

The Curricomp Property: an Acoustic Research and Brothertown Heritage Project

Cultural heritage is important internally to Brothertown as a community, and it can also be a tool to show a larger public the depth of Brothertown history, and the cultural continuity that stretches back to before the American Revolution. Our research team would like the chance to present our research to members of the tribal council for approval on September 18th, as well as call for any input into the analysis of the research that people are comfortable contributing. The following is an overview of our research to date.

In the time leading up to the American revolution, Joseph Johnson was working diligently in Connecticut to bring various Native communities together and make a move to Oneida land in upstate New York. For various years while he was actively pursuing this goal of political and governmental reformation, he was also teaching in Farmington, CT. By this time many of the Tunxis Indians, also known as the Farmington Indians, lived on and cared for a parcel of land that the settlers continued to chisel away, making it smaller and smaller. One of the prominent Tunxis families were the Curricombs, and their family held deeds on various tracts of that land.

Thomas and Andrew Curricomb are mentioned in Joseph Johnson's journal writings as people he often stayed with as well as people with whom he would sing. Andrew Curricomb left Tunxis Sepus, and settled in Oneida with Brothertown. He is listed as a "fence vewer"¹ in Sampson Occom's statement of Brothertown (Eeyamquittoowauconnuck) political formation in Oneida in 1785. Curricomb descendants go on to include the Dick, Skeesuck, Hammer, Wiggins, Toucee, Brushel, and Fowler families, and perhaps more...

In the mid-1900s a building from the Curricomp property was moved about a mile and a half to where it now sits in Connecticut. Brothertown visited the location on a heritage trip to ancestral lands in 1999. The colonial version of the history of the cabin is that it belonged to the last Indian living in Farmington. The myth of the vanishing Indian made its way into the story about where the building came from, and for years it was used to house 10,000 year old Native artifacts². This colonial version includes no real information about what Native communities actually used the space for, or where the descendants of those Indians are now living.

Our research team has been collecting historical information toward a more Native centered history of the building. We have also been collecting acoustic information about how the

¹ "But now we proceeded to form into a Body Politick we Named our Town -by the Name of Brotherton, in Indian Eeyamquittoowauconnuck J. Fowler was chosen clarke for the Town. Roger Waupieh, David Fowler, Elijah Wympey, John Tuhy, and Abraham Simon were chosen a Committee or Trustees for the Town, for a year and for the future, the committee is to be chosen Annually. and Andrew Acorocomb (name variation of Curricomb) and Thomas Putchauker were chosen to be Fence Vewers to continue a year." Sampson Occom Journal entry

² The Curricomp cabin is currently located at the Lewis Walpole Library, Yale University, in Farmington, Connecticut. By a review of Yale and Walpole library records, Farmington resident Wilmarth Sheldon Lewis acquired the Curricomp cabin between 1958 and 1960. His groundskeeper, Bill Day, had a hobby of collecting stone lithic artifacts he would find during his gardening around the property. Wilmarth "Lefty" Lewis decided that having an Indian cabin would be a perfect home for his groundskeeper's musings. He had the Curricomp cabin moved to his property and named it for his gardener, the William Day Museum of Indian Artifacts. After Yale acquired Lewis's extensive collections and property, the Day Museum was maintained for some time by the Farmington Historical Society, and opened weekly to the public. In 2005 the Day Museum was closed. Since then, exterior refurbishment has been completed, and the building renamed in an effort to acknowledge the Curricomp (Tunxis) family as the original owners and builders of the property.

structure sounds. Just like each guitar or drum sounds different and can incite different responses in the people who play or hear it, the architecture of each building also has acoustic properties that make it special.

Our research team believes that the acoustics of Heritage sites are specifically important to understanding their role in culture. In the case of Brothertown the role of traditions involving sound—aural traditions—are an opportunity for research and analysis to be guided by contemporary descendants of the Curricombs. Contemporary descendants are the knowledge holders that have sovereignty over how the heritage (in this case the Curricomp cabin) should be interpreted and documented for posterity.

We hope to submit a research paper to a special edition of the academic publication *Acoustics Journal*.³ We have used various technologies to make an acoustic “map” or “model” of the Curricomp cabin and then used other recording technologies to be able to hear how present day voices sound inside the cabin ([hear an example at this link](#)). The academic paper we are drafting also includes a large amount of academic theory about why Native knowledge holders are key in the development and application of the acoustic technologies used in such a case study. My partner Tim Hsu ([bio](#)) is the acoustics expert for the project, and while a full understanding of the technologies even escapes me at times, I believe there is a way to ensure a comprehensive Brothertown understanding of the project and its technologies so that these technologies are not misused, or misrepresentative of Brothertown Culture.

During our research we identified various issues of Western or Colonial prejudice in acoustics technologies, and called attention to them in the paper. Issues like; how the study of architectural acoustics only consider the English language when developing tools to analyze how well speech is understood in a building, while Native Language would have still been prevalent in Tunxis. Another example would be how previously conducted acoustics research about Christian worship does not completely allow room for the nuances of Native Christian intersectional worship space. In the draft of our paper there are more examples of how acoustics research can be biased, but academic theory and critical discourse only goes so far. Knowing how Brothertown might use this research to further their present-day goals and amplify Brothertown’s historical and cultural voice is our main goal in conducting this Scientific research.

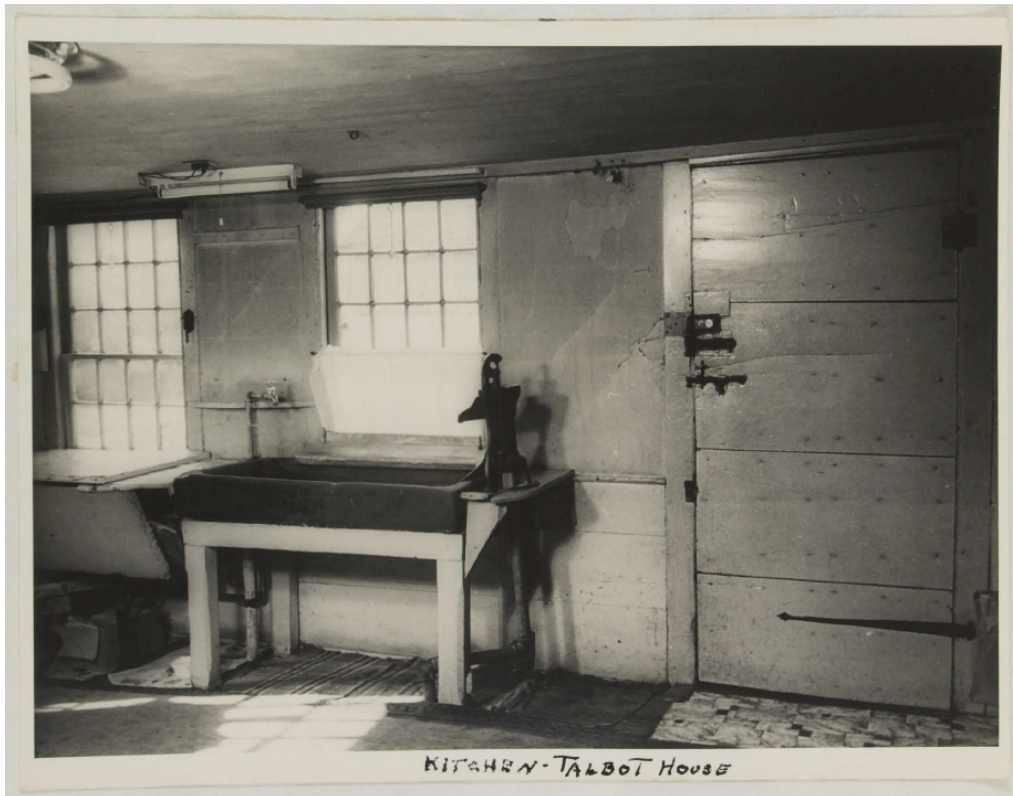
The Methodist Episcopal Church in New York City, published *Indian Melodies* in 1845 for Thomas Commuck (Brothertown). What most people don’t know is that two years earlier in 1843, in Brown County WI, Commuck actually published a manuscript copy of that same music. However *he* titled the book *The Indian Harmonist*. Before the Methodist Church published the book, they hired a famous music reformer of the era to write new harmonizations for Brothertown’s music. The man’s name was Thomas Hastings, and he was famous for his “scientific” approach to music harmonization. Western scientific progress has often gotten tangled up in an idea of making things “better.” In the case of Brothertown heritage and Thomas Commuck’s tunes, scientific progress is not actually better if the people who sang the music can no longer sing it because they don’t recognize the harmonization of the music anymore.

The view of our paper is that while “science” played a role, it is not the culprit in the previous example of *Indian Melodies*. Instead, the removal of Brothertown’s sovereignty over their own cultural heritage by a church publishing company in New York City, effectively changed the way the Brothertown community could engage in their own worship. Science and Native American Culture can co-exist, so long as sovereignty over cultural heritage remains intact.

³ https://www.mdpi.com/si/acoustics/Acoustics_Soundscapes_Intangible_Heritage



Current Photo Curricomp Cabin 2020



1950's Photo of Curricomp Cabin Before it was Moved



Tunxis Land in Farmington. (apologies for the poor resolution)