

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

JOE TWO TREES, BRENT MICHAEL DAVIDS

INTRODUCTION

A brief look into the historical background of Joe Two Trees, as described by Theodore L. Kazimiroff in *The Last Algonquin*, culturally places Joe within the Algonquin language umbrella, but more specifically within the Eastern Algonkian language family, which is very different from the Iroquois language or Objibwe (Chippewa, Anishanabe) families (which are also under the Algonkian umbrella). There are 3 main Algonquin language families: the Anishanabe-related dialects (west), the Iroquois-related dialects (mid), and the Delaware-related dialects (east).

Joe's language was closer to Mohican, Delaware, Montauk, Wampanoag, Natick, Lenape, Nanticoke, Wappinger, Munsee, Minsi, Abenaki and all the other Eastern Algonquin (Algonkian) dialects.



Joe's culture should not be confused with the Iroquois or the Anishanabe people. This is an important distinction for the story, as Theodore suggests that Joe might have found "his own" people had he searched farther north (p. 102). At the time Joe considered going farther north, his own people would have been long gone from NY (since 1839), some moving briefly into OH and IN, but most permanently into WI (where they still reside, mixed with other tribes, today). Although, if Joe had gone farther north and encountered the Oneida, he might have learned what had become of his people and where to go find them further West.

BACKGROUND

Dr. Kazimiroff describes Joe Two Trees' tribe as "Weckquaesgek" a variation spelling of the band of Wappinger Indians known as the Wecquaesgeek (the Wappinger band is identified by Edward Ruttenber and cited by Carl Masthay). "Wecquaesgeek" literally translates as 'end of the marsh' or 'end of the swamp' (*Wiequaskeck* 'end [of] marsh/swamp'). Therefore, Joe Two Trees was a Wappinger, and part of the larger Mohican (Mahican) Confederacy along the Hudson River.

The Wecquaesgeek Indians (Wechquaesgeek, Wiechquaeskeck, Wickquaskeek) lived on the east side of Hudson River between the Bronx and Tarrytown. The Wecquaesgeek villages included: Alipkconk, Nappeckamak, Nipinichsen, Rechouwakie, Rechtauck (Rechgawawank, Reckawawana), Wecquaesgeek, Wysquaqua, Ridgefield (CT), Saeckkill, and Sapohanikan. The Wappinger lived on the east side of the Hudson River between the Bronx and Rhinebeck extending east to the crest of the Taconic Mountains on the border between New York and Connecticut. Except for a few small groups, most Wappinger had left the lower Hudson Valley by 1760 and settled in western Massachusetts with the Mohican at Stockbridge. The Mohicans lived in a confederacy along the Hudson River (a river known as the "Muhhekonnetuk" by the Mohicans).



In 1600 the seven Wappinger tribes probably numbered about 8,000 in 30 villages. After contact, the rate of their "melting away" was dramatic. Smallpox struck the area 1633-35 and 1692. By 1700 epidemics (including malaria) had reduced the lower Hudson tribes to 10 per cent of their original number. Warfare also took a serious toll, and at least 1,600 Wappinger were killed during the Wappinger War (1643-45). Only a few hundred Wappinger remained in the lower Hudson Valley after 1700, and almost all were gone by 1758.

East of the Hudson, the Wappinger "sold" more than 100,000 acres between 1683 and 1685. While a few families stubbornly clung to their river homeland, most began to move north to the Mohican villages along the Housatonic River in western Massachusetts or settled with the 1,000 New England Algonquin refugees who had settled at Schaghticoke (the old Mohican capitol) after the King Phillip's War (1675-76).



The "melting away" of the Wappinger population on the lower Hudson is a perfect example of what happened to most of the eastern tribes when confronted with the "advance of civilization." Alcohol contributed to social disintegration and greased the wheels of a series of suspicious land sales to whites which usually left the Wappinger with little beyond the clothes on their backs. Epidemic accelerated the process by killing off both the old and young (smallpox in the Hudson Valley during 1636, 1656, and 1692 followed by malaria after 1700) leading to a lack of experienced leadership and a loss of any hope for the future. Warfare also contributed to the decline. Fully two-thirds of the Wappinger and Mohican warriors who volunteered never returned and gave their lives defending the interests of the colonists who were taking their land.

As Wappinger lands and numbers dwindled, small groups of extended families left the Hudson Valley and moved elsewhere. Many went north and settled at Schaghticoke on the upper Hudson or in the Mohican villages near Stockbridge, Massachusetts. Others moved to northern New Jersey and were absorbed by the Unami and Munsee Delaware. By the 1730s, only a few hundred remained in the lower Hudson Valley. The Moravians in 1740 established a mission at Shekomeko (Pine Plains, New York) for the Wappinger and Mohican still living along the river.

In 1755, the Munsee and Wappinger families living along the Hudson were ordered to leave the backcountry and move closer to white settlements for their own "protection." In 1756, a group of white vigilantes led by William Slaughter (appropriate name) killed nine peaceful Munsee, prompting 300 remaining Munsee and Wappinger to flee north among the Mohawk and Oneida; others settled near the Moravian missions for the Mohican and Delaware in Pennsylvania, and with the Mohican at Stockbridge. None would ever return to their homeland.

During the summer of 1757, frontier settlements in Orange and Dutchess Counties, New York and northern New Jersey were attacked by Munsee warriors still angry about being cheated out of their lands near Minisink. The following year, New York responded by confiscating all of the remaining native lands in the Hudson Valley. Whites immediately moved into the abandoned lands. By 1760 there were 300 Mohican, Munsee, and Wappinger living with the Oneida in upstate New York. They served with distinction as scouts for Sir William Johnson and the British for the remainder of the war.



After violence and riots in reaction to the Pontiac Rebellion (1763), the Moravian closed their missions in PA. The Wappinger families living nearby joined the general migration west to Ohio where they were perhaps absorbed by the Delaware. Many of those with the Mohawk settled at Chenango and were adopted by the Nanticoke, also refugees from English settlement. The Nanticoke supported the Mohawk and British during the American Revolution and in 1783 were forced to relocate to southern Ontario. Some of their descendants can still be found there among the Delaware of the Thames and Munsee-Delaware First Nations. The last major group of Wappinger settled in western MA with the Mohican at Stockbridge.

Both the Wappinger and Mohican were still angry about their lands in Dutchess and Putnam counties which had been confiscated by New York in 1758. However, when they tried to forcibly expel the white squatters, troops were brought in to prevent bloodshed. Daniel Nimham, the last great Wappinger sachem, traveled to England to plead his people's case. After receiving a favorable hearing, he returned to America in 1762 and filed suit in the New York courts to reclaim land taken without compensation.

The idea of Native Americans demanding justice in an English court stunned the colonists of New York, but they recovered with numerous motions intended to delay a decision. The proceedings were finally interrupted by the start of the American Revolution. As the war started, the Mohican and Wappinger, now virtually the same tribe, joined the Iroquois as neutrals. However, after attending a meeting in Boston in April, 1774, Captain Hendrick Aupamut of the Stockbridge agreed to support the Americans. Ninham's Wappinger followed suit. Few white American families can match the patriotic credentials of the Wappinger and Mohican from Stockbridge. They fought at Bunker Hill (1774), White Plains (1776), Saratoga (1777), and Barren Hill (1778).



Daniel Nimham was killed at the battle of Kingsbridge (near Yonkers NY) in August, 1778. The Stockbridge and Wappinger lost over 40 warriors in this battle. In all, half of the Mohican and Wappinger men of military age were killed fighting for the American cause in the Revolutionary War. The new nation's gratitude for their sacrifice was to not allow them to become citizens after the war. By 1786 the last groups of the Stockbridge (and Wappinger) had been forced to leave Massachusetts and resettle with the Oneida in upstate New York. For similar reasons, the Brotherton Indians from Connecticut and Long Island joined them at Oneida during the next few years. During the years which followed, the Oneida, Brotherton, and Stockbridge slowly lost their lands to speculators and the State of New York. In 1839 they relocated to a reservation established for the Oneida near Green Bay, Wisconsin. In 1856 a separate reservation was created for the Stockbridge Mohicans, along with the remaining Wappinger, Brotherton and Munsee, on lands purchased from the Menominee by the United States.

SUMMARY



It seems that Joe Two Trees' people, the Wappinger, moved north in the mid-to-late 1700s and followed the other eastern Algonquin speakers into WI by 1839 (the time of Joe Two Trees' birth was 1840). This brief historical research backs up Dr. Kazimiroff's story, and supports the fact that Joe's father searched in vain to find any other Indians in his original homeland at that time in history; they had all left the area around the time of Joe's birth. It also would seem, literally, that Brent Michael Davids (Mohican) shares a direct tribal and historical lineage with the people of Joe Two Trees (Wappinger). Brent Michael Davids is a citizen of the Stockbridge-Munsee band of the Mohicans, located on the same reservation created for the Mohicans in WI by the federal government in 1856. The Stockbridge-Munsee Indians are the last surviving band of the Mohicans, and the entire band is Turtle Clan.

Ruttenbur, Edward, M. (1971). *History of the Indian Tribes of the Hudson River*. Kennikat Press.
Masthay, Carl. (1992). *Schmick's Mohican Dictionary*. American Philosophical Society.