and the Schaghticoke were often jointly referred to as "River Indians" and the two became indistinguishable.

While in Schaghticoke, the Native people lived under English protection, but the colonial documents make clear that they governed themselves. When conflicts with Albany residents arose, the Mohican sachems would often intervene on their behalf. For several decades, the peace and steady trade among the Schaghticoke, Kanienkehaka, Mohican and the English allowed everyone living in the area to prosper. Frequent conferences with the English took place at Albany; at those conferences, the Schaghticoke appeared as a separate and independent tribe.

The Connecticut River Valley from then on served as a way-station, where many intertribal and colonial encounters (e.g., attacks, trades, hunting, etc.) took place but no longer was the center of any particular tribal nation. Eventually, further encroachment by Europeans and tensions with Mohawk would lead our tribe to return to Western Massachusetts again out of a calculated decision of our best chances of survival; we chose to accept an experiment of forming an "Indian Town" for our tribe in Stockbridge, Massachusetts (1735-85).

## **Mohican Tribe Today**

The time in Stockbridge, Massachusetts forever changed our tribe. For one, as an amalgamated peoples we no longer only referred to ourselves as Mohican but instead as the "Stockbridge-Munsee Mohican" to better incorporate the new tribal identity. After multiple forced removals westward, our tribe of 1,500 enrolled members now resides in northern Wisconsin on 23,000 acres of land. Through the Historic Preservation Department, we are proud to work to protect Mohican sites and return cultural materials on our traditional territories out East and to participate in educational opportunities such as this.