

In the Ground and in the Documents: Reconstructing Native American Communities

Presentation by Lucianne Lavin

in the symposium

"Beyond the Margins of Memory: Using the Documentary Record to Recover Native History," Annual Omohundro Conference in Halifax, Nova Scotia

June 12-15, 2014

Introduction

For centuries treasure hunters collected cultural items from New England farm fields, often imagining a fanciful and highly erroneous Native American past. In contrast, modern archaeologists seek to recover a more accurate version of the past by applying scientific method and accessing multi-disciplinary resources. These include scientific instruments such as surveyors' transits, ground penetrating radar, scanning electron microscopes, and radiocarbon dating facilities -- and the documentary record.

Native American societies traditionally were based on oral histories. They had no form of writing akin to alphabetical script.¹ This situation continued into the period of European contact. However, indigenous peoples did not live in isolation – at least not in southern New England. In order to continue their communities they had to interact regularly with whites on both economic and social levels. These relationships produced a slew of documents. Unfortunately, because

¹ Although it could be argued that indigenous rock art and symbols on woodsplint baskets and other items are a form of writing. They are most certainly forms of communication.

they were written and curated by whites, the documents are scattered in various repositories throughout the United States. Some colonial documents are located in Canada and Europe. Additionally, metadata assignments and finding aids do not always include Native American

content. But these documents are well worth the time and effort put forth in their retrieval.



Figure 1. Locations of western CT tribes & Moravian missions (From Crone-Morange and Lavin 2004: Figure 1; map produced by Donna Hearn).²

In this presentation I hope to prove to you just how important the documentary record is in the recovery of indigenous histories. Specifically, I focus on the

role that a wide range of documentary evidence played in interpreting archaeological finds on the Schaghticoke Indian reservation.

The Schaghticoke Tribe

The Schaghticoke have been recognized as an American Indian tribe by the colony and state of Connecticut since the beginning of the 18th century, when English entrepreneurs and settlers became interested in the mining rights and lands of their upland Homelands in northwestern Connecticut.³ “Ye Scattacook Indians” are mentioned as early as February 2, 1699 by Robert Treat of Milford, Connecticut in a letter to Connecticut’s Governor John Winthrop.⁴ The name

² Paulette Crone-Morange and Lucianne Lavin 2004. “The Schaghticoke Tribe and English Law: A Study of Community Survival”. *Connecticut History* 43(2):132-162.

³ See, for example, the early 18th century land deeds signed by the Schaghticoke sachem and other tribal members listed in the *Connecticut Archives 1666-1820* [Indian Series 2:43-45] and reprinted in Franz L. Wojciechowski’s 1985 dissertation *The Paugussett Tribes*, the Catholic University of Nijmegen, Department of Cultural and Social Anthropology, The Netherlands, pp. 141-145; and the 1739 map of Kent showing the original proprietors’ distribution and the Schaghticoke reservation bounds.

⁴ *Connecticut Historical Society Collections* 1921(24):65. A resident of southwestern Connecticut, Treat also mentioned two other tribes whose homelands were located in western Connecticut south of Schaghticoke– the Weantinock and the Pootatuck. Those references indicate that he was speaking of the Schaghticoke of northwestern

“Schaghticoke” derives from the English colonists’ mispronunciation of the beautiful eastern Algonquian word “Pishgatikuk”. It was the name of a major village located in the northernmost portion of the Weantinock tribal homelands, to which many members removed after they lost their lands to the south and east.

Pishgatikuk means “at the meeting of two waters”.⁵ It referred to the fact that the village was located near the confluence of the Housatonic River and the Schaghticoke River (which is now called Macedonia Brook).⁶ The present Schaghticoke reservation is located near the Town of

Kent, adjacent to the New York state border. The original reservation was over 2000 acres.

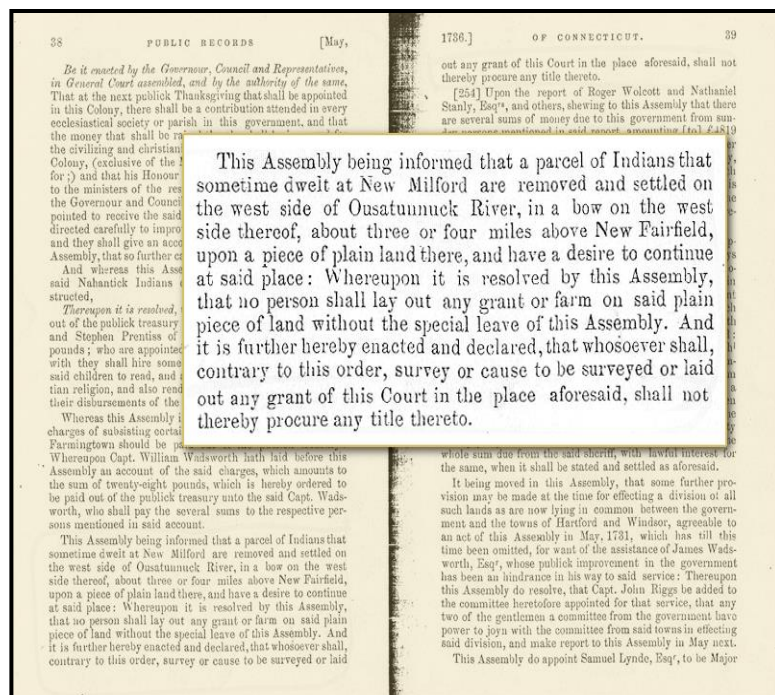


Figure 2. In 1736 the Connecticut General Assembly created the Schaghticoke Reservation at the request of tribal leaders.

Through the years white overseers appointed by Connecticut illegally

sold off tribal lands so that today only ca. 400 acres of the original reserve remains – mostly rugged, mountainous landscape with a narrow floodplain⁷. The Housatonic River forms its

Connecticut, and not the indigenous communities of similar name in the Hoosic Valley of eastern New York and in western Massachusetts.

⁵ William C. Reichel 1860:75. *A memorial of the dedication of monuments erected by the Moravian Historical Society, to mark the sites of ancient missionary stations in New York and Connecticut*, C.B. Richardson, New York, quoting tribal elder Eunice Mauwee, the granddaughter of the Schaghticoke’s first recorded sachem, Gideon Mauwee.

⁶ Barzillai Slosson 1812. *History of Kent*, manuscript on file at the Connecticut Historical Society in Hartford.

⁷ Much of the land was sold after the 1790 Indian Trade and Intercourse Act was passed by the United States Congress, which mandated that no one could buy or sell Indian lands without the consent of Congress. There is no evidence that Connecticut received that consent for the sale of Schaghticoke reservation lands.

eastern boundary, and the New York-Connecticut state line is its western boundary. The reservation was officially founded in 1736, when Schaghticoke leaders petitioned the Connecticut General Assembly to reserve some of their Homelands because white colonists were relentlessly encroaching upon them.

Archaeological Excavations

I directed two archaeological surveys of the reservation lands.⁸ One survey focused on the uplands environments around 1200 feet above sea level, while the second survey focused on the terrace above the Housatonic River floodplain. Limited intensive excavations were also conducted on historic home sites to learn more about site integrity (i.e., extent of soil disturbance) and 19th century Schaghticoke economy and technology. At the time, the Schaghticoke were pursuing their federal recognition, and tribal leadership hoped to reveal more of their history through an archaeological investigation.

Twelve archaeological sites and the remains of 13 historic charcoal hearths were located. Both artifacts and cultural features were recovered during these surveys. Over 14,000 artifacts and 1,600 faunal remains were recovered. They included pre-European contact and post-contact⁹ stone tools and stone flakes from tool manufacture, and fragments of post-contact items such as Euro-American ceramics; bottle glass; furniture parts; architectural materials such as window glass, nails, and shingles; items of apparel such as buttons, buckles, a suspender clasp, and beads; gun parts; and recreational items such as kaolin pipe fragments and children's toys. The artifacts dated from as early as 4000 years ago and as late as the 20th century. They demonstrate that Schaghticoke lands have a deep history of human occupation, even on the most marginal of their Homelands, which is today's reservation.

⁸ Lucianne Lavin, S. Douglas Dumas & Cynthia Kania 2001. "Pishgaticuk Archaeology Project: Phase I Archaeological Survey of Lowland Sections of the Schaghticoke Reservation in Kent, Connecticut". Unpublished draft report prepared for the Schaghticoke Tribal Nation, Kent, CT; Lucianne Lavin and S. Douglas Dumas 1998. "Phase I Archaeological Survey of a Portion of the Uplands Region of the Schaghticoke Reservation in Kent, Connecticut"; unpublished manuscript prepared for the Connecticut Historical Commission, Hartford.

⁹ Almost every indigenous person I know dislikes the term "prehistoric", as it implies there was no history in Native North America until Europeans arrived, which is not true, of course, since Native American peoples were passing down their histories via oral traditions for thousands of years prior to European contact. Consequently, I use the term "pre-contact" to refer to the time before European intervention and "post-contact" for the document-driven "historical" period since then.

The great majority of artifacts dated to the historic period, and show continuous occupation from the beginning of the early 19th century into the mid-20th century. Documents from the Moravian Church, the Public Records of Connecticut, and overseer reports tell us why this is so. The Moravian Church, also known as the Unity of Brethren, is a Protestant sect that originated in 1457 in what is now the Czech Republic.¹⁰ Its American center is in Bethlehem, Pennsylvania; the town was founded by the Moravians in 1741. From Bethlehem, missionaries travelled to various localities in the Northeast to establish congregations among the Native Americans.

The Church had a mission at Schaghticoke from 1743 until 1770. Missionary writings indicate that the tribe's 18th century summer village and burying grounds were located in the northern part of the reservation.¹¹ It is an area of high ground relatively free from river flooding with large fertile flatlands conducive to agriculture. Petitions to the General Assembly, land deeds, and overseer reports show that in 1803 that land was sold off by the tribe's overseer, despite the protests of tribal leadership. Tribal members were forced to remove to the present area of the reservation, where six cabins were built for them.

Our archaeological surveys also located cultural features. Cultural features are non-portable artifacts, such as firepits, privies, and stone foundations. In the uplands survey they included numerous charcoal circles, evidence of a possible collier's hut, and the stone foundations of a farmstead in the northwest corner of the reservation. Documentary evidence in the form of overseer reports, a newspaper account, and informant interviews indicate that tribal overseers sold off tribal resources, such as cordwood and wood charcoal, and allowed non-Indian companies to run charcoal kilns on reservation property.¹² Federal censuses show that some of these companies employed Schaghticoke as colliers, and it is likely that the upland charcoal circles are the remains of the kilns they tended.

¹⁰ <http://www.moravian.org/the-moravian-church/the-moravian-church/history.html>.

¹¹ Corinna Dally-Starna and William A. Starna (trans. and ed.) 2009. *Gideon's People*. University of Nebraska Press, Lincoln.

¹² Lavin and Dumas 1998:11; *New Milford Gazette* 1910, "Encircling Scatacook Lands", dated May 6, 1910; Lawson and Autobee 1997. Historical Report Supplementing the Petition of the Schaghticoke Tribal Nation of Kent, Connecticut for Federal Acknowledgment, unpublished report to the Schaghticoke Tribal Nation, pp. 66, 80, citing the Connecticut Archives, Indian series 2, vol. 2, pp74-75, 88, and overseer Austin St. John's report to the Litchfield Superior Court in 1867; Schaghticoke Reservation resident Russell Kilson, personal communication 1998; Robert Chase, long-time Kent resident, personal communication to the author.

The upland farmstead was minimally tested due to the extremely wet conditions of the locality. The two 50 cm excavation units contained fragments of creamware and pearlware that suggested a late 18th/early 19th century occupation date. Both the Moravian documents and overseer reports noted that several Schaghticoke families lived on top of Schaghticoke Mountain during the 18th and 19th centuries.¹³

Our excavations along the Housatonic River uncovered both pre-contact and post-contact hearth features, the stone foundations of four structures – three reservation houses and a stone-lined privy, and historic sheet middens.¹⁴ Artifacts recovered from one sheet midden contained evidence for cottage industries including gunsmithing, tinsmithing, and possibly, bone/ivory working, button and jewelry manufacture. The evidence for Schaghticoke cottage industries on the Reservation supports tribal autonomy and suggests tribal resistance to acculturation and detribalization. It shows that the Schaghticoke were attempting to produce within the Tribe objects that previously had to be purchased from whites.

With the help of historic maps, government records and overseers' accounts, the three house remains we uncovered could be assigned to specific 19th century Schaghticoke families. The 1874 Beers Atlas shows the locations of these houses on the Schaghticoke Reservation and the names of their heads of household: Value Kilson, Abigail Harris, and George Cogswell.

Value Kilson was a respected leader of the Schaghticoke tribe. Schaghticoke overseer Fred Lane described him as “a good Christian gentleman”. Federal censuses listed Value as a collier by trade. Abigail Harris was a great, great granddaughter of the first recorded Schaghticoke sachem Mauwehue, who was Christianized Gideon Mauwee. Abigail was a noted basketmaker and the wife of Henry Harris. Both Henry and Abigail are mentioned in local histories and Kent folklore. Henry Harris was described as an extraordinarily talented Native American basketmaker, tinsmith and gunsmith.

“Henry Harris, nicknamed ‘Tinner Pan’, was an expert on fixing old tin pans, in fact, he was a great tin smith and gun smith, and a skillful basket Maker.”¹⁵

¹³ Michael L. Lawson and Robert Autabee, 1997. Schaghticoke resident George Cogswell was cited in *The New Milford Times* 1910 article as pointing out old tribal homesteads atop the mountain to a reporter.

¹⁴ Lavin *et al.* 2000.

¹⁵ Schaghticoke overseer Fred Lane 1927:2. Unpublished manuscript entitled “The History of the Schaghticoke

One of Henry's possessions was an ancient musket. One of the sheet middens near the Harris house foundation contained numerous gun parts including a flintlock hammer with its gunflint still in place. It belonged to a French Charleville long barrel musket, the chief French firearm during the American Revolution. After the war, the Charleville was the major American firearm until the 1840s. Its presence along with other gun parts suggests that our excavations had uncovered the location of Henry Harris's workshop. Henry and Abigail's son, James Harris, was a Protestant minister and postal worker. In newspaper accounts, he was described as a "good Indian" and a "pious Christian".

Interviews with tribal members identified the later occupants of the houses. The Kilson house was last occupied by Value Kilson's grandson Robert Kilson until his death in 1961, when the overseer demolished the house. The Harris house was occupied by the Earl Kilson family in the early 1900s, until the house was deemed uninhabitable and ordered pulled down by the tribe's overseer by mid-century. The George Cogswell house was occupied by George until his death in 1923, when it was occupied by his son Frank. Both were chiefs of the tribe during the early and mid-1900s. After Frank's death in 1954 the house was occupied by tribal member Katherine Struever and her family, until the overseer removed the family from the reservation and the house was demolished in 1956. Overseer and other government records show that the state of Connecticut wanted to turn the Indian Reservations into state parks. Razing Indian houses after the death or departure of its occupants was one way of facilitating that goal.¹⁶

The project area included two standing structures that are the present residences of Schaghticoke tribal members. Both are historic structures that are likely two of those six cabins built in the first decade of the 19th century. They too are shown on the 1874 Beers map, occupied by Nancy Kilson and Lavinia Carter. Nancy Kilson was a Mauwee and the widow of Joseph Kilson. Kilson family members occupied the house until the mid-20th century, when the William Russell family moved in.

Tribe of Indians", dated May 20, 1927.

¹⁶ Connecticut State Park and Forest Commission *Report*, 1926:42; Fred Lane, ND, "The Schaghticoke Trail", unpublished manuscript on file at the Schaghticoke Tribal Office, Derby, CT; Lucianne Lavin 2013:356, *Connecticut's Indigenous Peoples: What Archaeology, History and Oral Traditions teach us about their Communities and Cultures*, Yale University Press, New Haven.

Lavinia Carter was a great, great granddaughter of Schaghticoke sachem Gideon Mauwee. She was a noted basket maker.¹⁷ According to overseer Fred Lane, she had beautiful gardens and made the best root beer. Some tribal members thought she had supernatural powers. These pieces of information suggest that she may have been an herbalist and medicine woman. After her death in the 1880s the James Harris family occupied her house, followed by the Earl Kilson family in the 1930s.

Although the 19th century reservation community appears very small, the Schaghticoke tribe was not. An informal census by anthropologist Frank Speck in 1903 listed 16 tribal members living on the reservation and an additional 109 living off-reservation.¹⁸ This was because most of the younger tribal members with families had been forced to do so by the overseers' land sales, which left the tribe with marginal rocky infertile lands that were economically useless.

Tribal interviews, federal censuses, and newspaper articles show that most members left to find work in the factories and foundries of cities and mill towns along the coast and lower Housatonic Valley. But they returned regularly to visit kin and participate in social and political activities. By the late 19th century the Schaghticoke reservation was no longer the tribe's residential center but rather its spiritual and political center. It continues to be so to this day.

Tribal leadership continued to make decisions on behalf of the tribe's membership. This is demonstrated by tribal petitions to the Connecticut government, which are listed in the state's public records. Around the turn of the century, the Connecticut Light and Power Company planned to build a large dam across the Housatonic just south of the Schaghticoke Reservation at Bull's Bridge. They planned to condemn reservation land, including the tribe's second cemetery. The tribe went to court with their overseer. They were convincing enough so that the judge visited the reservation and decided in their favor. He told the electrical company that the burial grounds were to be preserved and enclosed by a fence, and tribal members were to be allowed to

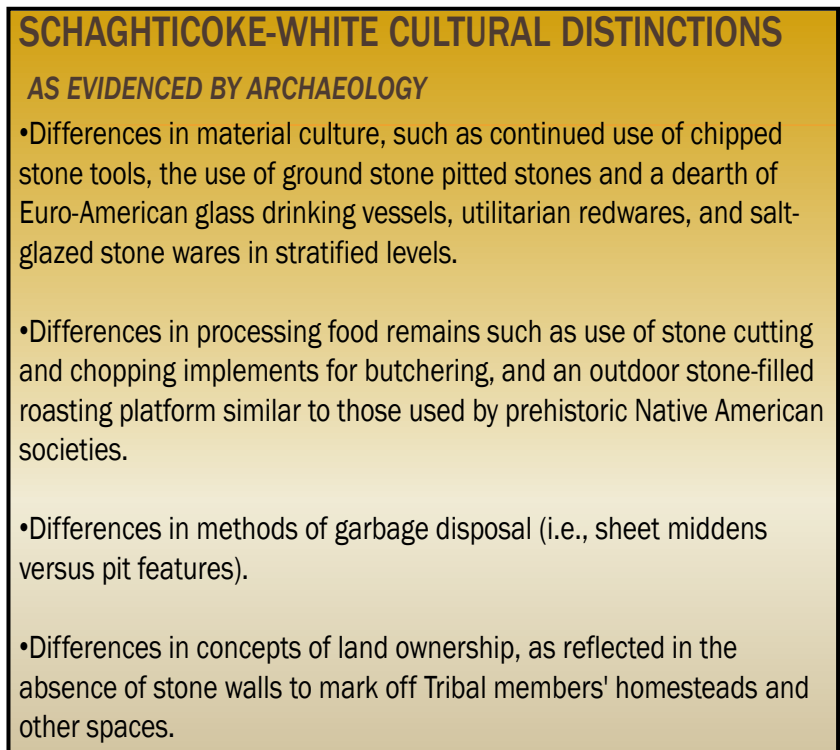
¹⁷ Frank Speck 1947, pp. 8-9.

¹⁸ Frank G. Speck 1903. Notes on Scaticook Indians, August 15, 1903; 1928. Native Tribes and Dialects of Connecticut Extract from 43rd *Annual Report of the Bureau of American Ethnology*, Washington DC, United States Government Printing office, pp 346-352; J. Dyneley Prince and Frank G. Speck 1903. Dying American Speech-Echoes from Connecticut. *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society*, pp. 346-352 – as cited by Lawson and Autabee 1997:89. See also Edward O. Dyer 1903, pg. 213. *Gnadensee: The Lake of Grace: A Moravian Picture in a Connecticut Frame*. The Pilgrim Press, Boston, for a similar census in the same year; Dyer lists 15 reservation residents and 100 off-reservation tribal members.

enter at will. The electrical company agreed, but when the dam was completed its waters flooded the cemetery, which is under the Housatonic River today.¹⁹

Summary

This short presentation made use of a large number of documents from a wide range of sources including public records of the Connecticut General Assembly, court records, land transactions, federal censuses, missionary diaries and baptismal records, local histories and other publications, historic maps and photographs, old letters, newspaper accounts, informant interviews, a doctoral dissertation, and unpublished manuscripts. Many had been collected for the Schaghticoke tribe by various researchers as part of the tribe's federal recognition efforts. The collection took several years and much money, as the documents were scattered at various repositories over an extensive geographic region. The efforts to obtain them were well-warranted, as they



SCHAGHTICOKE-WHITE CULTURAL DISTINCTIONS
AS EVIDENCED BY ARCHAEOLOGY

- Differences in material culture, such as continued use of chipped stone tools, the use of ground stone pitted stones and a dearth of Euro-American glass drinking vessels, utilitarian redwares, and salt-glazed stone wares in stratified levels.
- Differences in processing food remains such as use of stone cutting and chopping implements for butchering, and an outdoor stone-filled roasting platform similar to those used by prehistoric Native American societies.
- Differences in methods of garbage disposal (i.e., sheet middens versus pit features).
- Differences in concepts of land ownership, as reflected in the absence of stone walls to mark off Tribal members' homesteads and other spaces.

Figure 3. Schaghticoke--White Cultural Distinctions based on archaeological research.

The archaeology provided information on 19th century Schaghticoke shelter, diet, clothing, health, recreation, and children's activities. It also revealed some distinctive cultural differences between

the Schaghticoke and their white neighbors, as listed in Figure 3.²⁰ The documents provided

¹⁹ CT, State of, Litchfield County Supreme Court 1903, esp. “*The New Milford Power Co. vs. Martin B. Lane et al., Stipulation as to Amendment*”, pg. 1, dated September 1, 1903; *Martin Lane Judgment, Litchfield Court of Common Pleas*, pg.392, dated February 8, 1904; Anonymous 1934. “Last of Shaghticokes Lead quiet Lives among Ancestral Relics at Kent”, news clipping from an unidentified paper dated November, 1934, on file at the STN office; Lucianne Lavin 2013:356, *op cit*.

narratives of real people rather than vague “groups”. The artifacts and the behaviors they represented could be ascribed to individual tribal members with names and, in many cases, faces.

Most importantly, the documents describe social and political behaviors that could never be retrieved from the archaeological record. Their integration with the archaeological information produced a broader and more comprehensive picture of 19th and early 20th century reservation life than we could ever achieve through archaeology alone.

²⁰ This listing was excerpted from Lavin *et al.* 2001, page 15.