



NATIVE AMERICANS OF PUTNAM COUNTY

By Eugene J. Boesch

Exerpt Regarding

Daniel Nimham and the Wappingers

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Native American European Contact Period

The documentary history of the Putnam County vicinity begins with the information recorded by early traders and settlers concerning the Native American groups who occupied the area when Europeans first arrived in the early seventeenth century. This era is generally referred to as the Contact period (AD 1600 c. 1750), the time of the first large scale interactions between Native Americans and European colonists.

By the latter part of the Late Woodland period Native American cultures began to resemble those of groups that were encountered by seventeenth century Europeans. At this time Native Americans of the lower Hudson Valley region were part of the widespread Algonquian cultural and linguistic stock. Specifically, they were a group of Munsee speakers who migrated into southeastern New York and southwestern Connecticut during Late Woodland times (Goddard 1978a, 1978b; Salwen 1978; Solomon 1982). Their descendants were known collectively as the Wappinger. This group included the Putnam County Native Americans encountered by European settlers (Cook 1976:7374). The Wappinger also occupied much of present day Westchester, Dutchess, the Bronx, and New York Counties and southwestern Connecticut.

The Putnam Westchester County area was reportedly known to the Wappinger as "Laaphawachking" (Bolton 1848; Beauchamp 1907). The name reportedly translates as the "place of stringing" (Lederer 1978:79) which apparently refers to Native American wampum manufacturing that occurred in the area (Lederer 1978:79).

Northern Carmel was reportedly known by local Native Americans during the Contact Period as "Pechgachgoch" (Pelletreau 1886). No translation of this term is recorded. The area to the south, around the Croton River in the vicinity of the Carmel Somers border, was reportedly referred to by seventeenth century Native Americans as "Appamaghpogh" which reportedly has been corrupted into the present term "Amawalk." According to Lederer (1978:10), this aboriginal term roughly translates as "where the cattails used for covering lodges grew." This term probably referred to the wetlands formerly present in the valley bottoms and floodplains of the various branches of the Croton River.

The origin of the name Wappinger is unclear. Pelletreau (1886) states that the name translates roughly as "east of the river" although Salomon (1982:85) feels that it may be derived from the Algonquian word "wapinkw" or "woapink" meaning opossum.

In political terms the Wappinger were divided into seven (Bolton 1975:4) or nine (Ruttenber 1872) main groups or chieftaincies and numerous subgroups and bands. These were the Siwanoy, Kitchawanc, Wechquaesgeek, Rechgawawank, SintSink, Nochpeem, Wappinger, Tankiteke, and Uncowa. To the Dutch and English, the majority of the groups were known collectively as the River Indians. Regionally, the Wappinger Confederacy was loosely allied with the Mahikan Confederacy found to the north (Bolton 1975:4).

The total population of the Wappinger Confederacy has been estimated at about 13,200 individuals at the beginning of European contact (Cook 1976:74). Their settlements included camps along the major rivers with

larger villages located at the river mouths (MacCracken 1956:266). Despite references to villages and other site types by early European explorers and settlers, few Contact period sites have been identified in southeastern New York (Funk 1976).

Robert Juet, an officer on the "Half Moon", provides an account in his journal of some of the lower Hudson Valley Native Americans. In his entries for September 4th and 5th, 1609, he states:

"This day the people of the country came aboard of us, seeming very glad of our comming, and brought greene tobacco, and gave us of it for knives and beads. They goe in deere skins loose, well dressed. They have yellow copper. They desire cloathes, and are very civill. They have great store of maize or Indian wheate whereof they make good bread. The country is full of great and tall oakes.

This day [September 5, 1609] many of the people came aboard, some in mantles of feathers, and some in skinnes of divers sorts of good fures. Some women also came to us with hempo. They had red copper tabacco pipes and other things of copper they did wear about their neckes. At night they went on land againe, so wee rode very quite, but durst not trust them" (Juet 1959:28).

David Pieterz De Vries (Murphy 1853:154155) recorded another description of the Wappinger who resided around Fort Amsterdam:

"The Indians about here are tolerably stout, have black hair with a long, lock which they let hang on one side of the head. Their hair is shorn on the top of the head like a cock'scomb. Their clothing is a coat of beaver skins over the body, with the fur inside in winter and outside in summer; they have, also, sometimes a bear's hide, or a coat of the skins of wild cats, or hefspanen [probably raccoon], which is an animal most as hairy as a wild cat, and is also very good to eat. They also wear coats of turkey feathers, which they know how to put together. Their pride is to paint their faces strangely with red or black lead, so that they look like fiends. Some of the women are very well featured, having long countenances. Their hair hangs loose from their head; they are very foul and dirty; they sometimes paint their faces, and draw a black ring around their eyes."

The Wappinger group traditionally associated with Putnam County were the Nochpeem (Ruttenber 1872:80; Hodge 1910:II:79; Cook 1976:71), also referred to as the Canopus (Salomon 1982:80). Unfortunately, little information concerning them is recorded.

The name "Nochpeem" first appears in the 1644 treaty which ended a two year period of hostilities, known as Kieft's War, between the Dutch and lower Hudson Valley Native American groups. The Nochpeem reportedly took an active part in that conflict, including the confinement of most of the European prisoners taken by the Native Americans (Fisher n.d.:2).

Traditionally, the Nochpeem were located in the Hudson Highlands on the east side of the Hudson River "in the wild mountain region of [present day] Putnam County" (Bolton 1975:4). The extent of their territorial control appears to have extended from the vicinity of Anthony's Nose on the south to Matteawan Creek (Fishkill Creek) on the north and eastward to include most if not all of Putnam County (Pelletreau 1886:67).

A principal village of the Nochpeem reportedly was located in the valley now known as Canopus Hollow with another settlement located in what is now the eastern portion of the Town of Putnam Valley (Ruttenber 1872:8081). Three other villages, referred to as Keskistkonck, Nochpeem, and Pasquasheck, were also reportedly associated with the group (Ruttenber 1872:80; Hodge 1910:I:676; Swanton 1952:68). These villages are shown on the Janssonius Visscher Map of Nova Belgica and/or Nieu Nederlandt first published in 1650, which shows Dutch North American land claims from Cape Malabare (Cape Cod) to the Delaware capes (Jameson 1909:294; Gekle 1982:27).

Other scholars, however, restrict the Nochpeem to the region of Putnam County around the Hudson River (Cook 1976). Ruttenber (1872:80) states that it is not impossible that the eastern portion of the Hudson Highlands were part of the traditional lands of the Tankitekes, another main division of the Wappinger. Bolton (1975:5) is more specific, offering the possibility that it was the Pachami, a subgroup of the Tankiteke, which inhabited the "wild interior country around Ridgefield, Danbury, North Salem, and Carmel." He bases this idea

on an unidentified 1660 map of the region that locates the "Pachami" within a broad portion of northern Westchester and Putnam Counties (Bolton 1975:24). The map Bolton is referring to is probably the Janssonius Visscher map. De Laet in 1615 also identifies "a nation of savages called Pachami" as dwelling on the east bank of Fisher's Reach which is the portion of the Hudson River bordering what is now Putnam County (Jameson 1909:46).

During the period of European Contact, it is possible, if not probable, that portions of Putnam County were a boundary zone between the Nochpeem and Tankitekes/Pachami. If so, traditional Native American rights to the area must have been vague, dual, or shifting and probably misunderstood by the Europeans. This is especially indicated by the fact that the Tankiteke sold much of their land to Nathaniel Turner, representing the people of New Haven, in 1641 relatively early in the Contact period and thenceforth disappear from the historical record (Ruttenber 1872:80). With that sale, the Tankiteke may have merged with surrounding Native American groups and the Nochpeem may have extended their control into what had been Tankiteke territory.

Problems and conflicts during the seventeenth century between the aboriginals of the lower Hudson Valley area and the Dutch and English resulted in the deaths of large numbers of Native Americans (Washburn 1978). In a single tragic event occurring in February of 1644, an estimated 500 to 700 individuals traditionally thought mainly to be members of the Siwanoy and Wechquaesgeek groups of the Wappinger Confederacy were slaughtered by the Dutch under Captain John Underhill. The slaughter occurred at a winter village of the Natives. The exact former location of the village is uncertain but is thought to now be part of Pound Ridge or Bedford although other locations have been proposed.

The introduction of European diseases such as smallpox further devastated the local Native American populations. During the early period of European contact, the populations of the Nochpeem and Tankiteke have been estimated at approximately 600 individuals each (Cook 1976:6971). By the year 1700, the population of the entire Wappinger Confederacy has been estimated to have been reduced to approximately 1,000 individuals (MacCracken 1956:266). In 1774, the entire Native American population on both sides of the Hudson River was estimated at 300 individuals with only a small number of these people inhabiting the northern Westchester Putnam County region (Pelletreau 1886:68)

Daniel Nimham and Putnam County's Native Americans in the Eighteenth Century

Despite the hardships endured by the Native Americans during the seventeenth century, Blake (1849) claims that Wappinger groups still occupied considerable portions of Putnam County during the years 1680-1730. The Wappinger felt that they still legally owned the easternmost three quarters of what is now Putnam County since, in their view, the area was not included in a 1691 sale of their land. Although references by travelers through the Putnam Dutchess County area during the mid to late 17th century, such as those by Robert Juet (1959) and Jasper Danckaerts (Danckaerts and Sluyter 1867) are known, it was not until the 1680's that EuroAmericans began to enter the region and live in its forests and mountains.

These first arrivals were transients and squatters who possessed no deeds to the land they settled (Reynolds 1929:318). Two such men, Jan Roelof Sybrandt and Lambert Dorlandt, acquired land along the east shore of the Hudson River in 1691 from the local Wappinger (Pelletreau 1886:10). The acquisition extended from Anthony's Nose (Bear Mountain Bridge) northward to Polipel Island with no eastern boundary established (MacCracken 1956:52). Sybrandt and Dorlandt never received an official patent for this land and the lack of a recognized eastern boundary to the purchase subsequently created confusion as to actual ownership rights to most of what is now Putnam County.

Subsequently, Sybrandt and Dorlandt, in a deed dated June 16th, 1697, sold all rights to their purchase to Adolph Philipse, a New York City merchant and son of the first lord of the manor of Philipsburg (Pelletreau 1886:12; MacCracken 1956:52). The following day an official patent was obtained for the purchase by Philipse from the Governor General of New York, Benjamin Fletcher. Due to the legal questions concerning Sybrandt and Dorlandt's initial purchase of the land from the Native Americans, Philipse negotiated a confirmation deed

with local representatives of the remaining Wappinger in 1702 in which the Native Americans renounced title to the land and set the Connecticut line as the patent's eastern border (Smith 1876; Smith 1882). This was apparently done in order to settle the question of Native American land rights (which was not finally settled until the period of the American Revolution) and to keep other New York speculators from laying claim to the area before the colonial assembly. Sometimes these repurchases necessitated another payment for the lands "on the principal that it was easier and safer to pay them [the Indians] another price than to make them understand that the property had passed from one white to another" (Barrett 1886:608).

According to Solomon (1982:57), by the early eighteenth century, Putnam and Dutchess County Wappinger groups had established homes and farms on parts of the land, which they considered not part of the 1691 purchase and rented parcels to tenant farmers. Such control did not last. Although the population of what is now Putnam County was less than 100 individuals during the early eighteenth century, as more Europeans entered the region, land became a valuable commodity resulting in attempts to evict the Indians.

During the French and Indian War (1754-1763), members of the Wappinger fought for the English in Canada. While the men were gone, colonial authorities moved the remaining Indians, mainly women, children, and the elderly, to the Christian Indian mission settlement at Stockbridge, Massachusetts, ostensibly for their protection, for the duration of the war (Fisher n.d.:34). Upon returning from the conflict, the Wappinger who reportedly fought admirably for the English, found their remaining ancestral lands settled and in effect confiscated.

As recourse, in 1765 the Wappinger under the guidance of their sachem, Daniel Nimham, petitioned the New York Common Council and Colonial Courts, filing a claim against three of the great Hudson Valley area land owners, Roger Morris, Beverly Robinson, and Philip Philipse, to recover 204,800 acres of their land (Pelletreau 1886). Philipse presented the confirmatory deed to the area which Adolph Philipse had concluded with local Native Americans in 1702. The Wappinger contended the deed was not valid and demonstrated their prior role as landlord. The defendants employed a team of 15 lawyers in their defense while the Indians by law could not testify in their own behalf (Smith 1882). One settler, Samuel Monroe, attempted to assist the Wappinger but was jailed in order to silence his testimony. Unable to gain satisfaction in the colonial legal system, Nimham and some followers went to England to press their claim and petitioned the Crown (Smith 1876).

The Wappinger claim continued until the American Revolution. Despite their ill treatment at the hands of the colonists or perhaps because of it with the hope of fairer treatment under a new government, Daniel Nimham and scores of his fellow Wappinger fought for the American cause during the American Revolution. They served with George Washington at Valley Forge and later with General Marquis de Lafayette's troops (Murray and Osborn 1976:19). The lawsuit to reclaim their land, as well as all hope for fairer treatment under the Americans, ended in 1778 when Daniel Nimham and 40 to 60 of his fellow Wappinger were killed by Loyalist and British Dragoons in a battle on Cortlandt Ridge near the Yonkers New York City border (Murray and Osborn 1976:19; Solomon 1982:58).

On August 31st, 1778 five hundred Loyalist and British troops under Colonel Simcoe and Lieutenant Colonel Banastre Tarleton advanced towards Woodland Heights in the Bronx, where slightly more than one hundred Americans were posted (Hufeland 1974:260). Fifty to sixty of these American troops were Stockbridge Indians under their "chief" Daniel Nimham. On that August Afternoon, the Natives were positioned south of present day McClean Avenue in Yonkers, near the northeastern corner of Van Cortlandt Park. The remainder of the Americans, Continental troops under Major Stewart and Westchester Volunteers under Captain Daniel Williams, were situated to the north of McClean Avenue (Hadaway 1927:45).

A British column advancing from the east was attacked by the Stockbridge force. A second British column soon struck the Indians from the south. The Indians turned their fire to face this threat. Before the Indians had time to reload, a third column, a troop of British Dragoons under Lieutenant Colonel Tarleton, hit them from the northwest. The Indians were compelled to retreat across descending ground, reportedly Cortlandt Ridge (Hadaway 1927:45) located northeast of what is now the Major Deegan Expressway into an open field, now situated in the northeast portion of Van Cortlandt Park, where they were followed by the British Dragoons. Greatly outnumbered and without the benefit of bayonets, like most of their fellow American troops, the Indians were slaughtered. According to Comfort (1906:23) and Hufeland (1974:260), thirty seven of the fifty

Stockbridge Indians, including Daniel Nimham, were killed and two were taken prisoner while Jenkins (1912:303) places the number of Indian dead at seventeen individuals. The other Americans, stationed north of McClean Avenue, also were attacked and dispersed with few casualties. Total losses to the British and Loyalists during this engagement were two men killed and six wounded. The Indians were buried in the "Indian Field", almost where they fell (Jenkins 1912:303; Hufeland 1974:261). "Indian Field" is now part of the northeastern portion of Van Cortlandt Park, west of the present day Major Deegan Expressway. The deaths of Nimham and his men all but eliminated the Wappinger as a cohesive social group. A remnant of them, however, lived until 1811 near Farmer's Mills (Murray and Osborn 1976:19) in Putnam County.