Anushiik & Oneewe:

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Kpomthe’nã Mã’eekanik

Williams College: We are Walking on Mohican Lands
The Many Trails of the Stockbridge-Munsee Mohicans

Map of Stockbridge-Munsee Community homelands, depicting Mohican areas to the North and Munsee areas to the South

More Information

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Place names

Many words still commonly found throughout Williamstown and neighboring places in the homelands reflect Mohican heritage:

**Housatonic** comes from the Mohican word *Wa’thatinik*, meaning **beyond or over the mountain**.

**Pontoosuc** comes from the Mohican word *Pãntokwthik*, meaning **falls over or on a brook**.

**Taconic** comes from the Mohican word *Mtãxnik*, meaning **where there is timber/firewood**.

**Hoosic** comes from the Mohican word *hoothik*, meaning **kettle**.

Williamstown is part of the homelands of the Stockbridge-Munsee Community, one of 574 federally recognized Tribes in the United States. The Tribe is made up of Mohican and Munsee people. Today, as a result of European colonization, the Stockbridge-Munsee Community's reservation is in northeast Wisconsin.

As a federally recognized Tribe, the Stockbridge-Munsee Community (SMC) operates under its own governmental structure. Approximately half of the Tribe’s 1,600 enrolled members reside on the reservation in Wisconsin. Despite having been forced from its Hudson Valley homelands, the Stockbridge-Munsee Community remains alive, well, and active both here in the Northeast homelands and in Wisconsin.

Williamstown and Williams College were founded on the displacement of the Stockbridge-Munsee Community. This booklet serves as an introduction to the history of the Stockbridge-Munsee Community in Williamstown, the role that Williams College played in the forced removal of the Tribe, and the present-day partnership between the Tribe and college.
Today’s Williamstown is constituted by Mohican land agreements negotiated in 1758 and in 1763 with Mohican sachems (authorized stewards of the Tribe’s lands). They were facing colonial pressures which forced signing for treasured places such as this as they sought to survive as a People. These sachems were:


They are direct ancestors of today’s Stockbridge-Munsee Community members.

Archaeological evidence in the Williamstown area, such as this projectile point base from Caretaker Farm, demonstrates Mohican ancestors’ local lifeways from 9,000-8,100 BP. There are 7 recorded archaeological sites recorded in town, though there has been no systematic town-wide survey yet.
Recent projects in the homelands

1) In November of 2019, the New York Department of Transportation, in collaboration with the Historic Preservation Office, installed engraved murals of Stockbridge-Munsee dancers onto a flyover ramp at the Albany International Airport.

2) In the Summer of 2021, an archaeological dig conducted by Stockbridge-Munsee Community with many area volunteers found evidence of the 1739 Meetinghouse, a site of local governance in Stockbridge. The dig also revealed two sets of early precontact Mohican ancestors’ homes. More than 30 members of the Williams community volunteered in the fieldwork.

3) After being in the possession of the Berkshire Museum for 64 years, the wampum bag and moccasins of sachem John Konkapot were successfully returned to the Tribe. Student Jayden Jogwe ’24 prepared vital research for the claim. The objects now rest in the Arvid E. Miller Library and Museum on the Tribe’s reservation in Wisconsin.

Fort Massachusetts

On State Road in North Adams rests a stone and engraved plaque that commemorate Fort Massachusetts. In 1745, Fort Massachusetts was constructed by the Massachusetts Bay Colony, a puritan settlement. The fort was built in order to stave off Dutch settlers coming from New York to Massachusetts and to defend British colonies from French and Native American soldiers. Shortly after its construction, Fort Massachusetts was destroyed by French and Abenaki soldiers. In 1747, the fort was rebuilt and remained in operation until 1759. The construction and operation of Fort Massachusetts was an attempt to militarize and colonize the homelands of the Mohicans. The site holds significance in Mohican history because of Sachem John Konkapot’s service at the fort. When it came time to rebuild the fort, it was Ephraim Williams Jr., founder of Williams College, who was at the helm of the rebuild. Williams Jr. employed a band of Stockbridge Indians to assist him and appointed John Konkapot as their leader.
Williams College

Ephraim Williams Sr., the father of Williams College’s founder (Ephraim Williams Jr.) was directly involved in the displacement of the Stockbridge-Munsee Tribe from Williamstown. In 1742, Williams Sr. staked claim over land that had already been in use by the Mohicans. One tactic used by Williams Sr. to obtain land involved selling goods to Mohicans under a credit system. When they were unable to repay this debt, Williams Sr. would sue for land. Additionally, Abigail Williams, daughter of Ephraim Sr., was the wife of John Sergeant, the first missionary to the Mohicans. The legacy of the Williams family, who played such a key role in the displacement of the Mohicans, lingers on at Williams College.

In 1759, Benjamin Kokhkewaunaunt, after finding Israel Williams (Ephraim’s cousin) surveying land south of Pittsfield, organized to forbid further survey work in the area. Following the all-colonist 1763 Stockbridge town meeting engineered by Elijah Williams (Ephraim Jr’s brother, an enslaver and land speculator) as a land-grab, John Konkapot and 16 other Mohican petitioners wrote a petition opposing the meeting and Williams’ position.

Today, reminders of Ephraim Williams remain present throughout the college.

- Williams College students are fondly referred to as “Ephs”
- The college’s mascot is named “Ephelia”
- Several buildings on campus are named after direct descendants of the Williams family (Mark Hopkins, Hopkins Hall)
- Donors join the Ephraim Williams Society

The Williams family’s actions, which led to the founding of Williamstown and Williams College, are still celebrated today in the culture and iconography of Williams College, and as a result permeates the town of Williamstown—also named after Ephraim Williams, Jr.—as a whole.
"Through working with THPO I've learned the importance of having community and caring for your people. I have seen the violence and negligence Williams has shown the Stockbridge-Munsee Community. I have also seen the reparative progress that can be made with compassion and value. This has fundamentally changed not only how I view Williams, but also my place in the world; I've learned that community can help achieve justice, and justice can help cultivate community, and I find that process deeply meaningful."

-Gwyn Chilcoat '24

"The opportunity to work with the SMC THPO has been one of the most rewarding experiences I've had at Williams, and also some of the work I am most proud of. Growing up in Stockbridge, MA, I was aware that the town is incredibly significant to Mohican history, and also of the ways that much of this significance and history is obscured, erased, and not taught in local schools. Getting to be a part of the work to promote education on Mohican history, reestablish spaces in Stockbridge where the Tribe is currently representing themselves, and witnessing developments in archaeological and repatriation work was extremely impactful to me. Interning at the office in my sophomore year also helped me in deciding to major in American studies. In academia it's easy to get bogged down in criticism without action, and this internship was a chance to actually use skills I've learned in the major to do tangible, meaningful work outside the classroom."

-Trudy Fadding '24

Ephraim Williams Jr's original will, currently housed at Williams College Sawyer Library's Special Collections

Ephraim Williams Jr's original will allotted money for the education of Stockbridge-Munsee community members. Once revised, the will eliminated this commitment to Indigenous education, focusing instead on colonial education. The funds of this revised will were used to build Williams College, which did not serve the community in any capacity in its first two centuries of existence. Above is an excerpt of Ephraim Jr's will, a portion of which states, "Shall & do well and truly pay the sum of three pounds sterling money, annually, for the promoting and propagating Christian knowledge amongst the Indians at Stockbridge. The said money to be paid into the hands of such person or persons, as now have or hereafter shall or may have the care and instruction of Christian knowledge, and the person or persons so to receive the same, shall employ for the giving the advice and directions of Christian knowledge."
In 1953, the 1753 House was constructed in the middle of the roundabout at Field Park between Route 2 and Route 7. The house was built as a celebration of Williamstown's Bicentennial. The presence of this house is a colonial imposition that erases Mohican presence and care for this land long before 1753, and memorializes a false narrative of first settlement that begins with European colonists.

On Indigenous People’s Day in 2021, local artists installed a fence around the house. The four sides of the fence were marked with Munsee words for Eastern, Southern, Western and Northern door, respectively. Beneath each of these words was an image of one of the four family clans of the Stockbridge-Munsee Community: turkey, turtle, bear and wolf. The fence remained installed for two weeks, as a statement about the House’s exclusive focus on colonial history, and in an effort to inspire re-imagination of the space and its representation on the Williamstown flag.

Signs informing the public that Williamstown is on Mohican land have now been permanently installed outside of the 1753 House by the ’53 House Committee.
College partnership

In the Fall of 2020, in a historic partnership, the Stockbridge-Munsee Community signed an agreement with Williams College to open the Tribal Historic Preservation Office (THPO) on Spring Street. The partnership is through the College’s Office of Institutional Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (OIDEI). The Tribe’s THPO office carries two full time employees who are employed by the Stockbridge-Munsee tribal government through the Cultural Affairs Department. It hosts several Williams College interns every year. The THPO works to protect the Tribe's cultural sites from disturbance, repatriate cultural items, and provide ancestors with respectful reburials.

"The partnership between the College and the Stockbridge-Munsee Community is historic - it stands to acknowledge and elevate our complex history, deepen current relations between two communities, and envision future collaborations that may take place in and beyond Mohican Homelands."

-Leticia Smith-Evans Haynes, JD, PhD
Vice President for Institutional Diversity, Equity and Inclusion

Scan here to view a campus map featuring projects and initiatives done in partnership with the Historic Preservation Office.
Towa'kwok (Springs) of Williamstown

Mohicans traditionally regarded the area as significant for the abundance of natural springs

Sand Springs: Known in Williamstown as a water company and public pool, Sand Springs is a well-recognized name throughout the town. The water that fills this pool and is distributed for drinking comes from an ancient Mohican spring that has medicinal properties and carries great spiritual significance to the Stockbridge-Munsee Community. In times of sickness, members of the Stockbridge-Munsee Community visited the spring to benefit from its healing properties. Sachem John Konkapot (Pophnehonnuwuh) described regularly visiting the springs here, making this a cherished area of the homelands. Today, the spring is privatized and inaccessible to the public.

Cold Spring: In 2022, Williamstown Rural Lands worked with the Tribal Historic Preservation Office to create an interpretive panel recognizing the importance of Cold Spring to the Stockbridge-Munsee Community. Previously, signage at Cold Spring only informed viewers of the importance of the spring in relation to Williamstown's former water delivery system.

It is well documented that water and springs, more specifically, have long held extreme importance to the Tribe and are even embedded into the namesake “Mā’eekan” which means “water constantly in motion” as well as “Muh-he-con-ne-ok” meaning “people of the waters that are never still.” It can be inferred that Cold Spring would have been regarded as a community resource to be used and collectively held. The Mohican Blessing Fountain in New Lebanon, NY is a prime example of this relationship to springs. In 1941, the Mohican Blessing Fountain was built to honor and thank the Mohicans who sold a parcel of their land in 1759 under the stipulation that the land’s water would forever be free and accessible to all.