



# Stockbridge-Munsee Mohican History in Williamstown



## Anushiik & Oneewe:

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Program



# The Many Trails of the Stockbridge-Munsee Mohicans



Map of Stockbridge-Munsee Community homelands, depicting Mohican areas to the North and Munsee areas to the South

# More Information



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# Place names

Many words still commonly found throughout Williamstown and neighboring places in the homelands reflect Mohican heritage:

**Housatonic** comes from the Mohican word **Wa'thatinik**, meaning **beyond or over the mountain**.

**Pontoosuc** comes from the Mohican word **Pãntokwthik**, meaning **falls over or on a brook**.

**Taconic** comes from the Mohican word **Mtãxnik**, meaning **where there is timber/firewood**.

**Hoosic** comes from the Mohican word **hoothik**, meaning **kettle**.

The founding of today's Williamstown is rooted in the displacement of the Stockbridge-Munsee Community. Williamstown is part of the homelands of the Stockbridge-Munsee Community, one of 574 federally recognized Tribes in the United States. The Tribe is made up of Mohican and Munsee people. Today, as a result of European colonization, the Stockbridge-Munsee Community's reservation is in northeast Wisconsin.

As a federally recognized Tribe, the Stockbridge-Munsee Community (SMC) has its own governmental structure, determines the legislation the Tribe operates under, and defines conditions for membership. Approximately half of the Tribe's 1,600 enrolled members reside on the reservation in Wisconsin. Despite having been forced from their Hudson Valley homelands, the Stockbridge-Munsee Community remains alive, well, and active both here in the Northeast homelands and in Wisconsin.

This booklet serves as an introduction to the history and present-day activity of the Stockbridge-Munsee Community in Williamstown.

# Early History



Archaeological evidence in the Williamstown area, such as this projectile point base from Caretaker Farm, demonstrates Mohican ancestors' local lifeways from 9-8,100 BP. There are seven recorded archaeological sites recorded in town, though there has been no systematic town-wide survey yet.

Today's Williamstown is constituted by Mohican land agreements negotiated in 1758 and in 1763 with Mohican sachems (authorized stewards of the Tribe's lands). They were facing colonial pressures which forced signing for treasured places such as this as they sought to survive as a People. These sachems were:

**Benjamin Kohkewenaunant John Pophnehonnuhwoh, Jacob Cheeksonkun, David Naunaunukannuck, Solomon Uhhaunnuhwaunnuhmut, Robert Nungkauwot, John Naunaumphtaunk, Johannis Mhtoeksin, Mohkouwauweet, Ephraim Waunaunqueen, Isaac Wepuckshuh, Daniel Poochose, Daniel Quans, Ephraim Paumpkhaunhaum, Timothy Yokun, and Naunaumpeh.**

They are direct ancestors of today's Stockbridge-Munsee Community members.



Stockbridge-Munsee's Tribal Historic Preservation Extension Office



# Present Day

Despite facing many hardships, the Stockbridge-Munsee Community remains alive, well, and active in Williamstown and beyond. In the Fall of 2020, the Tribe, in a Tribal-College partnership with Williams College Office of Diversity, Equity and Inclusion, opened the Historic Preservation Extension Office on Spring Street. This office works to protect sites of cultural significance across the homelands, repatriates cultural items, and locates ancestors being held at museums and other institutions in order to rebury them.

## Recent projects in the homelands

1) In November of 2019, the NY Department of Transportation, in collaboration with the Historic Preservation Office, installed engraved murals of Stockbridge-Munsee dancers onto a flyover ramp at the Albany International Airport.

2) In the Summer of 2021, an archaeological dig conducted by Stockbridge-Munsee Community with many area volunteers found evidence of the 1739 Meetinghouse, a site of local governance in Stockbridge. The dig also revealed two sets of early precontact Mohican ancestors' homes.

3) After being in the possession of the Berkshire Museum for 64 years, the wampum bag and moccasins of sachem John Konkapot were successfully returned to the Tribe. The objects now rest in the Arvid E. Miller Library and Museum on the Tribe's reservation in Wisconsin.

# Fort Massachusetts

On State Road in North Adams rests a stone and engraved plaque that commemorate Fort Massachusetts. In 1745, Fort Massachusetts was constructed by the Massachusetts Bay Colony, a puritan settlement. The fort was built in order to stave off Dutch settlers coming from New York to Massachusetts and to defend British colonies from French and Native American soldiers. Shortly after its construction, Fort Massachusetts was destroyed by French and Abenaki soldiers. In 1747, the fort was rebuilt and remained in operation until 1759. The construction and operation of Fort Massachusetts was an attempt to militarize and colonize the homelands of the Mohicans. The site holds significance in Mohican history because of Sachem John Konkapot's service at the fort. When it came time to rebuild the fort, it was Ephraim Williams Jr., founder of Williams College, who was at the helm of the rebuild. Williams Jr. employed a band of Stockbridge Indians to assist him and appointed John Konkapot as their leader.

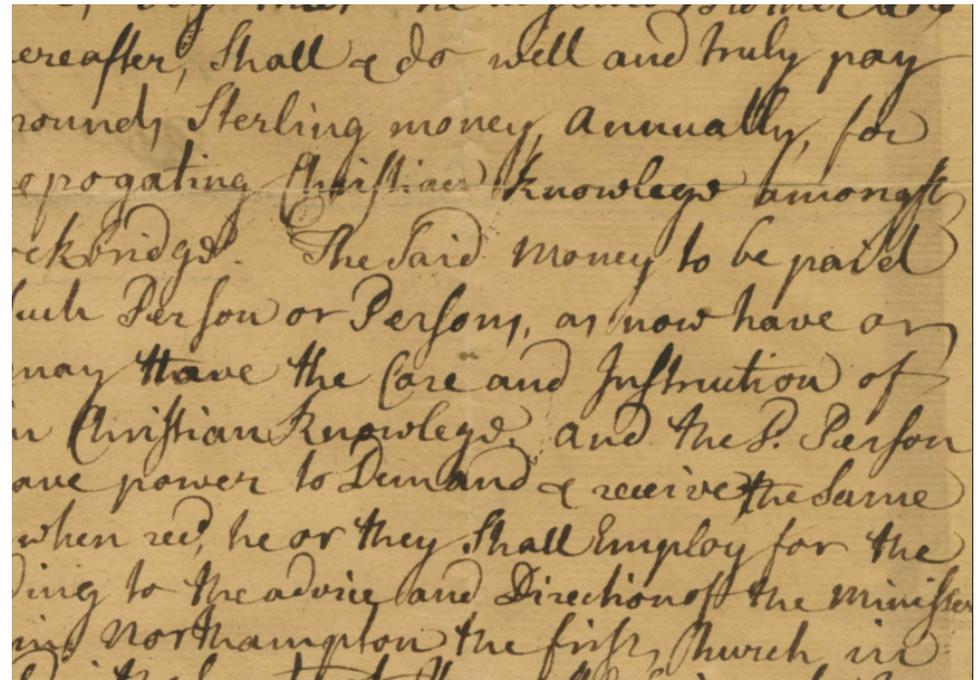


# 1753 House

In 1953, the 1753 House was constructed in the middle of the roundabout at Field Park between Route 2 and Route 7. The house was built as a celebration of Williamstown's Bicentennial. The presence of this house is a colonial imposition that erases Mohican presence and care for this land long before 1753, and memorializes a false narrative of first settlement that begins with European colonists.

On Indigenous Peoples' Day in 2021, local artists installed a fence around the house. The four sides of the fence were marked with Munsee words for Eastern, Southern, Western, and Northern door, respectively. Beneath each of these words was an image of the four family clans of the Stockbridge-Munsee Community, turkey, turtle, bear, and wolf. The fence remained installed for two weeks and served to make a statement about the sole focus on colonial history that the house icon represents and to inspire re-imagination of the space and the representation on the Town flag.

Signs informing the public that Williamstown is on Mohican land have now been permanently installed outside of the 1753 House by the 53 House Committee.



**Ephraim Williams Jr's original will, currently housed at Williams College Sawyer Library's Special Collections**

Ephraim Williams Jr's original will allotted money for the education of Stockbridge-Munsee community members. Once revised, the will eliminated this commitment to Indigenous education, focusing instead on colonial education. The funds of this revised will were used to build Williams College, which did not serve the community in any capacity in its first two centuries of existence. Above is an excerpt of Ephraim Jr's will, a portion of which states, **"Shall & do well and truly pay the sum of three pounds sterling money, annually, for the promoting and propagating Christian knowledge amongst the Indians at Stockbridge. The said money to be paid into the hands of such person or persons, as now have or hereafter shall or may have the care and instruction of the Indians there in Christian knowledge."**

# Williams College

Ephraim Williams Sr., the father of Williams College's founder (Ephraim Williams Jr.) was directly involved in the displacement of the Stockbridge-Munsee Tribe from Williamstown. In 1742, Williams Sr. staked claim over land that had already been in use by the Mohicans. One tactic used by Williams Sr. to obtain land involved selling goods to Mohicans under a credit system. When they were unable to repay this debt, Williams Sr. would sue for land. Additionally, Abigail Williams, daughter of Ephraim Sr., was the wife of John Sergeant, the first missionary to the Mohicans. The legacy of the Williams family, who played such a key role in the displacement of the Mohicans, lingers on at Williams College.

In 1759, Benjamin Kokhkewaunaunt, after finding Israel Williams (Ephraim's cousin) surveying land south of Pittsfield, organized to forbid further survey work in the area. Following the all-colonist 1763 Stockbridge town meeting engineered by Elijah Williams (Ephraim Jr's brother, an enslaver and land speculator) as a land-grab, John Konkapot and 16 other Mohican petitioners wrote a petition opposing the meeting and Williams' position.

The impact of the Williams family remains heavily embedded and valued in the culture and iconography of Williams College, and as a result permeates the town of Williamstown—also named after Ephraim Williams, Jr.—as a whole.



# Towa'kwok (Springs) of Williamstown

Mohicans traditionally regarded the area as significant for the abundance of natural springs

**Sand Springs:** Known in Williamstown as a water company and public pool, Sand Springs is a well-recognized name throughout the town. The water that fills this pool and is distributed for drinking comes from an ancient Mohican spring that has medicinal properties and carries great spiritual significance to the Stockbridge-Munsee Community. In times of sickness, members of the Stockbridge-Munsee Community visited the spring to benefit from its healing properties. Sachem John Konkapot (Pophnehonnuwuh) described regularly visiting the springs here, making this a cherished area of the homelands.

Today, despite the fact that the spring is privatized and inaccessible to the public, Sand Springs Springwater continues to advertise the water as being sourced from a spring that was “treasured by Native Americans centuries ago.”



**Cold Spring:** In 2022, Williamstown Rural Lands worked with the Tribal Historic Preservation Office to create an interpretive panel recognizing the importance of Cold Spring to the Stockbridge-Munsee Community. Previously, signage at Cold Spring only informed viewers of the importance of the spring in relation to Williamstown's former water delivery system.

It is well documented that water and springs, more specifically, have long held extreme importance to the Tribe and are even embedded into the namesake “Mā'eekan” which means “water constantly in motion” as well as “Muh-he-con-ne-ok” meaning “people of the waters that are never still.” It can be inferred that Cold Spring would have been regarded as a community resource to be used and collectively held. The Mohican Blessing Fountain in New Lebanon, NY is a prime example of this relationship to springs. In 1941, the Mohican Blessing Fountain was built to honor and thank the Mohicans who sold a parcel of their land in 1759 under the stipulation that the land's water would forever be free and accessible to all.