

# The Original People – The Leni Lenape

by Paul Mullin, Westtown Township Historical Commissioner

One spring several years ago, Westtown resident Bill Miller of Swinburne Road was tilling his soil in preparation for planting his tomato garden when he noticed a small, gray, flat stone. The ‘stone’ turned out to be an arrowhead made of chert, a tough form of quartz that can be broken to form sharp edges. He wondered how it got there and what was the origin of this small projectile.

Long before William Penn established Pennsylvania, the area that is now Westtown Township was part of Lenapehoking (lənape haki-nk), meaning ‘in the land of the Leni Lenape’ (le-nē-le-nah-pē), “the common or original people.”

Archaeological studies suggest that Pennsylvania has been occupied by Native Americans for approximately 12,000 to 18,000 years. The period that they likely first populated our state is known as the Paleo period. The ice age glaciers in Northern Pennsylvania were melting, and the land south of the glaciers would have been dotted by small patches of forest and open grasslands, populated by giant bison, musk oxen, and even mastodons, mammoths, and caribou. Many mastodon and mammoth bones have been found in Pennsylvania (Valley Forge National Park is one site), but so far none have shown evidence of butchering by humans. A gorget stone (the Lenape Stone) was found in a Bucks County field in 1872 showing some carvings, one of which appears to be Native Americans hunting a mammoth. To date, the authenticity of the carving has not been established.

At the time of European contact, the Lenape descendants of the Paleo people had progressed over thousands of years from being hunter-gatherers to mainly an agricultural group who depended on their crops of corn, squash, and beans (the three sisters). The Lenape would travel seasonally to established camps away from their villages to hunt or fish. During the time of contact with Europeans, the Lenape generally inhabited the lands from western Connecticut, southeastern New York, all of New Jersey, northern Delaware, and in Pennsylvania generally east of the Susquehanna River. The Lenape tribe is also known

as the Delaware, a name given to them by English explorers. The Lenape in our area spoke the Unami dialect of the Algonquian language. Another band of Algonquian speaking Lenape in northern Pennsylvania spoke the Munsee dialect.

The Lenape lived in bands of 20 to 30 people near the rivers and creeks in the area such as the Brandywine and Schuylkill rivers, Ridley, Crum, Cobbs, Darby, and Chester creeks and their tributaries. Married men lived with the band to which their wife belonged. The children were considered members of their mother’s band (matrilineal descent). The Lenape lived in small “huts” called wigwams. William Penn described the Lenape wigwams as follows; “...their houses are Mats, or Bark of Trees set on Poles, in the fashion of an English Barn, but out of the power of the winds, for they are hardly higher than a Man...” By the time of William Penn’s arrival in 1682, the Lenape in our area were already used to seeing Europeans due to prior settlements by the Dutch, Finns, and Swedes. After Penn arrived, he and his family purchased large areas of land from the Lenape. In 1737, one treaty, the infamous Walking Purchase, resulted in the Penn family acquiring approximately 1,200,000 acres from the Lenape. This treaty with the Lenape supposedly promised to sell land that started at what today is Easton, Pennsylvania as far west as a man could walk in a day and a half. When the heirs of Penn decided to enforce this treaty, they hired three men to take turns running along a prepared path which resulted in claiming 30 miles more than the Lenape had predicted that a man could walk in a day and a half. Lenape chief Lappawinsoe and others contested the results of this “walking” purchase. The settling of these lands and others by Europeans eventually led the Lenape to move west; first to western Pennsylvania and then to Ohio, Canada, and Oklahoma where many live today.

## Indian Hannah

Indian Hannah (Feeman) is locally known as the last of the Lenape in Chester County, although it is probable that other Lenape integrated with the non-native population. Hannah was known throughout the area for wandering the countryside selling her handmade brooms and baskets. In her later years, several Quaker

families took turns caring for Hannah until she was sent to the Chester County poorhouse in Newlin Township, where she died and is buried.

### Local Native American Place Names

Conshohocken: "pleasant valley"; Manayunk: "place to drink" (I didn't make this up!); Neshaminy: "double stream"; Nockamixon: "where there are three houses"; Passyunk: "in the valley"; Perkiomen: "where the cranberries grow"; Pocopson: "roaring waters"; Skippack: "wet land"; Susquehanna: "mile wide, foot deep"; Tacony: "wilderness"; Wawa: "wild goose"; and Wissahickon: "catfish stream."

### Camps, Villages, Reservations, and Burial Grounds

Historical records, archaeology, and local lore indicate there were many Lenape villages and camps in our general area. A documented Lenape village, Queonemysing (place of the long fish), was situated along the "big bend" of the Brandywine near the Pennsylvania-Delaware border. Arrowheads and sharpened stones were found on the old Orvis property in Westtown (Arborview) many years ago. Author C.A. Weslager in his book, *Red Men on the Brandywine*, states that archaeological evidence supports the existence of villages or camps at Chadds Ford, Brinton's Bridge, Pocopson, Lenape Park, Wawaset, Norhtbrook, Embreeville, Coatesville, Glenmoore, and Honeybrook. Local legend indicates the first settler of West Whiteland Township, Richard Thomas, settled in what is now Exton, along West Valley Creek, where there was a Lenape village or camp. Folklore states he decided to settle there because the barking of the dogs in the village would keep the wild animals away. The village was called Katamoonchink, meaning "hazelnut grove." It is thought to have been near Main Street at Exton and the intersection of routes 30 and 100. In 1701, William Penn established a 500-acre reservation for the Okehocking band of Lenape who had lived along Crum and Ridley Creeks. Today 115 acres of that land is maintained as the Okehocking Preserve on West Chester Pike in Willistown Township.

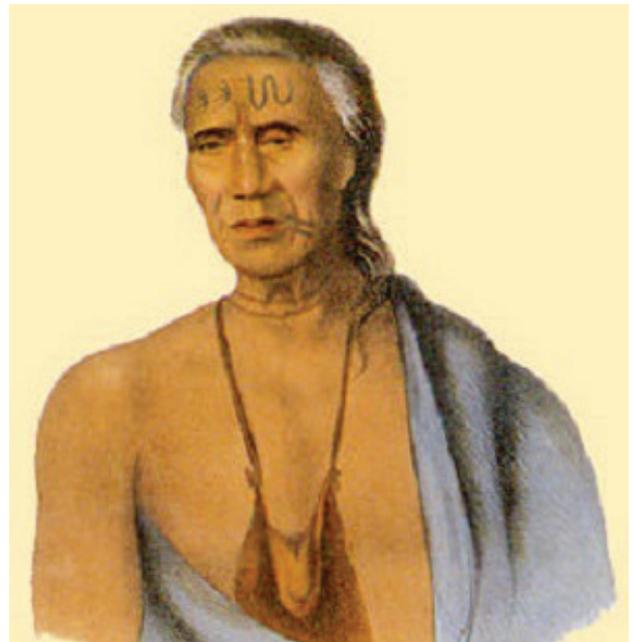
There are documented Lenape burial grounds at Northbrook and Glenmoore, both of which have been

determined to be 'post contact' as archaeologists have found glass beads, rusty iron nails, gun flints, and copper rings in the graves.

### Trails

The Great Minquas path was mainly a fur trading route used by the Minqua or Sussquehannock people. The trail led from the Susquehanna River near Conestoga to the Schuylkill River near Philadelphia. After crossing through West Chester, the trail passed through Westtown, and eventually on to Philadelphia. Parts of Gradyville Road in Edgemont Township and Middletown Road (Route 352) were also thought to have originally been Indian trails. Conestoga Road (Route 401), Ship Road, Swedesford Road, and Whitford Road are also thought to have been Indian trails.

Although many Lenape moved west, many currently live in Pennsylvania, New Jersey, and Delaware. Every year in Woodstown, New Jersey, a POW-WOW is held by the Nanticoke-Lenape nation, and is open to the public. The Nanticoke-Lenape nation also has Spring and Fall tribal gatherings in south Jersey, which are not open to the public.



*Portrait of Lappawinsoe, one of the Lenape chiefs who signed the "Walking Purchase" Treaty of 1737.*