THE INSTITUTE FOR AMERICAN INDIAN STUDIES

museum & research center

Our story is one of community, of connections to Mother Earth and to one another. It is also the story of an enduring presence. The land now called Connecticut we have always known as Quinnetukut, the place of the long water. Our homelands have been here, along river banks, in forested uplands and beside coastal marshes for thousands of years. We are always adapting to new ideas, new technologies and a changing environment yet our traditions and communities continue.

We are still here.
We are the Indigenous Peoples of Connecticut.

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Connecticut's First Peoples

10,000 years ago…

As the glaciers that once covered Connecticut receded they left a landscape quite different from the familiar woodlands we know today. Water, churning with debris from rapidly melting ice sheets, gouged paths to the Atlantic Ocean creating a myriad of rivers, lakes and streams. This fast flowing slurry turned floodplains and coastal areas into barren, dangerous places unfit for human habitation. Inland, however, shrubs, grasses, and resilient trees like Red Oak, White Cedar and some White Pine were able to take root attracting elk, giant beaver, mastodon and a variety of other animals.

This new environment encouraged people from the south and west to venture into Connecticut's uplands and inland wetlands. Little is known about the people of these ancient communities. They likely traveled in small family groups moving frequently and remaining in each location for a short time. Stones that were collected locally were chipped into cutting and scraping tools as well as projectile points for spears. They also used some chert for points, which is nonlocal. There is some controversy over whether this exotic stone is the result of exchange or if people were actually traveling such long distances. Many questions remain that can only be answered by the discovery and careful excavation of additional undisturbed areas where Paleo-Indians once lived.

Mother Earth

"Ours is a land culture. In fact, the land is the culture."
Aurelius "Big Eagle" Piper, Golden Hill *Paugussett,* 1989

The creation stories common to Algonkian peoples of Indian New England tell that this land we live upon was formed by The Creator, or Great Spirit, on the back of a giant turtle. We know this creation as Mother Earth and within her dwells a living spiritual force that continues to be present in our world today. The warmth of Mother Earth supports and sustains us throughout our lives and it cradles the bones of our ancestors. The Earth must endure for us to continue. Balance and harmony, we say, are maintained by returning thanks to the earth for her gifts.

We must always remember that the land does not belong to us. We belong to the land.

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Hunting and Gathering

8,000 years ago…

As the climate continued its warming trend, rising sea levels flooded the area we now know as the Long Island Sound. A variety of vegetation still common in Connecticut's woodlands emerged including birch, oak, cattail, Solomon's seal, and blue flag. This abundant flora could support many species of wildlife including white tailed deer, black bear, wolf, fox, turkeys, migratory birds, fish and turtles.

During the Early and Middle Archaic Periods indigenous populations remained relatively small but they began sophisticated patterns of cyclic migration known as "the seasonal round," which continued for over 7000 years, into the post-contact period. Communities moved several times throughout the year, hunting, fishing and gathering a wide range of seasonally available foods. Despite frequent moves, people expected to return to the same locations the following year. Like the Paleo-Indians before them, these Archaic Peoples focused their economic activities on the large inland wetland areas of Connecticut. Men, with their hunting skills and understanding of animal behavior, and women, with their knowledge of plant lore, all played key roles in the early economies.

Our One Legged and Four Legged Relatives

"Our relatives have always sustained us. They are the four legged, the winged, the finned ones, all those who crawl, and the standing tall one legged [the trees] - all of those with whom the two legged share breath."

Teri "Many Feathers" Delahanty, Cree, 2009

"When our people lived in the old way, we knew the right time and the right way to hunt and trap."

Tall Oak, *Wampanoag/Narragansett*, 1974)

We were taught by our fathers and grandfathers to work in groups as we set our snares and stalked the animals. Our daughters learned from their mothers and grandmothers where to look for nuts, edible tubers and healing plants. And our elders reminded us to respect the animals and the plants on our land and to always give thanks.

"In the prayers of my people are prayers for grass, for the renewal of earth, and for deer. And if we do this… then all of this life and all of this spirit will go on forever."

Tsonakwa, *Abenaki*, 1986

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A *cache* is a place where items have been concealed and stored for later use, usually in an underground pit. The Early Archaic Period is the first era ,where we find evidence of caching, but they were used through the Post-Contact period, especially for food (mainly corn) and raw materials. Going through the act of gathering meaningful and useful objects to store for later use indicates that there was an expectation of returning to the same location. This is therefore indicative of the practice of seasonal rounds, and that the location in question was worth returning to.
Archaeologists find caches for many reasons: environmental change making the site uninhabitable, cultural change causing the people to not return, or perhaps simple human error. Whatever the reason archaeologists find them, it gives an insight into what tools people valued at a moment in time. Artifacts typically found in caches are those that are nonperishable and include *cores* (blocks of raw stone material used in manufacture), *blanks* (unfinished stone tools that have been worked on both sides), *preforms* (roughly shaped blades, points, or other stone tools at the beginning stages of manufacture that have been reduced to easily transportable forms), and completed points. It is likely that perishable items such as nuts, seeds, antler, and bone tools were also buried with caches, but so far no evidence has been found for them.

Sixteen blades were found in 1991 by Mr. Glazier in Granby, Connecticut. A professional excavation was performed in 1993 and an additional fourteen blades were found in the cache. Nine of the blades were found *in situ* (in their original locations as they had been laid in the earth), and were oriented on a north-south line, which is showcased in this exhibit. Thin sectioning done on one of the blades which indicated that they were made from a non-local siltstone. Radiocarbon dating on charcoal found with the cache returned dates of 1,630 years ago and 1,590 for its internment –the early Middle Woodland Period. To date, this 30-blade cache remains the largest single cache of its kind found in Connecticut.

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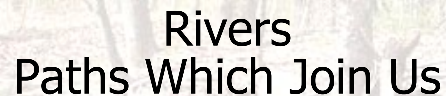
Fishing and River Life

5,000 years ago…

Connecticut's environment continued to change as a climate that was even warmer and dryer than today prevailed. Shrinking interior wetlands encouraged Late and Terminal Archaic peoples to establish settlements in major river valleys where water resources were less affected by drought. From these "base camps" people continued their established patterns of seasonal movements utilizing resources from inland, riverine and coastal ecosystems.

By the Late Archaic Period, two distinct populations with differing lifeways were occupying Connecticut. People of the Narrow Point artifact tradition, thought to have originated along the southern Atlantic coastal region, engaged in a broad range of economic activities including hunting and gathering of edible plants as well as fishing. By the Late Archaic Period, fishing played a significant role in the lives of Connecticut's early indigenous peoples. These communities were highly territorial and may perhaps represent the beginnings of tribalization in Connecticut. Activities of the Laurentian People, who most likely migrated from areas north and northwest of Connecticut, and the Broad Spear culture that replaced them, were even more focused on rivers and lakes than their Narrow Point counterparts. They were particularly involved in heavy woodworking, including the manufacture of dugout canoes. These vessels facilitated extensive trade with people to the east, west and north.



Rivers
Paths Which Join Us

Rivers are important pathways that cross our homelands and connect us to one another. Our ancestors plied these ribbons of water in dugout canoes, traveling to hamlets, settlements and camps where they could visit and trade with their neighbors and kin. Rivers took them to countless fishing spots, hunting lookouts, and rock quarries; to nut stands, berry patches, and places where healing plants grew: all destinations necessary for their survival. And rivers took them to sacred places necessary for well-being, where they could purify their spirits and continue being in touch with The Creator.

There is a place
where the word for world is River.
Along that river
there are houses of grass
and the boats of those people
bob with the nets
which catch their food
small animals and fish whose names
are the same in their language
as the words for blessing.

Joseph Bruchac, *Abenaki,* 1983

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Steatite, also called soapstone, is a soft metamorphic rock that was used during the Terminal Archaic Period (1850-750 BC) to craft many items including bowls and cooking pots. Soapstone containers are one of the few objects added to the Native American material culture that did not continue to be used by later Woodland period peoples. Steatite has a nonstick surface which makes the pots well suited to cooking solids, particularly nuts and acorns.

By the Early Woodland Period use of cumbersome soapstone containers declined and cooking in clay pots became more prevalent. The heavy weight of steatite cookware may be just one reason for its diminished popularity. Another explanation could be that because of a significant decline in acorn harvests brought on by a "Little Ice Age" that coincided with the close of the Terminal Archaic Period, people no longer needed nonstick steatite vessels. Use of steatite for carved smoking pipes and jewelry did continue after the Archaic Periods.

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Early Woodland Period (750 BC - 300 AD)

Shaping New Lifeways

2,500 years ago…

The onset of the Early Woodland Period coincided with a "Little Ice Age" that slowed the melting of polar ice caps, reducing river currents and allowing for sediment build up. Newly created mudflats formed the foundation for bountiful marshlands which developed into nurseries for a variety of animal life.

The changing environment shaped Woodland Indian existence in profound ways. Connecticut's coasts and estuaries, with their ready supply of food, had become ideal environments for the establishment of large settlements that could be occupied for long periods of time. Although population numbers as well as the number of settlements generally declined during the Early Woodland period, the size of communities grew. The Narrow Point tradition which was established during the Late Archaic Period was the dominant culture, moving into river floodplains and coastal areas as Broad Spear communities faded. Vegetation harvested from marshes often required long simmering times that led to a major innovation, the clay cooking pot. Significant use of clay to mold containers and smoking pipes was a hallmark of the Early Woodland Period.

Clay
The Body of the Earth

As they shaped clay into cooking and storage pots, pipes and beads, our ancestors remembered that they were using the body of the earth. It was the women in our communities who made the pottery, first preparing the clay by removing pebbles and roots. My grandmother would knead the clay with water into a soft mass sometimes adding small pieces of crushed stone or shell. She did this to make the clay less sticky and keep the finished pots from shrinking or breaking during drying and firing. Often she would store this prepared clay in moist, underground caches until she was ready to use it.

When she poured cool water from an earthen container and stirred her stew as it simmered over a fire, my grandmother was again reminded that her clay vessels, formed with the body of the earth, were "… not dead at all, and anything that has life still retains that life when you use it."

Tsonakwa, *Abenaki,* 1980

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Horticulture and Village Life

1,000 years ago…

After 13,000 years of rapid change, the climate stabilized at last and life for Connecticut's Indigenous Peoples became more sedentary. In some areas, village life, with many families working, playing and celebrating together year round, replaced the seasonal and multi-seasonal base camps of earlier eras. Journeys to prime fishing locations in the spring, gathering nuts and other wild edible plants in late summer and hunting, with the newly introduced bow and arrow,* continued to be essential to the Woodland economy.

A revolutionary development during the Late Woodland Period was the introduction of horticulture into various parts of Connecticut. Because coastal communities already had a prolific food source provided by the salt marshes and the ocean, many did not adopt horticulture until the end of the Late Woodland Period. The broad, fertile river floodplains were, however, conducive to large scale horticulture.

Maize, first cultivated in Mexico around 6,500 years ago, made its way into Connecticut around 1,000 AD traveling with Native American traders and immigrants along established routes from the Mid-Atlantic and Hudson River regions. Beans were introduced four hundred years after maize. These crops, along with sunflowers, gourds and other types of squash, all became significant products. Women, already possessing a vast knowledge of plants and how to grow them, became the natural caretakers of community gardens. As the importance of horticulture to village life increased, the status of Native American women was also elevated.

**Although the bow and arrow had been used in Alaska since 3,000BC and the western United States since 200 AD, it did not appear in the Northeast until the Middle Woodland Period.*

The Three Sisters

According to Narragansett tribal oral tradition, it was the crow that brought seeds to the people, carrying a kernel of Indian corn in one ear and an Indian bean in the other from the Great God Cautantowwit's field in the Southwest.

"Our elders recognized the spiritual elements thought to be present in corn, beans and squash, [The Three Sisters]. These vegetables were planted when the moon was 'growing,' never after the full moon."

Gladys Tantaquidgeon, *Mohegan,* 1989

"…it is the indigenous peoples of the Americas who maintain the spiritual and cultural connections with this wondrous plant [maize], which is celebrated in ceremonies, blessings, and in oral traditions. 'No matter how much or how little corn your garden gives,' my grandmother would say, 'always give thanks. Otherwise the Creator may not see fit to give you anything the next year.'"

Trudie Lamb Richmond, *Schaghticoke*, 1989

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We always plant corn, beans and squash together in a mound. The corn supports the young bean plants and lifts them up to the sunshine; the beans help provide important nutrients [nitrogen] to nourish the growing corn; and the large squash leaves protect and shade the soil, keeping it moist and free of weeds. We call these three plants 'the three sisters' and they remind us that we must always work together, as sisters, if we are to survive and flourish."

Janis "*Four Hearts Whispering*" Us, *Mohawk-Shinnecock descent*

Through a process known as seed selection, saving and planting seeds from plants that had desirable traits such as disease resistance or larger kernels, Ancient American Indians created thousands of varieties of new crops.

7,000 years ago… farmers of Mesoamerica began selecting seeds from teosinite (or teosinte?) (*Zea Mexicana*) a wild grass plant with many stalks and only a few seeds, which is likely a genetic forerunner of modern corn.

5,000 years ago… slowly, over thousands of years, American Indians created maize (*Zea Mays*). The first true "corn" had small ears that contained only six to nine kernels each.

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Beaver Pelts for Iron Axes

450 years ago…

European explorers and fishermen began frequenting New England at the beginning of the 16th century with the earliest documented European visitor to the Long Island Sound being the Italian explorer Giovanni da Verrazano in 1524. By the early 1600s, Dutch settlements had sprung up on both sides of the Sound and Dutch traders, including Adriaen Block, Hendrick Christiaensz, and Cornelius May, navigated Connecticut's waters exchanging goods with the local indigenous peoples.

Indigenous peoples were well-accustomed to trade relationships, having participated in such dealings with other Native communities for thousands of years prior to European contact. As a result, local Woodland Indians were experts in the art of bartering. Early trade relationships between Europeans and Native Peoples were friendly and mutually satisfying. Connecticut's Indians were eager to acquire manufactured goods such as metal tools, woven blankets and bolts of cloth; European traders were enticed by the exquisite furs which Native Americans could provide. Some Native American communities even encouraged Europeans to settle amongst them since easy access to European goods enhanced their quality of life and improved their social and political status with other tribes.

Unfortunately, trade relations also signaled the importation of new and devastating diseases into Connecticut for which the indigenous population had no immunities, such as smallpox, the plague, cholera, whooping cough and measles. After witnessing the effects of an unspecified 1633 epidemic among the Connecticut River Indians, William Bradford, the leader of the Plimouth Colony, commented that "…they dye like rotten sheep…they were in the end not able to help one another… nor [were there] any [left] to burie the dead…" There is no way to know an exact number but by 1650 it has been estimated that as much as 80% of Connecticut's indigenous population had perished from disease.

Wampum
A Pledge of Honor

Wampum, the purple and white beads that we painstakingly manufactured from whelk and quahog clam shells carry a spiritual value. The shells themselves are sacred substances that we have traditionally exchanged with our Grandfathers from the Underwater World. Shells symbolize the continuity of both our physical as well as our social life. For over a thousand years we have exchanged wampum with our neighbors in lands now known as Canada, New York, Pennsylvania and Long Island. When shared among people, wampum creates social and sacred bonds. These marine shell beads were rare and highly prized, especially *suckauhock,* the purple kind. When European traders arrived here, they saw the high esteem we placed on wampum and misinterpreted it as money.

"… It was never intended as money. True there were many instances where it was exchanged for other things yet the principle object was that it be used as a pledge of honor; say whenever a person or persons wished their words to be taken honorably and [gave] wampum with these words. This was sufficient to settle the matter."

Joseph Nicolar, *Penobscot*, 1895

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During the earlier part of the 17th century trade along much of Long Island Sound was dominated by the Dutch. Offering high quality cloth, kettles and iron hatchets rather than the trinkets that characterized early English trade, the Dutch successfully kept the English away from the Connecticut coastal trade relationship for many years. After the British defeated the powerful Pequots in the Pequot War of 1636-1637 they gained control of most of the wampum production around Long Island Sound which effectively ended Dutch dominance of trade in the region.

"It was often the Dutch women who were trading with Native American people. Dutch women were experts in book keeping; they traveled on the ships with the men, usually with their husbands, and took care of a lot of the business dealings. Dutch women maintained a unique independent position for that time period; they had many more rights than 17th century English women, similar to Native American women. Native American men were used to dealing with women – in many tribes it was the women who chose the chief – and the [American] Indian men liked dealing with the Dutch women. When the British took over the fur trade they thought it would just fall in their laps, but it didn't happen that way. It took a long time for the [American] Indians to get used to [dealing with] the British men."

Dr. Anneke Bull, *Dutch Heritage Project, 2009*

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Post Contact Period (1633 AD - 1850 AD)

Enduring Traditions

300 years ago…

Following closely behind explorers and traders, large numbers of English settlers arrived in New England seeking natural resources and religious freedom. Warfare, which had been rare in the Connecticut area before the influx of Europeans, occurred frequently throughout the mid 17th century. Many Native American warriors, as well as women and children, were captured by the English and sold into slavery. Ever increasing numbers of indigenous people perished as a result of conflict and disease, enabling English settlers to engulf precious Indian homelands. The land surrounding the fertile, majestic river known to indigenous peoples as Quinnetukut, or "the place of the long water," soon became the English Colony of Connecticut. One of the earliest actions of the new Colony was to establish its Indian reservation system, a phenomenon which pre-dates the formation of the United States by over a century.

Connecticut's American Indian communities have never been passive in their relationships with European-Americans. For many, adopting the English religion and learning British law became successful survival strategies; Christian Indian communities were exempt when Congress declared in the 1830s that all "uncivilized" Indians must be removed to lands west of the Mississippi River.* Although many Native Americans converted to Christianity, they never relinquished their traditional spiritual beliefs and faith in the Creator. These traditions are evidenced in a myriad of ways including sacred ceremonies that connect people to their ancestors and the natural world, the symbolic designs that adorn woven baskets, and an enduring reverence for Mother Earth.

**The main villages of the Schaghticoke at Kent, and that of the Mahikan tribe at Sharon, became Moravian mission villages in the 1740s. The Mohegan tribe founded a Christian church and school on their reservation in 1831.*

Manitou
The Spirit in All

"Manitou" is a word used by Algonkian peoples to express the spiritual essence that is present in all things. This force is much like the "spiritual energy" or "soul" common to Western religions. It arises from a source which we call The Creator or Great Spirit, a being with many names. The Creator is known in some cultures as God, Yahweh or Allah. The Mohegan people know The Great Spirit as Gunci Mundo, the Narragansett as Cautantowwit and the Oglala Sioux as Wakan-tanka.

Manitou is guiding our existence and is inherent in varying amounts in every part of this world. Manitou is in the fire inside a wigwam, in the branches bent to make the frame, and in the wigwam itself. Our elders, our children, our leaders, our artists, our animal and plant relatives, sacred objects and the bones of our ancestors, stones on the land, the land itself – each contain Manitou.

"Mundu is good, rising in my heart. Mundu dwells in all the world."
Diary of Fidelia "Flying Bird" Fielding, *Mohegan faithkeeper*, 1904

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A Story of Survival

Recent times…

Since Indian reservations were first established in the 17th century the size of those land holdings has been gradually but drastically reduced. Small, rocky and infertile places, the reservations were generally unfit for cultivation or other traditional economic activities. Many Indians were forced to leave the reservations and move to nearby cities to toil in mills and factories, on fishing vessels, or as day laborers to support their families. A large percentage of Native American men joined the military. Indian women often worked as laundresses or servants in local Euro-American homes. Both men and women were basket makers, selling their wares to local farmers and storekeepers.

> "It was common to see a group of older Indians going along the road… loaded down with baskets of all descriptions, from strong oak bushel baskets which the farmers like to own when picking corn or digging potatoes, to nice little ones made from very fine black ash splints" (New Milford Times; October 26, 1939).

Despite 375 years of adversity including racial discrimination, illegal sales of reservation lands by unscrupulous white overseers, and governmental attempts at forced detribalization and cultural assimilation, five Connecticut tribes remain as indigenous, self-governing entities: Schaghticoke; Paucatuck Eastern Pequot; Mashantucket Pequot; Mohegan; and Golden Hill Paugussett. Although people must still often leave the reservations today in search of economic opportunities, they return regularly to visit relatives, attend celebrations and other social events, and to participate in governmental decision-making. The Reservation is now the tribe's political and spiritual center.

Our Homelands

Like Native Americans all across this continent, we feel ourselves to be an integral part of our Homelands. We cannot be separated from that parcel of earth without loss of identity and well-being. The sacred Homelands of our ancestors and spirit beings shall always shelter and strengthen us and our descendants to come.

"And not withstanding the deprivations under which we labor, we are attached to our homes. It is the birth-place of our mothers. It is the last gift of our fathers; and there rest the bones of our ancestors… We do not wish to leave it…"

Samuel Rodman, *Narragansett, 1880*

Today the wood frame houses throughout Indian New England are still social places where we work and sleep, joke and argue, share meals and tell stories. Our sense of belonging to family, community, and home remains strong. The warmth of the hearth, the sound of Grandmother's voice as she talked, our people's art and music – these are enduring memories of Home.

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"Historical silences have largely contributed to the invisibility of the indigenous peoples of southern New England…We are often discussed in the past tense and seldom in the present. But we have endured and survived in spite of being fragmented, factionalized, Christianized and Americanized. Our tenacity, our resilience, our stubbornness, and our beliefs enable us to continue and work toward rebuilding who we are: the indigenous people of this land."

Trudie Lamb Richmond 1994
Schaghticoke Elder & former tribal chair

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$10.00 Seniors
$8.00 Children

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From Hartford & Waterbury, CT
Interstate-84 West to Exit 15. Take Route 67 North to Route 199, then left onto Curtis Road.

From Washington Depot, CT
Take Route 47 South to Washington Green to Route 199 to Curtis Road.

From Northwestern CT
Take Route 7 South to New Milford then Route 67 South to Route 199 to Curtis Road.

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