

The Schaghticoke Nation and the Moravian Movement: Tribal Revitalization without Assimilation

by

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Paper presented at the 1999 Annual Meeting of the American Society of Ethnohistory at the Mashantucket Pequot Museum and Research Center, Ledyard, CT October 20-23.

This paper explores the socio-cultural response of the Schaghticoke Indians of Northwestern Connecticut to European contact. The aboriginal territory of the Schaghticoke Tribe encompassed portions of the Housatonic watershed, including the northeastern edge of the Appalachian Highlands, known locally as East Mountain, Preston Mountain, and the Schaghticoke Mountains. The present Reservation bounds still include part of this mountain range. Specifically, the paper's focus is the effect of eighteenth century Moravian missionizing efforts on tribal solidarity.

For those who do not know me, I am an anthropological archaeologist and a consultant for the Schaghticoke Tribe. My firm conducts archaeological, and community and archival studies for the Tribe.

The Schaghticoke Tribe has embarked upon an extensive long-term historical and anthropological study of their tribal roots. This inquiry includes a community study, archaeological surveys of the present reservation, and documentary research. The documentary investigation targeted Colonial and State records of memorials, land transactions, and other legal documents; store ledgers; diaries; overseer reports; federal censuses; writings of contemporary historians and anthropologists; newspaper articles; and the Moravian archives in Bethlehem, Pennsylvania. The

Tribe began collecting transcriptions and translations of the Moravian materials as early as the mid-1980s to help document their Tribal history (Rabkin, pers. comm.). These sources provide a surprisingly clear picture of eighteenth and early nineteenth century Schaghticoke society. The picture generates several theories of cultural dynamics, some of which are testable through ongoing archaeological excavations on the Reservation.

The present Reservation encompasses about 440 acres of woodland in Kent, Connecticut. Kent is located in the Northeastern Highland section of the state at the eastern edge of the Appalachian chain. Most of the reservation is mountain, with a small, narrow strip of floodplain along the west bank of the Housatonic. The Appalachian Trail passes through the ridge area of the Reservation, which also includes one of the few known rattlesnake dens in the state. DeForest described the reservation lands in 1851: "The Scatacooks have yet a considerable tract of land on the mountain; too rough and woody indeed to be cultivated, but well-adapted for supplying them with firewood. At the foot of the mountain along and between that and the Housatonic they possess a narrow strip of plain, sufficient in size for gardens, watered by springs from the upper ground, and containing a few comfortable houses (DeForest 1851:120)."

Such steep, rocky, wild country is typical of Appalachia. Is it the reason why the Schaghticoke have been able to remain on their aboriginal Tribal lands while other New England tribes have not? Was Schaghticoke with its mountains, rocks and snakes and dearth of good agricultural lands a barrier to white colonization? The Schaghticoke Tribe has maintained this land since at least the beginning of the 18th century.

Archaeological Investigations at Schaghticoke

As noted above, the Schaghticoke Tribe had recently initiated a long-term study of the cultural resources on its present Reservation. Initial investigations by my firm included two systematic Phase I archaeological surveys of portions of the uplands and riverine sections of the Reservation. Limited intensive excavations were also conducted on certain sites encountered in the surveys, in an effort to discover additional information concerning their integrity and extent (Lavin and Dumas 1998; Lavin, Dumas and Kania 1998).

Two hundred and four 50-cm test units were excavated along transects within the riverine and lower slope area, while 86 test units were excavated along the upper ridges. Both surveys were directed by the author as principal investigator. A total of 73.5 square meters has been excavated to date, and at least 13 sites and 11 cultural have been identified. The sites date from the Late Archaic period circa 4,000 years ago up to the 20th century. The cultural complexes represent a series of charcoal hearths and other charcoaling activities. The majority of artifacts dated to the nineteenth and early 20th centuries. All of the datable features discovered during the Phase I excavations date to the historic period as well. The features, which included three dry-laid stone cellar holes, and the thousands of recovered artifacts are the remains of the nineteenth and early 20th century Indian village that was founded by Tribal members who were displaced from the 18th century village when the Tribal overseer sold off a northern portion of the reservation in 1801 (Public Records of Connecticut 1965:250-251). They suggest a fairly sedentary settlement pattern for Reservation residents during those time periods. The few diagnostic Archaic and Woodland materials recovered from the project areas suggest short term hunting and foraging encampments. In sum, these finds support the hypothesis that members of the historic Schaghticoke Tribe appear to have been clustered

within a marginally productive reserve economically unattractive to earlier prehistoric Native Americans for year round settlement. This "fringe area" seemingly sheltered its native inhabitants from white encroachment.

The Eighteenth-Century Schaghticoke

A brief introduction to the Schaghticoke Tribe is in order. Seventeenth and early eighteenth century records document three spatially separate (but not necessarily socially discrete) Schaghticoke social entities: (1) The Scaticook group located above Albany at the confluence of the Hudson and Hoosic Rivers (Dunn 1994:150-162); (2) The Skatecook group located in the Sheffield region of southwestern Massachusetts (Hopkins 1911:15); and (3) The Schaghticoke group centered about the confluence of the Housatonic and Schaghticoke Rivers in northwestern Connecticut. The first two Scaticook groups encompassed Mahikan villages. The Hoosic Mahikans were later joined by New England Indians, participants in King Philip's War who were fleeing the English (Ruttenber 1872:166, 188). The Sheffield Skatecook were Mahikans led by the sachem Aaron Umpachenee. They eventually sold their lands and became part of the Stockbridge Christian Indians (Hopkins 1911:14-17). Umpachenee later became the grand sachem of the Mahikan nation.

The term "Schaghticoke" is an anglicized version of the Algonquian word "Pishgatikuk," which means "at the confluence of two streams" (Eunice Mauwee, Schaghticoke elder, quoted by Reichel 1860:75). All three of the Schaghticoke identities were located at the junction of two flowing bodies of water, hence, their nomenclature. Whether the relationship ends there requires further investigation. Tantalizing bits of evidence suggest that it may not. For example, Umpachenee, the leader of the Sheffield Skatecook, was the cousin of Gideon, the first recorded

sachem of the Connecticut Schaghticoke (Moravian Archives, Box 114, F.4). This paper focuses exclusively on the Schaghticoke of Connecticut.

Because of its mountainous topography, only five families presently live on the reservation. The majority of the Schaghticoke Tribe live off-reservation, within a 60-mile radius. The five houses, tribal cemetery, campgrounds and tribal office are concentrated in the floodplain. Originally, tribal lands were much vaster, extending north to the Mahikan villages situated in the Sharon area and south and west along the Ten Mile (a.k.a. Webatuck) River into New York State.

"Ye Scattacook Indians" are mentioned in 1699/1700 by Robert Treat in a letter to Governor John Winthrop. Since Treat was writing from the coastal town of Milford, Connecticut and discussing lower Housatonic Valley Indian groups, he was apparently referring to the Schaghticoke of Kent and not the more northerly Skatecook in Sheffield or those on the Hoosic (CHS 1921 (24): 165). The Council Journal of Connecticut mentions the presence of "Scatecook Indians" in northwestern Connecticut in 1725 (CJC April 1725 (253): 511-512). The earliest land transaction to specifically mention the Tribe at Kent, however, is a 1741 deed selling 200 acres of land to Colonel John Read. Sachem Mauwehue and three other Indians signed the deed (Orcutt 1882:17). During the early 1740s, Moravian missionaries built a mission at Shekomeko, a Mahikan village located two miles south of present Pine Plains, New York, and 20 miles northwest of Kent. The Schaghticoke sachem Mauwehue visited the mission and in February 1743 he was converted by the Moravians and baptized Gideon. Gideon invited the Moravians to reside at Schaghticoke, and they accepted his offer (Moravian Archives, Box 313, F.6).

Baptismal records and the signatures on early Schaghticoke land transactions and petitions indicate that the group included Mahikans and Pootatucks as well as Gideon's followers. Family

names like Sokenoge and Sucknucks indicate the presence of southeastern New England Indians as well (Moravian Archives Box 114, 115; Orcutt 1882:17; DeForest 1851:413-414; Stiles 1789). The documents suggest that social boundaries were fluid, with historical Native American settlements sheltering individuals of diverse ethnic backgrounds.

The mission was active from 1743 to 1763, when the English forced the Moravians to return to Pennsylvania. Moravian missionaries continued to visit and baptize the Schaghticoke until 1769 (Moravian Archives, Box 3191, F.1). The structure traditionally referred to as the chapel was still intact during the 1970s.

The Moravian Archives contain much documentary evidence concerning the Schaghticoke settlement during this early contact period. The Archives are located in Bethlehem, Pennsylvania, and the Schaghticoke Tribe has authorized the translation and transcription of a number of those pertaining to the Mission at Schaghticoke.

Missionaries' letters and diaries mentioned native individuals by name, and routinely described their spiritual and emotional conditions as well as the everyday economic and social activities of the people (e.g., Moravian Archives, Box 115, F.14). The congregation consisted of 120 to 150 Schaghticoke. They lived in bark wigwams and practiced a mixed economy of hunting, fishing, and maize agriculture. The Moravians introduced them to home garden plots that included beans, cucumbers, and pumpkins. Chickens, pigs and goats were also kept. This agrarian-foraging economy was often supplemented with a cash income earned by hiring out as local farm laborers or manufacturing and peddling woodsplint baskets, brooms and tin items (Moravian Archives Box 114, F.3). This economy was practiced from the Moravian period up to the early 1900s (e.g., Reichel 1860:74; Lossing 1877:457; Todd 1906:214).

Eighteenth century Schaghticoke were semi-sedentary. According to the Moravians, the Reservation at Kent was their winter-spring quarters. Documents mention a summer settlement north of the reservation, which was accessible by canoe up the Housatonic. Tim Binzen's research demonstrates that the adjacent Mahikan groups occupying present Sharon and Salisbury, Connecticut employed a similar settlement system of two semi-annual base camps (Binzen 1997). Robert Grumet has described a similar form of subsistence for eighteenth century Hudson Valley Indians. As with the Schaghticoke, Grumet contends that these groups "eked out a marginal existence" while they inhabited "the mountainous contested borderlands" separating the colonies (Grumet 1992:81).

The Moravian Encounter

The Schaghticoke-Moravian encounter occurred during a crucial period in Indian-white relations in northwestern Connecticut and adjacent areas. Coastal Connecticut and the lower reaches of the State's major river valleys were well known to Dutch and English explorers in the early 17th century. Both had established settlements in Connecticut by 1636. The 17th century settlements were limited to the Connecticut River valley and the coastal regions, however. Lack of good transportation and communications systems as well as fear of Indian attacks kept the northwestern section of Connecticut a "terra incognita" to colonists for another century (Public Records of Connecticut 1633-1665, 1665-1710, 1710-1717, 1717-1725).

Population explosions in the first quarter of the eighteenth century, and the concomitant scarcity of arable land in the coastal areas, created pressures for colonial migration into the interior. Between 1670 and 1700, Connecticut's population had increased by 58%. Between 1700 and 1730 it increased by 280% (Bushman 1967)! Land speculators turned their eyes northward to the frontier

lands of Schaghticoke. Consequently, the town of Kent was founded in 1738 and incorporated in 1739. By 1740 the land rush was on, with farmers and traders intimidating the Indians. The former took the most fertile farmlands, allowed their stock to ruin Indian gardens and forbid the Schaghticoke access to resources on their woodlots. The latter sold liquor and created Indian debt. This scenario of white-Indian relations during English colonization typically led to economic, social and political decline within the native population, often culminating in emigration of tribal members westward, assimilation within the greater white society, or political dependence of indigent native populations on marginally located reserves (e.g., see Rutenber 1872).

But this did not happen at Schaghticoke. Why not? I believe that it is no coincidence that during this crucial 1740 to 1760 period of northwestern expansion and settlement, the village of Schaghticoke was a Moravian mission village. I believe that the Moravian movement was a potent force in tribal revitalization. Schaghticoke participation in the Moravian form of Christianity helped maintain their psychological sense of community and self-identity. It also enhanced the physical community through economic and social improvements.

The Moravian movement was an evangelical one. It emphasized emotions, individual participation and group interactions rather than passive scriptural study led by one's minister. In this it was similar to traditional native religions, and so it would have had initial appeal to Native Americans. Moreover, the Moravians encouraged Indian participation.

Moravian services at Schaghticoke included daily prayer meetings, hymn-singing and regular communal religious suppers called "love feasts". The Indians were not simply vocal participants. They were allowed leadership positions within the church. The brethren had a number of Indian assistants. They acted as interpreters, assisted in the services, and often led the hymn singing.

Gideon Mauwehue and other Schaghticoke were allowed to preach at the services. The Moravian missionaries worked to evoke a family type environment. Indians and Moravians called each other 'brother' and 'sister'. When visiting away from Schaghticoke, they sent messages to each other in letters or via couriers, often in the form of prayers for one another's welfare (Moravian Archives Box 114, 115; Frazier 1992:60). Schaghticoke participation in the Moravian prayer meetings created a spiritual bond among its members, integrating the various ethnic groups into a single Christian community.

Additionally, the Moravians frowned upon divorce and polygamy. They actively counseled natives with marital problems. The drinking of alcoholic beverages was banned, and so the socially disintegrating effects of alcoholism such as violence, indebtedness, and health problems, were mitigated. The Moravians were also pacifists who counseled nonviolence. Such missionizing efforts contributed to harmonious social relations within the Tribe.

The Moravians saw God as a loving and sympathetic being, interested in human affairs; He was quite different than the cold, punishing God of the Puritans. Indians and Moravians alike were viewed as his children. This notion of the Schaghticoke as the children of God surely must have increased their sense of self-respect, and strengthened them to face their present political and economic crises. Indeed, the Moravians taught that to do so would bring them the ultimate reward -- eternal happiness in Heaven with God, the loving father.

The Moravians encouraged the sharing of religious thoughts, experiences, and anxieties about faith. These revolved about daily events, and so the Schaghticoke were able to discuss their problems and worries, to verbalize their psychological burdens, and thereby abate them. Group therapy is a powerful psychiatric tool today. Psychoanalysts have noted that the sharing of emotions

and deeply personal experiences bonds people and enhances group identity. Such experiences would have strengthened the Schaghticoke Tribe both spiritually and physically.

Most importantly, the Moravians were not assimilative. They did not require that the Schaghticoke accept European culture. In fact, they supported a positive image of Indian culture by actively participating in it. Firstly, unlike their Congregational contemporaries, the Moravian ministers lived among the Indians. Prior to the building of the chapel and brethren's house at Schaghticoke, Brother Martin Mack lived with Gideon Mauwee in his wigwam. Later, as at the missions at Shekomeko and Wechquadrach, the missionaries lived in simple houses among the Indian wigwams (Moravian Archives, Box 111, F.1; Box 112, F.7).

They often dressed as the Indians did, and one, Brother Post, married an Indian woman. The brothers preached in Native languages or used translators (Moravian Archives Box 114, F.4, Box 115, F.8). Hymns were sung in the Native tongues. The Schaghticoke hymnal included 26 hymns in Mahikan and three in an unknown New England dialect (Masthay 1980).

Even conversion to Moravian Christianity was not so much an act of assimilation into white society, as Indian conversion has often been perceived. Rather, the Moravian mechanisms of religious communication were quite similar to those of Native American traditions. Charismatic leadership and the importance of personal experiences formed the core of communication. The emphasis was on oral exchange rather than scriptural reading. A good part of the service was taken up with parishioners' religious soliloquies, reflections on revelations such as dreams, and singing. Because it followed traditional Native means of communication and because it was useful in strengthening group solidarity, the Schaghticoke added Moravian religious doctrine to their culture. Rather than replacing Native religious ideas, it appears to have existed side by side, with the

missionaries' blessing. For example, one brother's diary noted that an evening prayer meeting had to be cancelled because the sachem and his men were planning a group hunt and so they were ritually ensconced in the sweat lodge (Moravian Archives, Box 114, F.1; see also Box 115, F.5).

Apparently, the Schaghticoke were worshipping the Moravian God as a high god but still adhering to the requirements of the Native nature religion in certain aspects of their social life. In this case, ritual cleansing of participants prior to the hunt took precedence over Moravian church service. The situation tests the assumptions of the anthropological concept of acculturation. In the case of Schaghticoke conversion to Moravian Christianity, the Indians do not appear to have become assimilated into European ways. Moravian and Native rituals appear to have thrived side by side as separate but not conflicting entities. Probably because in the minds of the natives they performed different functions, achieved different goals. Native rituals were for the here and now, while Moravian worship was for happiness in the hereafter. Ritual cleansing in the sweat lodge resulted in deer meat to sustain your immediate physical needs. Singing hymns to Jesus led to the heavenly happiness that could no longer be found on earth.

The early eighteenth century Schaghticoke were feeling the deleterious effects of English colonization that their Native counterparts on the coast had felt a hundred years earlier. They included land encroachment, loss of fishing rights, disappearance of game and other food sources, alcoholism, contagious diseases, harassment, and ensuing poverty and political dependence. The Native belief system that had traditionally sustained the Schaghticoke socio-political system was unable to prevent these problems. The Moravian Church provided a viable alternative. The Church provided positions of responsibility and respect for Native Americans in the form of assistants and interpreters. With respect came authority and power. Also, the Church's emphasis on a joyous

afterlife helped Natives endure the anxieties and burdens of their present life. In fact, the Moravians preached that the Natives' suffering, like that of Jesus, would earn them a place in his Heaven.

The fear and anxiety the mission engendered among the local colonists show that the Moravian movement was a potent force in tribal revitalization. Schaghticoke abstention from alcohol was so great that local traders and merchants were hurt economically. Relatively few tribal lands were sold during this period, and there is nothing in the records to indicate large scale medical problems on the reservation, as is documented for the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries (Connecticut Archives -Towns and Lands, Indians, Series I and II; Public Records of the State of Connecticut 1778-1803; Beach 1801-1852).

Disbandment of the Mission

Unfortunately, the Moravian presence occurred amid the French and Indian War. Connecticut colonists lived in fear of French-instigated Indian attacks, especially along their frontiers. In the mid-1700s, Kent was the frontier. Unscrupulous traders, angered because the Schaghticoke would no longer buy liquor from them, spread rumors that the Moravians were traitors, papists and spies for the French. The Moravians were eventually forced to leave Connecticut and return to their headquarters in Bethlehem. No longer under the protection of the missionaries, the Schaghticoke were politically and emotionally powerless against colonial pressures. The familiar cycle of land losses, indigence, alcoholism, and other health problems normally encountered in white-Indian contact situation quickly ensued (Loskiel 1838:161-162; Connecticut Archives-Indians Series I, 2:201,206-208,220-221; Connecticut Archives-Indians Series II, 2:49-50;). In 1794, the Moravian historian George H. Loskiel described the Schaghticoke post-mission conditions as follows:

"One piece of land after the other was taken from them, by which they lost the means of their support. Thus they were obliged to run into debt, and to live dispersed among the white people, to earn a livelihood. If they could not pay, they were treated with the greatest severity, and even their poor furniture taken from them. This behavior exasperated the unbaptized Indians to such a degree, that they abused the baptized on account of their sobriety and better management of their outward concerns, attacking them on the highway, and in other places, and cruelly beating them. This occasioned some of the baptized to waver, and to become low and dispirited. Some young people were even seduced to sin, and brought into misery. A certain melancholy pervaded the congregation, and the missionary himself began to lose courage (Loskiel 1794 (pt2): 200)."

However, the Schaghticoke remained Christians through the centuries. A small stone structure which oral tradition claims is the Moravian chapel is still extant, a monument to the enduring spiritual strength of the community.

Summary and Conclusions

In summary, the primary documentary sources, especially the Moravian Archives, are rich in information about the eighteenth century Schaghticoke community. They have suggested several theories of cultural dynamics for that period that are testable through archaeological investigations on the present and past reservation lands. These major hypotheses are summarized below.

Hypothesis #(1). Contact caused fairly sedentary demographic clustering in highland "fringe" areas minimally utilized by prehistoric groups. Previous archaeological surveys by Kevin McBride and others in the eastern highlands of Connecticut, and by Ken Feder in the central uplands indicated

only temporary use of uplands environments by late prehistoric Woodland groups (Feder 1981; McBride 1984; McBride et al. 1980). This hypothesis is archaeologically testable through the presence or absence of diagnostic Archaic and Woodland materials, the functional diversity of their associated artifacts, duration of site occupation, and the subsequent interpretation of Woodland settlement patterns in comparison with Contact period sites. Two archaeological surveys of portions of the present Reservation unearthed only small numbers of prehistoric artifacts with no associated features. They suggest that prehistorically the present Reservation was the location of special procurement activities by individuals and work parties emanating from base settlements situated elsewhere. In contrast, the large amounts and variety of artifacts and features associated with the historic Schaghticoke Tribe indicate very different land use patterns than prehistoric Native Americans. The intensive, sedentary historic occupation depicted by the Reservation archaeology is mirrored by Grumet's (1992) study of New York Native Americans.

Hypothesis #(2). Social boundaries were fluid, sheltering natives of various group affiliations. The early eighteenth century documents indicate the presence of Pootatuck, Mahikan and southeastern New England Indians at Schaghticoke. Later secondary sources suggest members of other groups, such as the Tunxis and Paugusset. Stylistic analysis of archaeological materials such as pottery from pre-nineteenth century sites may be able to throw some light on group affiliation and the possible social heterogeneity of the settlement. Spatial analysis of such materials may shed light on ethnic residence and/or settlement patterns on the reservation. (The nineteenth century Schaghticoke members no longer produced their own pots. Euro-American ceramics were the only types recovered from the nineteenth century village sites.)

Hypothesis #(3). The Moravian movement was a potent force in Schaghticoke revitalization

without assimilation. Karin Tiro's (1995) study of the Pequot William Apess suggests that Methodism, another evangelical religion, may also have promoted Native solidarity and self-identity through similar channels. In his discussion of the Brotherton (Edgepillock) group of Christianized Munsee in southern New Jersey, Kammler referenced similarities between the evangelical Presbyterian theology and religious communication of Rev. David Brainerd, and those of traditional Delaware religion (Kammler 1996:36). These works suggest the broader hypothesis that eighteenth and early nineteenth century evangelical movements in general may have helped sustain Native societies rather than eradicate them. Additionally, the informal and emotionally-charged church meetings would have been ideal places for Native Americans to form relationships with individuals of other racial and ethnic backgrounds who shared their similar religious beliefs and lower social class. For example, some of the Afro-American-Indian marriages listed in censuses and other government documents probably evolved from such meetings.

In an attempt to assess the degree of Schaghticoke acculturation, the present archaeological research design focuses on early historic Schaghticoke sites and compares their contents with those of contemporary white sites. As noted above, recent archaeological investigations have unearthed portions of the early nineteenth century Schaghticoke village. The retrieved data demonstrate distinct economic and technological differences between Tribal members and contemporaneous white society, evidencing continued Schaghticoke community. For example, 19th century Schaghticoke continued to implement their metal tools with traditional stone tool technology. They continued to use open-air stone roasting platforms so familiar in late Archaic and Woodland period prehistoric sites.

The structure and contents of Moravian period Schaghticoke sites hopefully will be

discovered and compared with those of Schaghticoke sites post-dating the Moravian presence. Such a study might provide distinctions in population size, economic viability, and cultural change between Moravian and post-Moravian Schaghticoke communities. Kevin McBride's (1990) ongoing study of the Mashentucket Pequots of Ledyard, Connecticut has continually demonstrated the successes of a similar research model.

Acknowledgments

I am most indebted to Chief Richard Velky, Tribal Administrator Paulette Crone-Morange, and members of the Schaghticoke Tribal Nation for kindly sharing with me their knowledge of Tribal heritage and traditions, and allowing me the opportunity to study the Tribe's history and prehistory. They and Paula Rabkin graciously provided access to original and transcribed copies of the Moravian documents cited in the text. It is with gratitude and pleasure that I acknowledge their indispensable assistance.

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