

# WEEKLY HISTORICAL NOTE

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## *The New York Indians: The Oneida Nation, The Stockbridge-Munsee and The Brothertown Indians*

In 1838 when the Oneida signed a treaty with the United States, the treaty contained the phrase “the New York Indians.” The New York Indians included not only members of the Oneida Nation, but also members of the Stockbridge-Munsee and Brothertown Nations. Recognized and acting as independent nations, they were often lumped together by terms such as the “New York Indians,” yet the Stockbridge-Munsee and the Brothertown Indians have unique histories, culture, and languages that distinguish them from the Oneida Nation.

### **The Stockbridge-Munsee Indians**

In 1609, the famed trader and explorer Henry Hudson, made his first trip up the Mahicannituck River, known today as the Hudson River. The Mahicannituck River bisected the Mohican homelands into eastern and western portions. Dutch colonies followed soon after Hudson’s journey leading to the spread of Christianity, diseases, and European goods through the Mohican villages. The Dutch were also among the first to develop an insatiable appetite for furs, and particularly the beaver pelt. Furs along the Eastern seaboard were quickly depleted, and the

focus and economic power of the Fur Trade shifted from the east coast to deeper inland reaches of the Appalachian Mountains. As a result the Mohicans and the Mohawk contended for control of the furs, which led to the loss of Mohican control of areas west of the Mahicannituck River.

In 1734, a missionary named John Sergeant began to baptize and give English names to Mohicans in the village of Wnahktukuk. In 1738, Sergeant received permission to officially start a mission; a school and a church building quickly followed. Natives from other tribes that converted to Christianity were often sent to live in this village. Many Europeans also moved into the village and it was eventually given the English name of Stockbridge. “The Mohicans,...as well as other Native people who relocated there, became known as the “Stockbridge Indians.”

When the American Revolution began, the Stockbridge Indians sided with the Colonists. Following the war, the Stockbridge warriors returned to their community only to find that they had lost title to much of their land due to “unscrupulous means,” and “that the Stockbridge Mohican people were not welcome in their own Christian village any longer.”

As a result, the Stockbridge called upon the Oneida and asked for a place to live. In the mid 1780s, the Oneida granted the Stockbridge a track of land near Oneida Lake that consisted of “rich farmland and forest.” In 1818 a group of 70 Stockbridge Mohicans left for Indiana where they planned on living with the Miami and Delaware. When they arrived, they found that the Delaware had sold their lands and moved away leaving the Stockbridge band with no where to go. As pressure mounted back in New York State to remove all tribes from within the states borders, the Stockbridge Mohicans decided to move with the Oneida to Wisconsin, which at that time was part of Michigan Territory.

In 1822, negotiations were finalized with the Menominee and Ho-Chunk granting the New York Indians land to live on. The Stockbridge eventually settled near lake Winnebago, where they lived for a few decades before eventually being relocated to land adjacent to the Menominee Reservation.



Figure 1: The mission house the John Sergeant established in Stockbridge, Massachusetts. The house was built around 1740, just two years after Rev. Sergeant received permission to establish a mission to the Stockbridge. Rev. Sergeant managed to convert about 60 percent of the Mohican population in Stockbridge, or 129 people.

In 1830 congress passed the Indian Removal Act and some Stockbridge began to face the idea that they would again be moved, this time to Kansas or Oklahoma. In 1839 a group began their migration but due to hardships, many died and others returned to the reservation in Wisconsin. About this same time is when a group of Munsee Indians joined the Stockbridge and became part of their community. "Known first as the Stockbridge and Munsee, eventually this community was simply called the "Stockbridge-Munsee."

### The Brothertown Indians

The Brothertown Indians have an even more diverse history than the Stockbridge or Oneida. In the 1740's a religious movement called the Great Awakening moved through both colonial and native communities in New England. As a result, some members of the Mohegan, Montauk, Narragansett, Niantic, Pequot and Tunxis nations all converted to Christianity. In an effort to prevent converts from reverting to their traditional lifestyles, these natives were often moved to nearby towns where they lived with other Christian Indians. These towns were Charlestown, RI., Farmington, CT., Groton, CT., Mohegan, CT., Montauk, NY., Niantic, CT., and Stonington, CT. These seven communities became the melting pot that solidified the so called "praying Indians" into a cohesive community.

After decades of pressure from European Settlers, the seven towns began to seek an escape from the influence and damaging effects of alcohol, war and disease. Representatives from the seven communities gathered in 1773 to discuss the option of relocation. On January 20<sup>th</sup>, 1774, Joseph Johnson, a prominent leader of the seven towns, traveled to the Oneida community of Kanawarohare (spelt *Tkana>alóhale* in the Oneida language, it is commonly referred to as Oneida Castle in English). Johnson successfully negotiated a 10 mile tract of land and returned in 1775 with a group of young men to begin building homes and preparing fields.

Timing couldn't have been worse for Johnson and his community. That same year, the first shots of the American Revolution were fired. In 1777 British forces forced Johnson's community to flee and they found refuge with the Stockbridge who were still living in Massachusetts at that time. It wasn't until the close of the war that Samson

Occom lead a group back to the community in the Oneida homelands. On November 7<sup>th</sup>, 1784, Occom named the settlement "Brotherton," giving rise to the Brothertown name.



Figure 2: Samson Occom, or , or Samuel Occom, was born in 1723 at Mohegan, CT. At the early age of 16 he was deeply converted to Christianity and studied under Eleazar Wheelock. He eventually married Mary Fowler of the Montauk Tribe and they had 10 children. He assisted in raising £12,000 for the founding of Wheelock's school, which later became Dartmouth College. He eventually moved to Brothertown, NY where he passed away July 14<sup>th</sup>, 1792.

In the early 1800s, the same pressures from greedy land companies, government officials, and churches that led to the Oneida and Stockbridge migration, also prompted the Brothertown to seek "less coveted lands in Wisconsin." The Brothertown, like the Stockbridge, settled along the shores of Lake Winnebago. In 1839, fearing removal to Kansas, the Brothertown Indians requested and became the first Indians to be granted citizenship to the United States. They also voted for private ownership of reservation land, believing this would prevent the loss of their lands. At the same time the Federal Government ceased to recognize the Brothertown as a separate and independent nation. The Brothertown have since spent 170 years fighting to keep their identity and reclaim Federal Recognition, something they never surrendered.

### Sources:

1. [http://mohican-nsn.gov/Departments/Library-Museum/Mohican\\_History/](http://mohican-nsn.gov/Departments/Library-Museum/Mohican_History/) accessed on September 10<sup>th</sup>, 2009.
2. Andler, Caroline "EYAMQUITTOOWAUCONNUCK," from <http://www.brothertownindians.org/History.htm> accessed on September 10<sup>th</sup>, 2009.
3. Figure 1: Joseph Sergeant Home, from <http://www.wikipedia.org/>, accessed on September 10<sup>th</sup>, 2009
4. Figure 2: Samson (Samuel) Occom Portrait, accessed from <http://www.dartmouth.edu/~library/digital/collections/occom-samson/index.html>. Accessed September 10th, 2009.