

**DUTCH AND NATIVE AMERICAN HERITAGE IN THE HUDSON VALLEY**  
**WHITE PAPER**

**Prepared for the Hudson River Valley Greenway**

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**July 17, 2018**

## **Indigenous Peoples of the Hudson Valley**

Prior to European arrival, the Hudson River Valley was home to a thriving network of diverse Native American societies. The lower river valley was home to the Munsee Indians, a branch of the Algonquin-speaking Lenape. Known later as the Delaware, the Lenape were usually the first Native Americans European explorers encountered in North America, and they showed the new arrivals how to navigate the rivers and to survive in the New World. Today the island of Manhattan retains the Munsee name for the island: *Mannahatta*, “the island of many hills.”

The upper Hudson Valley was home to the Mohicans, a related group of Algonquin-speaking people with whom the Munsee frequently traded and interacted. Also known historically as the “Mahicans,” the Mohicans derive their name from their word for the Hudson River: *Muhicanituk*, “the water that flows both ways.”

The upper river valley was also home to the Mohawk tribe, who lived in the Mohawk River Valley and traveled east to hunt, trade, and occasionally wage war with the neighboring Mahican tribes. The Mohawk are the easternmost branch of the Six Nations of the Haudenosaunee Confederacy, a political league whose structure inspired the United States’ federalist government system. For the Native peoples living in the region, religion and ecology were closely entwined. Early Dutch settlers learned important survival techniques from the Native Americans and admired many of their cultural practices, including a strong diplomatic ability and sophisticated societies far less violent and criminal than the sailors were used to in Europe.

Trade with the Dutch gave Native Americans access to goods like woolen fabrics, glass beads, and steel tools, but the Europeans also carried new diseases that decimated much of the Indian population. Wars and violent conflicts with the settlers became more frequent as the Dutch colony grew, further reducing the American Indian population and pushing them from their traditional homelands.

Political pressure forced the indigenous peoples to sell or otherwise lose their territories. Many tribes were forced to migrate west, surviving in what became the tribal nations today of Stockbridge Munsee Community (Wisconsin), and the Delaware Tribe and Delaware Nation (Oklahoma). Other communities remained in New York and assimilated into the new American society. Today, New York State is home to eight federally recognized tribes and over 220,000 people who identify as American Indian or Alaska Native. Community engagement among members of the Mohawks, Mohicans, Munsee, and many other tribes remains active around the Hudson River Valley National Heritage Area.

## **New Netherland**

In 1609, Henry Hudson and his crew were the first Europeans to sail into what is now called the Hudson River Valley. Exploring for the Dutch East India Company, they met and traded with Lenape and Mohawk villages throughout the region. Although they failed to discover a northwest passage to Asia, Hudson’s ship the *Half Moon* returned to

Amsterdam with reports of a beautiful land, rich in resources and navigable by what Hudson's first mate Robert Juet called "as fine a river as can be found."

Dutch traders quickly established posts in the New World, gradually dominating the trade economy begun by the Native Americans. At **Fort Orange** (1624) on the upper Hudson River, Mohawk and Mohican trappers became an important source for beaver pelts, which were fashionable and in very high demand in Europe. The lucrative trade in beaver furs was so critical to New Netherland that this northern outpost was called Beverwijck, before being renamed Albany at the end of the 17th century.

In the 1620's, the Dutch West India Company decided to expand their colony's territory and population. They—in their view—"purchased" land from the Native peoples in the region and sold large properties to Dutch landowners, called *patroons*. The first and largest of these patroonships was the estate of Kilaen Van Rensselaer. Granted in 1629, Rensselaerswijck encompassed the land surrounding Albany and extended for miles on both sides of the Hudson River. **Crailo State Historic Site** (1707) was the Van Rensselaer family's home until 1924. Today the house is a museum preserving the story of Dutch colonial settlement in the upper Hudson River Valley.

Goods from Beverwijck were transported down the Hudson River to other Dutch settlements, including the village of Esopus in the mid-Hudson Valley and New Amsterdam at the southern tip of Manhattan. Esopus, later renamed Wiltwijck and finally Kingston, attracted settlers as a fertile place to grow wheat and other crops. Wheat was measured out in schepels as a medium of currency to purchase land, enslaved Africans, and goods at the market. Dutch farms encroached on land traditionally used by the Esopus Indians and tensions grew as the Esopus resisted permanent occupation of their territory. Two local conflicts known as the Esopus Wars led the Dutch to build a defensive stockade around their town in 1658. The **Uptown Stockade District** in Kingston is the largest remaining example of early Dutch settlement in New York State.

When English ships seized New Amsterdam in 1664, Dutch governor Peter Stuyvesant reluctantly oversaw New Netherland's peaceful transition to become the province of New York. The terms of surrender allowed Dutch inhabitants to continue their way of life, and so Dutch cultural influence remained strong.

### **Harmony with Nature**

The identity of the Hudson River Valley is tied to its breathtaking natural scenery, and much of the landscape was shaped by the indigenous communities who lived here. Using controlled burning techniques, Munsee and Mohican tribes would clear patches of woodland to create fields where they could grow staple crops such as corn, beans, and squash. They later shared these farming techniques with the Dutch colonists, aiding their survival. Native Americans' sustainable practices have thus fostered not only for the Hudson Valley's rich agriculture, but also many of the open meadows and views that have inspired Hudson River School painters and others for centuries.

For a glimpse of the natural valley as it was in the 17th century, wander the hiking trails of **Hudson Highlands State Park Preserve, Harriman State Park, Clarence Fahnestock Memorial State Park**, or one of the many trails maintained by the Hudson River Valley Greenway.

The Dutch left their mark on the Hudson Valley's landscape notably through their distinctive architecture. Original farmhouses like those at the **Bronck Museum** (1663 & 1738), the **Madam Brett Park and Homestead** (1709), and the **Jacob Blaauvelt House** (1832) preserve the building style popular among early Dutch immigrants, featuring elements including gambrel roofs, overhanging eaves, and compact layout designs.

### **Cultural & Political Influences**

The 17th century is remembered as the Dutch Golden Age, a time when the Netherlands dominated the global economy and Dutch society was the most progressive in Europe. A practical and relatively tolerant society, Amsterdam was a place of opportunity for not just the Dutch middle class, but for minority groups facing persecution elsewhere: Catholics, Protestants, Jews, Puritans, and French Walloons. These people were folded into the thriving Dutch economy, and these were the people sent to populate the Dutch West India Company's colony in the New World.

New Netherland had features that modern Americans will find familiar: ethnic diversity, laws protecting religious freedom, and an economy built on free trade and an early model of the stock exchange. Dutch, Munsee, Mohican, Mohawk, African, and European people of many backgrounds worked closely together to build this early colony, and for centuries their descendants have continued to shape the cultural and political landscape of the Hudson River Valley.

Daniel Ninham, a *sachem*, or chief, of the Wappinger Indians, was an 18th-century political leader and hero. Ninham defended his people's homeland, even traveling to England to legally challenge the patent that granted the Wappingers' territory to Dutch landowners during the French & Indian War. Hoping to negotiate better terms for the Wappingers in an independent America, Ninham supported the colonists in the American Revolution. **Indian Field**, part of Van Cortlandt Park in the Bronx, honors Ninham, his son Abraham, and the fifteen other Stockbridge Munsee Mohican warriors who died fighting the Queen's Rangers on this site in the Battle of Kingsbridge in 1778. Daniel Ninham is remembered with further memorials throughout the region, most notably Ninham Mountain State Forest in Putnam County, where hikers can visit the **Ninham Mountain Fire Tower**.

From 1883 to 1916, the **Mohonk Mountain House** was the site of the annual Lake Mohonk Conference of Friends of the Indian. Government officials, academics, philanthropists, and Indian leaders gathered to discuss ways to improve the Native Americans' status in New York.

The **Van Schaick Mansion** (1735) lies on an island which was likely the home to the Mohican village site “Moenemin’s Castle,” at the confluence of the Mohawk and Hudson Rivers, later an important meeting point for Mohawk and Dutch traders. The home that the Van Schaick family built at this strategic location served as military headquarters for the English during the French & Indian War and for the Continental Army during the American Revolution.

The Roosevelts trace their ancestry to one of the earliest Dutch immigrants to New Amsterdam and became one of America’s most influential political families. Theodore Roosevelt was the 26th US President and the first to prioritize protecting our country’s outstanding natural resources, hence his nickname as America’s “Conservationist President.” As governor of New York he founded the Palisades Interstate Parks Commission, an organization that maintains spectacular parts of the Hudson Highlands including **Bear Mountain** and **Storm King**

### **Mountain State Parks.**

Visit the **Home of President Franklin D. Roosevelt National Historic Site** in Hyde Park to learn how FDR expanded the scope of the National Park Service to protect new regions and historic sites, including his own home and the nearby **Vanderbilt Mansion** (1899). Roosevelt was a lifelong resident of the Hudson River Valley and felt strongly that the region’s Dutch heritage should be preserved. He personally incorporated Dutch style into the expansion of his family’s home Springwood (1915), his retreat Top Cottage (1937), and his wife Eleanor Roosevelt’s retreat Val-Kill (1924).

### **Ongoing Cultural and Environmental Advocacy**

The cultural legacy of the Hudson River Valley endures because the people who remain here are committed to preserving the heritage of their home. Seasonal festivals, museum exhibits, and commemorative events celebrate the Native American and Dutch influences that still shape the Hudson River Valley today.

The Hudson River Sloop Clearwater, a reconstruction of a typical 18th-century Dutch yacht, was launched in 1969 through a campaign calling for stronger environmental protection for the river. The ship makes its home at the **Hudson River Maritime Museum** in Kingston and serves as a traveling museum, teaching students about ecology and the enchanting maritime heritage of the Hudson River. Replicas of Hudson’s ship the *Halve Maen* and Captain Adriaen Block’s 1614 ship the *Onrust*, both constructed and sailed using authentic 17th-century techniques, have also toured the Hudson River to celebrate the valley’s legacy of Dutch exploration and commerce.

The **Redhawk Native American Arts Council** hosts programs year-round to educate people on the history of indigenous peoples in the United States, and to bring together and celebrate the Native communities who are active today. Notable public events include the annual Indigenous Peoples Celebration held in New York City.

The annual **Albany Tulip Festival** takes place in Washington Park, Albany every May, and celebrates the city's long and rich Dutch heritage.

For information about upcoming cultural heritage events in the Hudson River Valley, visit the Hudson River Valley National Heritage Area's website at [www.hudsonrivervalley.com](http://www.hudsonrivervalley.com).

## UPPER VALLEY

**Cohoes Falls** was an important meeting point for the Haudenosaunee (Iroquois) and Dutch fur traders, and today the adjacent Falls View Park is a popular site for visitors to catch a glimpse of this spectacular natural landmark.

The **Van Schaick Mansion** is near an original Mohican village site called "Moenemin's Castle." Its location between the Mohawk and Hudson Rivers made it a strategic meeting point for Haudenosaunee and Dutch traders, and it later became a critical military headquarters during both the French & Indian War and the American Revolution.

Since its origin as the Mohican peoples' "place of the Council Fire" and later the inland trading post Fort Orange, Albany has long been the local seat of cultural and political influence. The **Ten Broeck Mansion**, **Crailo State Historic Site**, and the **Schuyler Mansion State Historic Site** preserve examples of the Dutch colonial lifestyle and honor three of the most influential families in the city's history.

The **Albany Heritage Area Visitor Center** is an excellent first stop to learn about the Native American and Dutch history of Albany, and to pick up information to plan the rest of your visit to the city. The **New York State Museum** hosts an exhibit on the culture of the Haudenosaunee Indians in upstate New York, as well as a Mohican display and a new exhibit on the city's origins as the Dutch trading post Fort Orange.

The **Papscanee Island Nature Preserve** is named for 17th-century Mohican sachem Papsickene, and is a noted Mohican village site dating back thousands of years. This 156-acre nature preserve is free to the public and offers access to over 2 miles of the Hudson River shoreline.

The annual **Albany Tulip Festival** takes place every May in Washington Park and celebrates the enduring Dutch heritage of the Capital Region.

## MID-VALLEY

The city of Kingston was originally land farmed by the Esopus Indians, and in 1652 Dutch colonists founded the village of Wiltwijck. Visit the **Senate House Museum** and the **Matthewis Persen House** to learn the history of the **Uptown Stockade District**, the largest identified area of early Dutch settlement in New York State.

Walk through the **Hudson River Maritime Museum** for a fascinating look at how the Hudson River has shaped the evolution of life and industry in the region since pre-historic times.

In 1663, Swedish farmer Pieter Bronck purchased land from the Mohicans and built a farm near present-day Coxsackie. Over 350 years later, the **Bronck Museum** preserves the Dutch colonial heritage of Greene County and maintains several buildings from the farmstead's history, including the Bronck family's original 1663 house, believed to be the oldest surviving dwelling in Upstate New York.

Built in 1737, the **Luykas Van Alen House** is a designated National Historic Landmark and restored home museum authentically representing rural Dutch colonial life in the 18th century.

The **Martin Van Buren National Historic Site** honors the 8th President of the United States, who was born and raised in nearby Kinderhook. Van Buren purchased this mansion and named it Lindenwald in 1839 during his presidency, then lived here until his death in 1862.

President Franklin Roosevelt was proud of his family's Dutch roots in the Hudson River Valley, and he personally built this heritage into his home in Hyde Park. The **Home of Franklin D. Roosevelt National Historic Site** includes FDR's lifelong home Springwood, his personal retreat Top Cottage, and his wife Eleanor Roosevelt's cabin Val-Kill.

## LOWER VALLEY

Hike through the **Hudson Highlands State Park** or **Clarence Fahnestock State Park** and immerse yourself in the Hudson Valley's exquisite natural scenery, imagining the world as it would have appeared to the Dutch explorers when they arrived in 1609.

The **Ninham Mountain Fire Tower** honors the Wappingers *sachem* Daniel Ninham and offers a fantastic view of the Hudson River and surrounding mountains.

**Bear Mountain State Park** and **Storm King Mountain State Park** are among the recreation areas protected and maintained by the Palisades Interstate Parks Commission, an organization co-founded by New York State Governor Theodore Roosevelt, before he went on to become our nation's first "Conservationist President."

Washington Irving, America's first internationally famous writer, is remembered for works including *Knickerbocker's History of New York*, a satirical depiction of Dutch culture in the Hudson River Valley. Fans can visit Irving's home **Sunnyside** for an enchanting look at the writer's life and rise to fame. Explore the setting of Irving's most famous short story "The Legend of Sleepy Hollow" with a walk through the Old Dutch Church of Sleepy Hollow, and visit around Halloween to catch a performance of the spooky tale!

A tour through **Kykuit**, the Rockefeller estate, offers a glimpse into the Gilded Age lifestyle of one of New York's most prominent families. Learn about the Rockefellers' contributions to business, government, and philanthropy as you take in their art collections, spectacular gardens, and the breathtaking scenery of the surrounding Hudson Valley.

**Van Cortlandt Park** was the site of the Battle of Kingsbridge on August 31, 1778. **Indian Field** honors the Native Americans who died fighting the British in this battle, including Chief Daniel Ninham, his son Abraham, fifteen other Stockbridge Munsee Mohican warriors, and others. This site was previously occupied by the Wiechquaskeck Lenape until Europeans arrived to settle in the Bronx in 1639.

**Inwood Hill Park** offers hiking trails and recreation areas amid the last natural forest and salt marsh in Manhattan. The Shorakkopoch Rock landmark commemorates Peter Minuit's infamous exchange with the Lenape to allow Dutch settlement on Manhattan, which took place on this site in 1624. Around the corner, the **Dyckman Farmhouse Museum** is the oldest surviving Dutch homestead in Manhattan.



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