



NORTH GREENBUSH NOTES

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THE MOHICANS IN GREENBUSH

When I think of the Mohicans who inhabited our area when the Dutch arrived in the 1600's, I envision massive cornfields. Crops of maize stretching from Troy through North Greenbush and on past Rensselaer County's southern boarder. Miles and miles of land were cultivated by the Mohicans for centuries before the Europeans came. This all changed starting in 1609 when Henry Hudson sailed up "his" river.

During the next few years, Dutch fur traders began making contact with local Indians and promptly found themselves in the middle of a series of wars between the Mohawks and the Mohicans. In 1626, the Mohican leader Monemin was killed in battle and the Mohawks became the chief trading partner of the Dutch. More importantly, the Mohican defeat set the stage for land sales to the Dutch.

Unlike the English and Spanish governments, the Dutch did actually pay for the land they obtained. The problem was that the Mohicans had a different view of what a land sale meant. They continued to hunt and fish on the land and would reoccupy any farmstead that became vacant.

By studying recorded land transactions, we can determine approximately where some of this property was located. In 1651 the Dutch purchased the Wynantskill, a creek south of the farm of Thomas Chambers, with the surrounding wood, and the adjoining land extending to an Indian castle (fortified village). This tract included present South Troy and some of North Greenbush. Another transaction in 1678 was a farm in today's North Greenbush described as "behind Jan Ooms, five English miles from the river." Jan Ooms path is today's Washington Avenue and five English miles would place it just south of the intersection of Routes 43 and 4.

Seventeenth century maps place other Indian settlements in Rensselaer and somewhere along Red Mill Creek in East Greenbush. Monemin (the Mohican chief mentioned earlier) had a "castle" identified as near Cohoes and later somewhere in the North Greenbush/Rensselaer area. Cartography was an inexact science in those days.

My favorite geographic place name is "Dickop's Huis." Dickop was a Dutch nickname given to an otherwise obscure Mohican. It translates roughly into "thickhead" or dummy. Before you assume the Dutch were culturally insensitive, you should know that they used similar impolite nicknames for each other. Dickop's minute of fame came during the Mohawk/Mohican wars, when the Mohawks were raiding Dutch farms. The story goes that Dickop ran all the way to New York City to tell the officials that the Mohawks were killing the livestock. You marathoners may scoff at the story, but it did earn Dickop and his house a notation on a 1632 Dutch map. It's impossible to tell, but I suspect Dickop's Huis was somewhere on or near the RPI Technology Park.

The end of the Mohican story is sad but predictable. Disease, losses from war and sale of their lands forced them from this area. The Mohicans went to Stockbridge Massachusetts and then on to

Wisconsin where today they have a 16,000 acre reservation. One would hope that their oral tradition still recalls those miles and miles of corn fields in Greenbush.

My thanks to Shirley Dunn of East Greenbush whose two books on the Mohicans was my primary source for this article. There is much more information on this fascinating subject-check these books out at your library.