



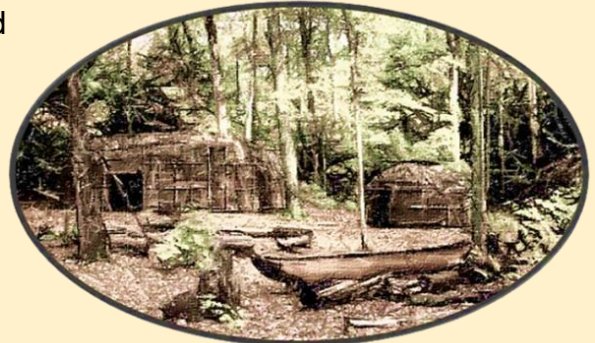
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Tribal Education for Brothertown Youth

Our Early Ancestors

(Much of this article is developed from articles from Milwaukee Public Museum).

Like other peoples of the Woodlands, the New England Indian forebears of the Brothertown Tribe spoke languages of the Algonkian language family. Prior to European contact, our ancestors were farming, hunting, and fishing people and their ways of life were adapted to the area's environments: forests and park-like woods, rivers, streams and lakes, and coastal areas. The Algonkian people worked out consensual agreements in village and inter-village councils to live in harmony.



*New England Algonquin village in the
17th and 18th centuries*

In New England, Native people relied on agriculture. Women raised corn, beans, squash, and sunflowers, while men hunted deer, moose, and smaller animals with bow and arrow, and fished on land and from dugout canoes using nets, hooks, and fish traps. Women also collected shellfish and wild foods. Generally, they lived near shore in agricultural hamlets and moved to villages inland for fall and winter hunting. Their dome-shaped wigwams and longhouses, of saplings covered with bark or woven mats, were furnished with sleeping mats and furs, pottery cooking vessels, wooden spoons and bowls, baskets and bags, and other tools and equipment. Their leather and fur clothing provided opportunities for painted and other decorations, including designs symbolized plants and animals.

Contact with Europeans and Early History

From the 1500's onward, Native people encountered European explorers, exchanging furs and agricultural surplus for metal tools, beads, and other trade goods. In particular, part of this trade focused on wampum, small beads made of white or purple shell which both served as ornaments and were later adopted by Whites as a medium of exchange with Indian people. Wampum beads were made by coastal tribes and were traded with both inland tribes and Europeans.

After epidemics in the 1600's decimated* Native populations and radically altered their ways of life, colonists flooded these areas, taking over prime fishing and agricultural areas. Through a series of wars, including the Pequot War of 1634-35 (southern New England), the Esopus Wars of 1655-65 (in the New York City vicinity), and King Philip's War in 1675-76 (all of New England), Native people lost political control over their lands, but remained in the area, adapting themselves to ways of life which depended on relations with European colonists, but maintaining a strong sense of communal life and family organization.

* *Decimated definition: to kill or destroy, remove a large percentage or part of population*

The Selling Tribal lands and resulting problems

In southeastern New England, land transactions between Natives and Europeans continued and combined with increasing encroachment on remaining Native lands. As Native people were confined to smaller parcels of land, they could no longer move their settlements freely when soils and firewood sources became depleted. Different patterns of land use probably arose, including shorter fallow periods or no fallow periods for agricultural lands, resulting in lower production. Native people may have countered this by increasing catches of herring for use as fish fertilizer or by taking up new European crops which were more tolerant of depleted soils.

At the same time, the shrinking Native lands made subsistence hunting problematic, and Native people needed firearms to hunt more effectively on the lands remaining to them. Additionally, native hunters needed to venture farther from settlements to avoid competing with settlers. European's fear of armed Native populations led to new colonial laws against selling firearms, powder, and shot to Native people. During this time native materials and culture had been replaced or were in the process of being changed by European goods, including ceramics, and clothing (except moccasins), housewares, and tools. Native house design remained constant, but their construction was changed by introduction of iron tools.

Missionaries and Conversion to Christianity

All the changes above also caused large-scale change in other parts of their lives. The 1640's saw the beginning of attempts to convert Native people in southern New England, largely through simultaneously converting Native people to Christianity and European patterns of life, of "Praying Towns" where Christian Indians lived separately, and they did this from both Europeans and non-Christian Natives.

As other groups were divested of their lands, some Native people took up residence in newly developing urban areas - increasing the numbers of "urban" Indians working as domestics or in small-scale industry. However, even in these situations, European settlers attempted to control their interaction with Native people through mechanisms like curfews which dictated that Indians could not remain in town overnight. Other individuals and families left the area to join other groups in less settled areas.

After King Philip's War

The defeat of Native forces in the Pequot War and King Philip's War spelled the end of Native autonomy (the right of self-government) in southeastern New England and radically transformed the lives of Native people and the constitution of Native societies which remained in ancestral areas. By 1676, large numbers of Native people were enslaved or indentured, not only encouraging but simultaneously creating structures of inequality that have continued for centuries.

Those who were not so controlled faced loss of massive amounts of their aboriginal land holdings and found it difficult to maintain earlier patterns of subsistence and land use in obvious Native settlements and instead dispersed themselves across the landscape in small communities or left the region, coalescing to the west and north to escape White encroachment creating amalgamated communities of mixed Native heritage. With the rise of natives in urban centers, Native people often fit in as domestics and skilled laborers, although this usually meant they could not maintain contact with other Native people in distant, dispersed communities.

Becoming Invisible

Colonial policies and attitudes of the 17th and 18th centuries identified Native people and their cultures as dangerous, and their elimination via extermination or assimilation as critical to American colonial success. Because of these attitudes, Native identity became a stigmatized category in southern New England after King Philip's War. As a result of this, in the 1730s, the Mahican consciously chose to regroup and form a mixed Native and White mission community in western Massachusetts for the continuation of their society.

During the Great Awakening in the 1740s, many New England Indians converted to Christianity and shifted to European-style frame houses, while others furnished their wigwams with American-made chairs, chests, tools, and other articles, or built D-shaped structures that appeared European from the front but otherwise maintained the form of traditional wigwams. Aspects of Native dress and material culture were abandoned, although some traditional ornaments that could be hidden underclothing appear to have survived.

The next section will be entitled: "From The Brothertown Movement Onward"