The Native Americans in South Brunswick

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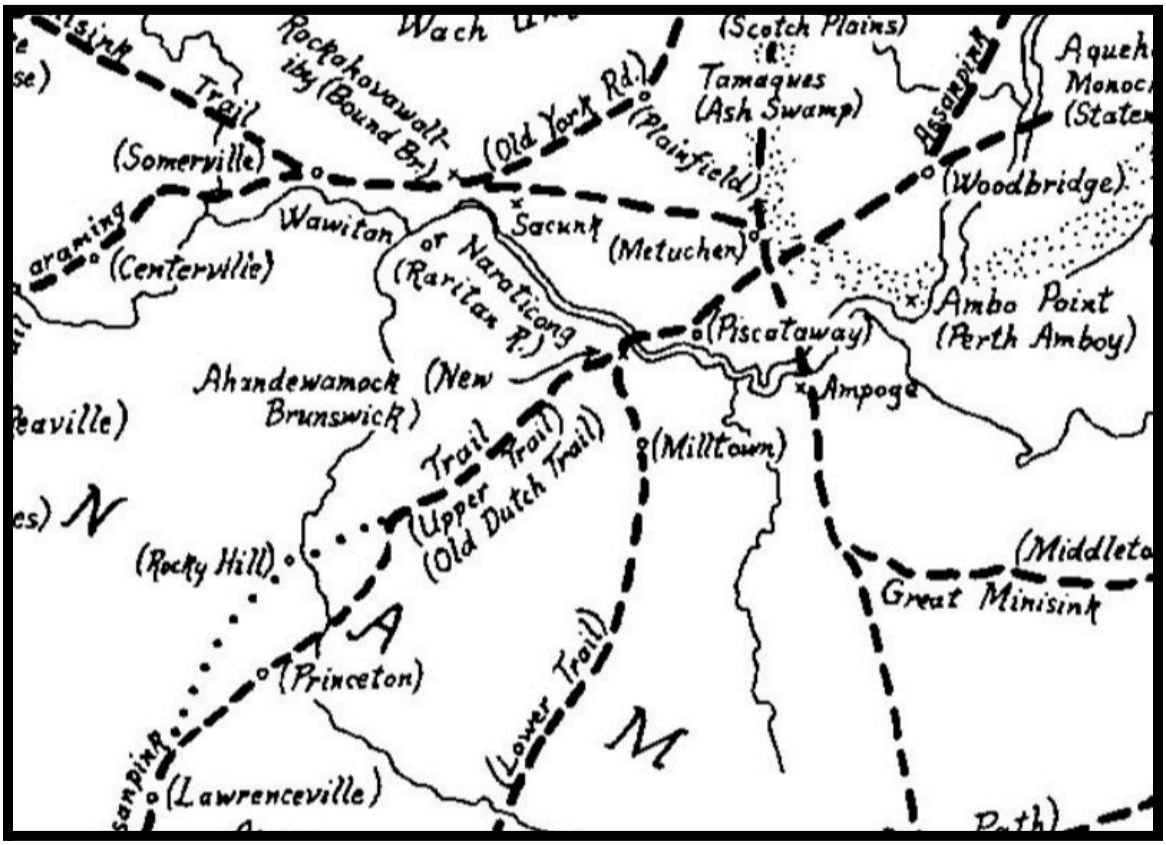

The Story of New Jersey Civil Boundaries 1202-1968 by John P. Snyder, millstonevalley.org/lenape.html.

SOUTH BRUNSWICK HISTORICAL SOCIETY

Chapter 1. The First Native Americans

To discover the origins of the first humans to set foot on land that would become South Brunswick Township, one must travel back in time at least 20,000 years. From the river basins of the Lena and the Aldan in Siberia came the Stone Age spear hunters who crossed over the land bridge at what is now the Bering Strait. They were pursuing large beasts, such as the mastodon and the mammoth, south along a difficult corridor between glaciers which covered most of North America. These paleo-Native Americans (meaning the first of their kind in the Paleolithic- "ancient"-"stone" -age in North America) wandered across the heartland, with some bands heading east all the way to the ocean shores of the Atlantic. With the recession of the Wisconsin ice sheet, starting some 13,000 years ago, all of what would become New Jersey served as potential hunting grounds for these paleo-Native Americans. All of these spear hunters had to have passed through the area that was to become South Brunswick Township thousands of years later.No trace of their presence has been found in this area as of yet. However, the possibility of finding something of theirs always remains.

The earliest humans to walk on South Brunswick land were resourceful and skilled meat-eaters. They were adept at tool-making--especially in fashioning broad, fluted spear points, used for felling such large beasts as mastodons and mammoths. They made fires for roasting meat and for keeping warm. They prepared animal skins for clothing, using sinew and gut for sewing with needles of bone. They employed thick, warm clothing and boots to battle the daily cold temperatures, which were well below the South Brunswick temperatures of today.

At the waning of the Wisconsin glacial period, the Jersey coast extended more than fifty miles out from where it lies today. It was a broad, flat region cut by deep river channels, and was a vast extension of the outer coastal plain. The land that made South Brunswick back then lay west of this region and was part of the inner coastal plain (except for South Brunswick's western extremities, which are part of the piedmont area of New Jersey). Thus, the land served as a transitional area for spear hunters who tracked big game on the outer coastal plain. As the glacier continued to recede due to rising temperatures, meltwater swelled the rivers roaring through the inner coastal plain and running across the outer coastal plain in order to empty into the rising ocean. In turn, ocean waters reclaimed much of the outer coastal land on the continental shelf. In addition, glacial lakes were formed inland, as were vast swamps and marshes. The lake that covered most of what became Kendall Park is gone, but swamps--such as Pigeon Swamp and Burnet's Swamp--remain. The spear hunters would have had to use hunting trails around such impediments when passing through the area. They probably preferred high ground when available and/or traced streams and rivers.

Glacial recession started with not much growing on the ground--lichens, mosses, and dwarf trees were found all the way down to the outer coastline. Later, vast grasslands and marshes attracted such beasts as mammoths, musk oxen, and caribou. Where there were spruce, pine, birch, oak, and beech trees, as well as low bushes and plants, Mastodons, moose-elk, peccaries, white-tailed deer, and giant sloths could be found. Competing with the spear hunters in the area were the dire wolf, black bear, saber-tooth tiger, and the short-faced bear. However, these carnivores were also a meat source for the bravest of the spear hunters. Other animals, such as tapirs, giant beavers, and moose, as well as aquatic birds, could be found around the lakes, bogs, ponds, and streams.

If a band of twenty to forty people happened to set up a campsite in what became South Brunswick Township, it probably would have been located on higher ground and associated with rock outcroppings. Such places would have provided shelter and protection as well as a source for tool-making. The Rocky Hill area or the Sand Hill area come to mind. Another possibility would have been on a ridge embankment of a stream such as the Millstone River or Lawrence Brook. A cave would have been nice, but finding one in the South Brunswick area would have been remote. Surrounding a suitable open-air campsite would have been a hunting range of three hundred square miles. This would ensure enough meat sources to feed all men, women, and children in the band. The best opportunities for successful kills would have been to the south and east of the campsite. This range would have included the swamps, streams, and flatter lands of South Brunswick.

With their sharpened bone points and fluted flint spear points, the men who made up a hunting party were equal to the challenge of coaxing a mammoth or mastodon into a depression or marshy area, thereby slowing it down, and spearing it many times over. By harassing and distracting a large beast on one side, spearmen on the other side could get close enough to thrust their weapons. As the prey weakened and slowed, one or more hunters could deliver a death thrust into the heart or lungs and finish off the prey. Then came the work by the women and the men to convert every part of the fallen beast into food, clothing, shelter, tools, and whatever was needed. The same was true for smaller beasts. Caribou, a primary source for meat, clothing, and antler tools, was easier to bring down than a mammoth or mastodon. Hunters would cause a caribou herd to stampede toward other hunters hiding in ambush in a narrow area. They could have done this locally, chasing caribou into the Millstone River. The prey would slow down and be killed.

Besides lake and stream fish, ducks and geese, bird eggs, hares, and other small animals, the spear hunters also consumed edible plants such as sedge, goosefoot, huckleberry, blackberry, smartweed, and several others. The need to do so was dependent on how long they stayed in the South Brunswick area before moving on and what season it was. There was no such thing as a permanent site in this area. They might have stayed for more than a month, but not much longer than that. While the men were out hunting, the women might have been foraging for plants when they were not concentrating on prepping hides for various uses. They probably enjoyed a break from scraping and cutting the hides; removing the fur by soaking the skins in urine; treating the skins with animal brains and liver oils to make them supple; then chewing the skins to make them more supple. In the process of turning hides into something useful, cutting and scraping tools, bone awls for making holes, and bone needles had to be used.

Some tools were made out of stone. Prize cherts, jaspers, and flints were either found at quarry sites or left behind by receding glaciers. Spear hunters visiting the South Brunswick area could have brought such stones with them, found them at such places as Little Rocky Hill, or traded for them with other bands passing through. In the mind of a paleo-Native American, each tool or weapon had to be made well in order to avoid offending both the prey and the numerous spirits. A poorly made stone device was unacceptable to such spear hunters.

Life expectancy among the first humans in the South Brunswick area was 30-35 years. Infant mortality rates were high. The deaths of mothers giving birth were also high. Infanticide was practiced if a newborn was sickly, deformed, or unresponsive. Such early visitors to South Brunswick land were prone to bouts of famine, poor diets, and various diseases. Those who could not keep up with the band had to be abandoned. Such decision-making was made by a headman and elders.
Each hunting foray called for a leader of exceptional ability. Women led children on foraging missions in order to teach them which plants were edible and which were not, and which plants could be used for medicinal purposes. Religious beliefs were passed down from generation to generation. All things possessed spirits which had to be worshipped and appeased through sacrifice. The sun and the moon played important roles in the process. Rudimentary scarring and tattooing were done for religious purposes by using gravers to prick the skin and shape patterns. Ash was rubbed into wounds to raise scars.

The paleo-spear hunter's world began to change dramatically around 10,000 years ago when the giant mammals were close to extinction. At the time, warming temperatures were melting the glacial ice and opening up vast areas for caribou and musk oxen to the

north of what became New Jersey. The majority of spear hunters followed such migrating animals. They vanished from the South Brunswick area--never to return. However, there were some who remained in the region. They adapted to a land that was taken over by deciduous forests surrounding the watery areas. Smaller animals were hunted by humans who were coming from the west or moving inland from the coastal regions. The large spearheads were no longer needed. These late paleo-Native Americans preferred the smaller, unfluted triangular-shaped spearheads, which were better suited for bringing down smaller game. The stage was now set for the next age of Native Americans in the South Brunswick area.

Chapter 2. Native Americans During the Archaic Period

The Archaic period of the Native American experience in what would become South Brunswick Township stretched from 9,000 to 2,000 years ago. The small mobile bands of hunter/gatherers of this time found most areas heavily forested and a few areas dominated by grasses and swamp vegetation. The most promising areas for game were around lakes, ponds, rivers, and streams. All these features could have been found in the South Brunswick area during these years. The Native Americans who visited this land still hunted in small bands, as did the new folk moving up the Atlantic coast, following the rivers and passing through. These groups used unfluted notched and stemmed spear points. They hunted what they could, did not stay more than a season, and moved on. The variety of spearpoints, such as bifurcated ones with serrated edges, indicates that some of these Native Americans came from Appalachian areas. One of the favored routes of these hunters, as well as other bands, was along the Assanpink drainage, which is a bit south of what became South Brunswick land. It is not a stretch to imagine bands of Native Americans from various points of origin passing through South Brunswick and leaving traces of their being here. Their artifacts are waiting to be found.

As the years went by and the outer coastal lands were claimed by ocean waters, all living things were adapting to warming climate conditions. New groups of hunters were forcing old groups of hunters out. There was no permanence of human habitation in the area. By 6,000 years ago, the environment was pretty much like it is today. Broadleaf deciduous trees provided mast foods which attracted all sorts of foraging animals. Deer and elk were abundant in grassy areas. Fish and fowl were plentiful in their watery habitats. From the Rock Hill and Sand Hill heights to the southerly sprawl of swamplands at lower elevations, what would become South Brunswick was a good place to hunt and also a good place to gather edible things.

To process what was to be found on this land, better tools were needed. The axe and the adze were among them. These were used for chopping down large trees and carving out canoes. Smaller sharp tools were needed to craft bowls and other wooden items. Controlled fire was still used to fell large trees and hollow out canoes, and even bowls. Sinew and gut were used for hafting stone and bone to carved wooden handles of various tools. These included better tools for processing hides and preparing food. The semi-lunar knife and shaped milling stones are examples from these times.
Better weapons were always in demand for hunting and protection. The atlat (a catapulting device) allowed a hunter to toss a spear farther and with more accuracy. The bolas (made of weights in skin pouches on separate lines) were flung by hunters in order to wrap around the prey and bring it down. With new and improved weapons, the growing bands of hunters could also defend their territories better. They probably had more occasions to do so as the Native American population grew. Territories had become more clearly defined. There may have been a particular band that claimed the South Brunswick area as its own, and they most likely defended it well. Territorial claims were probably seasonal, with attention paid to wetlands in the summer and forested areas in the fall when nuts were ripe and attracting game. On the other hand, the hunting areas could have brought bands together for peaceful social exchange. Such confrontations could have occurred at some temporary site, especially in the summer, on high ground overlooking a swampy area.

A new tool at this time was the broad but thin spear point. Bands from the south probably introduced such a point, or it could have been introduced by the Native Americans from the Appalachian areas who were moving into the Jersey Piedmont area above South Brunswick. Another device was the wooden spear with a fire-tempered point. Antler tines were also being fashioned into spear tips at this time. Also new to the area was the soapstone kettle. This item was used to cook soups, stews, and porridge over an open fire. It could hold up at high temperatures and would not crack. Soapstone came from quarries in present-day Maryland and Pennsylvania.
New bands in the South Brunswick area must have brought such an item with them and perhaps offered it in trade.

As the population grew, so did the number of campsites and semi-permanent settlements. Such a site was possible along a major river like the Millstone. Where a large, flat stone could be found, a site for grinding wild grains and nuts could be established in order to better feed a growing population. Suitable places for fires and fire pits in clearings would allow for food to be cooked in bark containers, stomach pouches of larger game, on hot rocks pulled from the fire, or hot rocks dropped in liquid to bring it to a boil. At such sites, possible forms of shelter might include an oval-shaped structure or a rectangular structure. These were made from bark, reeds, and grasses over a

frame of saplings. It is remotely possible that a burial site might also be associated with a seasonal settlement. Cremation of the deceased was common during these years. Buried along with the remains would have been the person's prized possessions.

The Archaic Period was a time of grudging progress for the Native Americans who passed through what would become South Brunswick Township. The stage was set for the better-known tribal phenomenon in the area.

Chapter 3. The Early Woodland Native Americans

Three thousand years ago, the Woodland Period of Native American habitation of what would become New Jersey started. The term "woodland" comes from the Eastern Woodlands, which stretched from the Mississippi River east to the Atlantic Ocean. The first thousand years made up the Early Woodland days and featured the making of pottery along with a continuation of traits from the late Archaic Period. More advanced Native Americans from regions west of what is now New Jersey came to trade with lesser folk who were found in what became the South Brunswick area.
The newcomers wore elaborate woven garments and shiny ornaments made from copper, shells, and unusual stones. They most likely introduced pottery making to the Native Americans already here.

Wherever there was a clearing near a large stream or overlooking swampland, the possibility of a temporary site for the newcomers, in what would become South Brunswick, was feasible. Earlier Native Americans could have been using these same sites. In a typical clearing, there might have been huts of bark or thatch, fire pits, dugout canoes, and soapstone pots. Most hours would have been occupied with hunting, fishing, and gathering. The best food resources in the South Brunswick area would have been where the Piedmont uplands met the inner coastal plain along the Fall Line, which runs along the eastern side of what is now Route 1. The remaining hours were used for familial activities centered around meal preparation, tool making, and the prepping of animal skins for various purposes. The language used throughout the day was probably of Algonquin origin.

Innovations included clay pottery; fishtail spear points, which replaced the Archaic broad-spear points; specially trimmed paring knives; fishtail engravers, scrapers, and strike-a-lights; platform stones for drying fish, along with cobble-stone hearths; a greater variety of soapstone pots and repair of such pots by lacing them with rawhide; and novel forms of ornamentation. The most important innovation was the crafting of pottery out of clay. The idea of making clay vessels came from the Native Americans of the Southeast. The first pottery vessels in the local area were imitations of soapstone

bowls, but they were lighter and easier to carry. The clay, found locally in the Sand Hills area and the area later known as Dallenbach's, was tempered with bits of steatite, sand, or crushed shells. Such a pot had a flat base, sloping sides, and handle shapes on the sides. From the north, around this time, came the cone-shaped clay pots marked with cord impressions.

This was a time of profound outside influences having an impact on the Native Americans already in the local area. The mysterious Meadowood Native Americans came from central New York by canoe and got as far as the Delaware Valley. They were traders as well as hunters and gatherers. They left meager evidence of having visited what became New Jersey, but they left behind knife blades of Onondaga chert, Meadowood spear points, stone gorgets of polished slate, pottery vessels, birdstones, and tubular pipes for smoking.

The Adena peoples from the Ohio River Valley also made contact with local Native Americans at this time. They were known for their burial mounds, and the elaborate contents therein, but no such mound has ever been discovered in the local area. Among burial finds in other places were blocked-end smoking pipes, boatstones, beavertail spear points, annealed copper beads, and squash gourds. Adena peoples were into gardening and might have introduced their crops and techniques to Native Americans in the local area. Besides the "three sisters" (corn, beans, and squash), they were growing sunflowers, sumpweed, melons, pumpkins, and tobacco.

Other groups may have visited the area that was to become South Brunswick, but no trace of them has been found. Most of the other groups kept to the coast and did not wander inland to hunt and forage on the inner coastal plain. This concludes the findings and speculations on the Early Woodland Period.

Chapter 4. The Middle Woodland Native Americans

The Middle Woodland Period occurred more than a thousand years ago. There was yet no evidence of Europeans or Africans visiting the eastern shores of North America. Even the Vikings had not made it across yet. This was a time for visitors, but they were all of Native American stock.

One group was from the Fox Creek peoples who kept to coastal areas and navigable rivers. They brought with them their own stylized spear points, knives, scrapers, drills, and reamers. They also used axes, pounding stones, pestles, and the like. Unique to their culture was the petalas blade, made from argillite or chert, that was used in the butchering process for fish. It is doubtful that any Fox Creek band ever made it to what

would become the South Brunswick area. However, it is possible that Fox Creek trade items found their way to the local area. They might have included long copper needles and large open-mouthed unglazed pots. The Fox Creek groups tended to seek shelter under rock overhangs or construct flimsy lean-tos. They were fishers, hunters, and foragers, but not farmers. Thus, they were always on the move and challenged most severely by the winter season. After the spring fishing season, the Fox Creek bands tended to move inland to forage during the summer months and early fall. Whether any of them came onto South Brunswick land is pure conjecture. They did seek out campsites near lakes and streams, so it is not impossible that they visited here.

Another group to possibly pass through the local area were the Kipp Island Native Americans, who originated in central New York. They left behind pentagonal-shaped projectile points, straight-based platform pipes, beaver tooth incising tools, and shark tooth beads. This group may have introduced the bow and arrow to the Native Americans already in the local area. Such a weapon would soon make the spear obsolete.

The Middle Woodland Period was a time for change, but not dramatic change, except for the introduction of the bow and arrow. It took many years for new ideas to catch on in the local area. The triangular arrowhead did eventually replace all other types of projectile points. Collarless pottery vessels with rounded bottoms and corded decorations replaced the old net-impressed vessels. There was no permanent settlement yet, and, therefore, no intensive farming. However, the dawn of the coming of the Lenni-Lenape would bring dramatic changes.

Chapter 5. The Late Woodland Native Americans (part A)

The pre-1600 A.D. Native Americans of the Late Woodland Period, associated with the area that was to become South Brunswick, were part of the Algonquian-speaking peoples of the northeast. This particular group was known as the Lenni-Lenape (meaning "men of men" or "the original people"). The Lenape were made up of small communal groups separated by varying distances, but each identifying with large clans. Each clan had its own dialect. On the north side of the Raritan River were found the Munsee-speaking clans. On the south side of the river were found the Unami-speaking clans. The Unami sub-groups included the Assunpink, Siconesee, Naraconck, Mantaes, Armewamek, Rumkokes, Okehocking, Aquackanonk, Axion, Calcefar, Canarsee, Gachwechaguchba, Hackensack, Matas, Schackamaxons, Chichequaas, Raritan, Nanticokes, Tatelos, Sankhikan, and several others. Likely candidates for groups using the South Brunswick area were probably the Calcefar up from the Delaware River by

what is now Trenton and/or the Raritan down from the river of the same name. It is definite that the people in the South Brunswick area were Lenape and Unami speaking.

The origins of the Lenape are subject to speculation. They were a wandering folk just like the Native Americans who preceded them. They may have migrated from southern Canada thousands of years ago due to famine and war. They would have headed south, passing through what became western New York and Ohio. They would have passed through the land of the Mound People to make their way east to the land by the "Salt Sea." They called this land "Scheyechbi" (or New Jersey). Another possibility was a migration from the far west. These folk crossed the Mississippi (Namisisipu) and met up with the Mengwes while heading east. The two groups formed an alliance and conquered the Allegewis (Allegheny). The Mengwes then headed to the Hudson (Mahicannick) River. The Lenape stopped at the Delaware (Wihittuck) River and headed north and south along it. Those folk heading north had to fight against the Iroquois, and they lost. They became vassals to the stronger tribe and were forced to pay an annual tribute. Those folk heading south had an easier and more peaceful time of it, even when the Iroquois bothered to come south along the Delaware River. The superior Iroquois looked upon all Lenape males as inferior and referred to them as women.

The Lenape eventually settled a large area that stretched from eastern Pennsylvania to the Atlantic Ocean, and from eastern Delaware to Southern New York. The total population of the Lenape nation was probably less than 10,000 people, with about 3-4,000 in New Jersey, by the time the European settlers arrived. The three major groupings of the Lenni-Lenape sub-tribes were the Minse (or Munsee) "wolf" tribe to the north; the Unalachtigo "turkey" tribe to the south; and the Unami "turtle" tribe in the central region, which included the South Brunswick area. The traditional tribal area of the combined three sub-tribes, and twenty lesser divisions, came to be known as "Lenapehoking.":

Chapter 5. The Late Woodland Native Americans (part B)

The Lenni Lenape in the South Brunswick area may have used the land for a small settlement site, or more than one site, along the Millstone River (Mattawong) where Stony Brook feeds into the river or at a fording spot at what is now known as Kingston (Wapowog). Another spot could have been along Lawrence Brook (Piscopeck). A third possibility was the open land between swamps, later called Indian Fields, and associated with Devil's Brook. Another possibility was a site along the southern Assanpink Trail, which ran from the Raritan River, at what is now known as New Brunswick, south to the Delaware River at the Trenton Falls. Route 27 and Route 206 south basically follow this old Native American trail, which was also known as the

Raritan path. It was used to get to hunting grounds, to get to large ceremonial gatherings, or for trading purposes. There may have been a settlement where Six-Mile Run crossed the Assanpink Trail. Four miles from the Millstone River at Kingston, there might have been a Native American settlement that was mentioned by the 17th-century missionaries, Danker and Sluyter. There was also the possibility of a settlement along the Crosswicksung Trail, which ran roughly where Georges Road runs from New Brunswick down through Cranbury and Hightstown. This trail, paralleling Lawrence Brook, cuts through what is now known as Deans and Dayton into the woods east of what is known as the old Princeton Nurseries. Such a settlement, or campsite, would have been found on the high ground between the marshes. It would have been similar to the 4,000-year-old campsite discovered north of One Mile Road in East Windsor close to Route 130. At this site, several Native American artifacts were found, including long thin pestles and a flat circular mano for grinding nuts and seeds. A large, flat communal Native American grinding stone was also found by South Brunswick resident Herb Wright, in the vicinity of Deans Pond. He had the stone hauled to his property on Georges Road, where it sits today across from the Crossroads North Middle School.

Other possible sites include one in Cranbury associated with the Crosswicksung Trail. A sub-trail once existed off the Crosswicksung. It skirted what became known as Pigeon Swamp and linked the Crosswicksung Trail to the shore region beyond Jamesburg and Englishtown. A minor settlement could have existed along this route and may have been associated with the Indian Fields area. There were also possible temporary sites such as quarry extraction sites at Little Rocky Hill or Sand Hills. A quarry base camp could have been established near a river or stream in those areas.
Where Dallenbach's Sand and Gravel now sits, a quarry site might have existed. Hunting camps could have been set up wherever game was plentiful and/or where the game could have been driven into ambush areas, such as along the Fall Line east of what is now Route 1. Reduction stations could have been set up between major sites. Thus, the possibilities for Native American sites in the South Brunswick area are numerous. There is much work to be done finding those sites and any artifacts associated with them.

Chapter 5. The Late Woodland Native Americans (part C)

A typical Lenape-Unami settlement site, in what became the South Brunswick area, consisted of a small number of round houses with a single family in the small type and several families in the large type. These dwellings (perhaps five or fewer, with no more than 40 per settlement) were made of saplings in a circle with their tops tied together. The saplings were covered with bark and grasses. A hole was in the roof to allow smoke to escape. Pine boughs and wooden benches were used for beds. Usually each

dwelling had only one entrance. There was no sense of permanence in the construction of these dwellings. When game grew scarce and/or the land played out, a small group would move to another site. Locating a site was usually determined by the season. Such a settlement might be abandoned for an extended period of time during a seasonal round of hunting and fishing.

Hunting and fishing remained customary male pursuits. The fishing, in what became the South Brunswick area, had to have taken place in the Millstone River or any of the sizable streams in the area. The Native Americans used large nets, usually made of hemp strands, dogbane, or nettle fibers twisted into cords. Such large nets were spread across the river. Smaller nets were used in wading or when tossed from canoes. Stone net sinkers of various sizes were used on the nets and seines. Basket weirs were also used to catch fish and eels. Local Native Americans probably also used spears and bows and arrows when fishing. Fish hooks and harpoons were not used. The caught fish were smoked and dried over cobble-lined hearths and rock-filled platforms.

Hunting in the area involved bringing down or trapping deer, elk, bears, beavers, rabbits, raccoons, skunks, squirrels, turkeys, geese, ducks, swans, turtles, frogs, and so on. The bow and arrow was the favored weapon for hunting during the Late Woodland Period. The bows were quite long, as were the arrows. Arrowheads were triangular in shape. A hunt could last for days. Often, the prey had to be chased, tired out, and finally brought down. The hunter would lug his kill back to the site, and his mate would take over from there. Successful hunters and their mates always gave generous amounts of the kill to others. Autumn was the best hunting season, especially for deer.
The area for deer hunting may have been larger than the South Brunswick area-a mere part of a much larger communal hunting territory. Any landmark boundaries within the area would have been respected by each group in the territory.

Chapter 5. The Late Woodland Native Americans (part D)

Settling down in one place in order to farm was not an easy transition for wandering hunter/gatherers like the Lenape. Many of this tribe's groups resisted the idea for a long time and carried on as they had done for thousands of years. The first Lenape, in the area that would become South Brunswick Township, to do some farming did not abandon their hunting/gathering habits. They did both for many years. Whatever gardens were started and tended to in the local area usually could be found near streams where alluvial soils were located. A prime local area for some farming might have been Indian Fields. The Native Americans there had no plows or plow animals. Tools were small and simple. They had hoes made of wood and stone. They had dibble sticks to make holes for planting seeds. Some forested areas were cleared with axes

and/or controlled burns in order to create more land for planting and, at the same time, fertilize the soil. The end result was that farming remained on a small scale and never made hunting and gathering obsolete.

How the Lenape came into farming is based on conjecture. Either they developed it through trial and error or borrowed ideas from groups with which they came in contact. They may have imitated other groups in clearing sapling-covered sites, felling larger trees, and burning the underbrush ... the resultant ash acting as fertilizer. Corn, beans, and squash seeds were planted as other groups had done. To do all this, a group had to remain in an area for a longer period of time than previously experienced. Thus, farming may have caused a group to remain in the South Brunswick area for more than one season.

Farming took place from April through September. Most of the work was done by females. The main crop was the diminutive northern corn (maize). Crops of grains, beans, squash, and pumpkins were grown around the corn. Tobacco and sunflowers may also have been planted in the area. Most of the harvested crops were stored away for consumption in the winter. Food was kept in reed baskets, skin pouches, mended pots, and storage pits. The staple corn was eaten right off the cob, or boiled, or roasted. Dried corn was pulverized into meal for making hominy, or bread, or sampan (mush). Lenape ate two meals a day. Cornmeal and meat or fish were consumed almost every day. Another food source to rely on was wild plants. Again, women and children did most of the gathering. Nuts and berries were available in great quantity in the local area.

Surplus meat and fish were dried in strips and later boiled for consumption. Animal bones were crushed in order to consume nutritious marrow. Dogs were rarely used as a meat source and usually only in times of famine. Animal skins and furs, as well as bones, hooves, claws, intestines, and sinews served many essential purposes.

Weaving was rare in the Late Woodland period, except in the making of baskets and mats. Pottery was common and varied in shape, size, and style. Clay for pottery-making was mixed with crushed stone, sand, shell, or fibers to prevent cracking during the drying process. Coil construction on the pottery was popular at this time. A paddle and a scraper were used to make sure the coils were fused together to make the vessel hold up for a time. Pots tended to be larger than the ones made before this time. Exterior designs were more varied.

Chapter 5. The Late Woodland Native Americans (part E)

The local Lenni-Lenape could be identified by their dialect, their tattoos, and their body painting designs. Red and black were their favorite colors, with white being a close third. Animal designs were preferred for body decorations. They also cut their ears and elongated the lobes by adding weights over time. Some pierced their noses with such sharp objects as porcupine quills. They greased their hair with bear fat to make it shine. Some wore their hair in long braids on one side or both sides.
Others wore a circular crown of hair and plucked or shaved the sides bald. They greased their bodies in all seasons in order to repel bugs and for warmth, especially in winter. The weather determined the clothing--breechcloth in the summer; animal skins and leggings in the winter. Women wore short skirts in the summer and dressed like the men in the winter. Men and women wore jewelry derived from stringing animal teeth, claws, shells, stones, and wood. They usually wore feathered mantles for ceremonial activities. Small tubular shells and pointed wooden beads were often used as wampum, with black and white objects as the most valuable.

Lenape Native Americans favored matrilineal descent, with the mother and her siblings having a higher status and priority over others in a group. A mature woman was held is highest esteem-she ruled a house, and her children belonged to her clan, not her mate's clan. A settlement in the South Brunswick area would have been matrilocal, with a mother's daughters living with their mates where the mother was located. All children were raised by a mother and her sisters. The male's main role was as a provider and protector. When a man found a mate, he left his family and moved in with his mate's family. Such mating always took place outside a particular group. A male was eligible for mating at 17; a female at 13. The usual custom of courtship depended on the female selecting a male after gaining her mother's consent. A young couple would live in the mother's house until the mother decided it was time to allow the couple to make their own hut. Polygamy was rare among the Lenape.

For a boy to be considered a man and eligible to be chosen by a female, he was first treated badly by adults in his family. They encouraged him to wander off alone on a vision quest. While sleeping in the woods, a guardian spirit would appear to him in a dream. The guardian spirit was sent by the supreme god, Manitou. The male was to prepare an offering to the new guardian spirit before returning to his settlement as a man. If successful, he became part of the spirit world and was ready to hunt with the men in the forest. He was also eligible to become a mate.

Chapter 5. The Late Woodland Native Americans (part F)

The origins of the Lenape are bound to their religious beliefs. According to their time-honored traditions, all things started with the actions of the supreme god, Manitou, who ruled over all beings. The first human to fall from the sky was a pregnant woman who was caught by great birds and deposited on the shell of a giant turtle. This "first woman" bore many creatures, including a deer, a bear, a wolf, and more. She also bore twin boys who possessed traits of the first three animals. From the start, Manitou created the cycles of life for all people, including the Lenape, who were the last Native Americans to visit the land that would eventually become South Brunswick. These cycles included the annual round of seasons, life and death, war and peace, sickness and health, planting and harvesting, and so forth. Humans, in turn, created ceremonies and sacrifices to acknowledge all these cycles. Many of these ceremonies were conducted in the summer. One was conducted at the first harvest. This was the Green Corn ceremony, which lasted 12 days--sacrifices were made to the Corn Woman in order that the latest crop be protected against drought, famine, and/or pestilence.

Good and bad spirits had to be appeased by offerings and sacrifices. Spirits were in all living things. To deal with such spirits, a group had a shaman who was usually an elderly diviner and curer. The shaman possessed the power to predict weather, make rain, prevent misfortune, heal the sick, prepare potions, and assist in childbirth.

Leadership took a few forms. A chief would have been a male chosen by the women with the highest status in a group. The chief would reign in peacetime. He would turn leadership over to the strongest male in the group in times of war. Decisions at most of the time were made in a council involving the chief, shaman, elders, and warriors. War was rare in one cycle for the Lenape before the coming of the Europeans. Their main foe was the Iroquois to the north, who raided Lenape territory upon occasion. The Lenape were then forced to wage a defensive war, which they usually lost. It is doubtful any Iroquois raids occurred in the South Brunswick area. Most warfare occurred along the northern reaches of the Delaware River. The Lenape of the South Brunswick area were peace-loving. The closest thing to "war" in the area was a lightning storm, which the Lenape believed was a battle between the forces of good and evil.

Sadly, the days of peace and contentment among the Lenape in the South Brunswick area did not continue through the 1600's. A strange and alien people came to settle on bountiful land and bring death and destruction to the Native American way of life. By the end of the 1700's, the Lenape were no longer a presence in the Township. Traces of their having been here remain buried in the ground. Little has been found. Hopefully,

future generations will have better luck in finding evidence of the first humans to inhabit South Brunswick land.

Compiled and updated in 2026 by Kelan Amme, Local History Librarian. Some details and original sources may be unconfirmed. If you have questions, please email **kamme@sbpl.info**.