

The Ways Of The Stockbridge - Munsee Native American Tribe

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Introduction

The colonial settlers greatly affected the way in which the Stockbridge – Munsee lived off of the land. Adapting to a changing environment and keeping cultural values was something this nation was forced to face. The following will address the history of the Stockbridge – Munsee before colonial settlement. The report will then explain how colonial settlement affected the ways the Stockbridge – Munsee, using the land to such a point when natural resources began to exhaust. I will conclude by discussing how the Stockbridge – Munsee used their reserved land to best benefit the tribal community and how timber harvesting and gaming have become two of their greatest dependencies.

Pre Colonial Settlement

Land

The Stockbridge and Munsee tribes were actually two separate tribes, but both originally settled the same woodland areas within the Hudson River. They lived along remote portions of this river, in the valleys among the mountains, and in eastward upland bogs. The total area in which they roamed stretched north from Manhattan Island to Lake Champlain and east to present day Vermont and New Hampshire. Their cultures grew so similar that to describe one is in essence describing the other.¹ For the remainder of the paper they will inclusively be referred to as the Stockbridge – Munsee.

The woodland area in which the Stockbridge – Munsee lived was a forest full of Red Spruce, Pines, Oak, Elm, Maple and Birch trees. This type of vegetation made for a diverse and plentiful array of animal species including, but not limited to; white- tailed deer, black bear, moose, beaver, otter, bobcat, mink, turkey, and a plethora of bird and fish species. The land was full of rivers, most notably the Hudson River, which was known as the Muhheakunnuk to the Stockbridge – Munsee.

Seasonal Activities

The Stockbridge – Munsee always lived with nature, and as the seasons changed throughout the year so did the activities of the people. Spring was the best time for fishing; men in their dugout and bark canoes used spears and/or gill nets to catch different types of fish species, most notably herring and shad. Spring also meant the gathering of syrup from the Maple trees. This gave the people syrup and sugar to flavor their meat. Another spring activity was gardening, which was done by the women of the tribe. The women did all the preparation for gardening which included clearing the land and tilling the soil. Their main crops were maize corn, beans, squash and sunflowers.

Many northeastern tribes had very similar agriculture methods. These gardens consisted of the “three sisters”, corn, beans and squash. The corn and beans were planted on miniature hills created by the women of the Stockbridge – Munsee. These hills were made by taking the soil from an area and packing it together. The formation of hills was done for a variety of reasons. By concentrating the topsoil the women were also concentrating the nutrients within the top soil, giving the crops better access to the nutrients. It also raised the level of the seed within the soil, so that a heavy rain would not wipe out an entire season of crops.

Another reason for these hills was to assist in stabilizing the corn plant, so that it could grow to its full potential. Corn is a heavy user of nitrogen, and can wear out fields quickly, but bean roots have nitrogen- fixing nodules. By planting beans with corn, the Stockbridge – Munsee were able to plant in the same areas longer periods of time. Squash was planted around the hills in order to prevent weeds from growing with the crops. This type of planting also allowed lots of crops to be planted in a limited area. (Demchik)

Summer and fall consisted of tending to the agriculture the women had planted. This was also the primary time for hunting; men would hunt all species of animals within the forest, but they were primarily interested in white- tailed deer. The Stockbridge – Munsee used nearly every part of the entire deer they killed, and always made sure to thank the creator for their kill. Hides were used for clothing, which included breechcloths, leggings, and dresses. Bones were used to create tools and weapons.

Foraging was also done throughout summer and fall. Harvesting of crops was done in fall by the women. Pits were dug into the ground, lined with grass or bark, and used as storage containers. This gave the Stockbridge – Munsee at least a limited supply of food if hunting wasn't fruitful.

In the winter hunting was still important, but it was not a priority as with the previous season; snowshoes were needed to maneuver in the snow, making the task more difficult. Time was passed during the winter by carving and repairing eating utensils and weapons, making pottery. Clothing and blankets were woven at this time, and decorated with quills.

Living Conditions

The Stockbridge – Munsee often built their homes near rivers. These homes were either wigwams or longhouses. Wigwams were circular and made with bent saplings. Long houses were generally fifty to one hundred and fifty feet long and consisted of several family units. The shingles of the longhouses were made with Elm bark, and smoke holes were placed about every twenty feet in the shingles. About two hundred people lived in a village and the number of villages fluctuated with the population of the Stockbridge – Munsee. Every eight to ten years villages would move so that the land could replenish itself.

The Slow Destruction of Culture

The first recorded contact that the Stockbridge – Munsee people had with European settlers was with the Dutch trader and explorer Henry Hudson and his companions in 1609. The tribes were very curious of these new people who had come to their land. They treated them very kindly and welcomed them. Five years later Fort Nassau was built along the Hudson River on Castle Island. The Dutch were interested primarily in beaver and otter pelts at this time.

It wasn't long before animosity arose among the Indian tribes of the area. Wars between the Stockbridge - Munsee and the Mohawks fought for control of the fur trade. The first documentation of fighting between these two tribes was recorded in 1628. The Stockbridge - Munsee relocated from place to place in order to take advantage of the wildlife in new areas and avoid confrontations with the Mohawks. This war between the Mohawks lasted until about 1675 when it was decided amongst them that they would “bury the hatchet” (Frazier).

The frontiersmen attempted to take advantage of the Native Americans by making the European items seem more valuable than native goods. Trades consisting of twenty beaver pelts for one firearm were a common occurrence in the early and mid 1600's. Hunting and skinning

these beavers was a very time consuming chore, but tribesmen spent more and more time hunting for trade. Trading posts began to rise, with the Dutch and English competing against one another for fur trade dominance, and often found themselves in quarrels.

The Europeans brought diseases into the native communities that the people had never before encountered. With no immunity to these diseases, it was very easy for one illness to wipe out an entire village. These diseases included smallpox, measles, scarlet fever and even the common cold. The Stockbridge – Munsee lost more people to disease than any other factor for almost two centuries, until the 1800's.

The fur trade had drastic impacts on the resources of the land. The wildlife, which had once been plentiful, was becoming scarce and harder to catch. Most notably, beaver, black bear and white-tailed deer numbers diminished greatly.

Land was soon cleared so that European forts could be built. These forts were often built along rivers, where many wildlife species could often be found. The wildlife of this area was forced to find new habitat; the dynamics of ecosystems changed as more Europeans settled on the land that the Stockbridge – Munsee had been living on for centuries.

The Stockbridge – Munsee began to adopt more European ways; before the settlement of Europeans, the tribe only hunted for necessity. With high demand on pelts, rotting beaver carcasses were often found upon the landscape. A large influence on the people's newly found wasteful ways was the tribes' desire to trade for rum, which they quickly became addicted to. The influence of alcohol caused the people to act unpredictably; the only documented accounts of the Stockbridge - Munsee displaying irrational or violent behavior includes the mention of alcohol (Frazier). The rum had significant influence on the development of the Stockbridge – Munsee as did the goods found at trading posts.

The Settlement of Europeans

With the influx of Europeans settling in America, it was becoming obvious that these explorers were now here to stay. Rather than accepting the Native Americans, and respecting the various cultures, the English believed that they needed to “save” the Stockbridge – Munsee by converting them to Christianity. The Europeans believed that by converting the Native Americans, they would get them to settle down and lose their cultural ways. They wanted the Indians to adapt to their culture and their ways of living. A missionary by the name of John Sergeant was able to convince some of the Stockbridge – Munsee to listen to his preaching, though many of the natives were skeptical, and this caused some division amongst the people. However, more and more of the Stockbridge – Munsee came to listen to Sergeant’s preaching. They began to believe that perhaps they needed to accept God; since the tribes people had been dying and relied so heavily on rum, while the English were successful and multiplying, the tribe began to believe this new God could save them.

In 1738, a mission village was founded in the State of Massachusetts. The village was named Stockbridge, as the tribes settled in this area and introduced to church and organized schooling. The women of the tribe continued their traditional roles of clearing land, planting and harvesting crops. The Stockbridge – Munsee in this area “... always chose river bottoms and meadowlands for their planting grounds...” which was a contrast to planting in forest soils prior to colonial settlement (Frazier). However, it was noted that Maple syrup collection and hunting camps brought boys back into the wilderness. The colonials felt this was a distraction to the Indians’ re-education, but it was obvious that the Stockbridge – Munsee were not going to give up all of their traditions.

Adapting to New England Ways

The Stockbridge – Munsee grew corns, beans and oats. They had cattle sheep and horses grazing their lands. They began to tithe and hold official offices such as hog reeves, surveyors and constables. Surveyors made measurements of areas and attempted to draw representative maps. Hog reeves were civil officers with the duty to impound hogs running at large. They had a gristmill, a sawmill, and new roads. Even dress changed; men began wearing European style pants, while women wore a wrap type skirt made of wool broadcloth and cloth leggings, instead of traditional deer hide leggings. Both men and women wore blankets around their shoulders and beaver hats. It was obvious that some culture was being lost as the Stockbridge – Munsee lived and worked with the non-Indian colonials who resided in the area.

Wars

The settlement of the Stockbridge – Munsee in Stockbridge gave the English colonials a valuable ally, as the natives joined the side of the English during the French and Indian War. They dressed lightly in buckskin and had weapons of firelocks, tomahawks and knives. Years later the Stockbridge – Munsee would join the side of the colonials in the Revolutionary War. This time they dressed in deerskin moccasins, coarse linen trousers and long tunic-like linen shirts. They had a cinch around their waist which carried their tomahawk, as well as pouches that they filled with dried food and gun powder. They also had a bow and quiver with about twenty arrows around one shoulder and a musket in their hands. The difference of weapons and dress between the two wars shows how the Stockbridge – Munsee adapted to European ways as they continued to live amongst colonials (Oxley).

The Stockbridge – Munsee were more likely to die of disease than in war. They were often used as scouts, showing their ability to blend in with nature. There were many different opinions regarding how the Stockbridge – Munsee influenced war. Some generals thought very highly of them and praised them for their resiliency. Others cursed them for drinking too much rum and disrupting the camp (Frazier).

Land Disputes

One thing that the Stockbridge – Munsee did not expect was the population outburst that occurred in Stockbridge. They did not realize that by helping the English fight off their enemies they would also be bringing New England colonization to America. In 1759, there were forty-two Stockbridge – Munsee families living in Stockbridge. At the same time, there were nineteen non- Indian families present in Stockbridge. In 1763, non- Indian families almost doubled, and doubled again in 1770. After a fairly constant growth for about eleven years, the population exploded; by 1776, there were one thousand colonial families living in Stockbridge. In comparison with the two hundred Stockbridge – Munsee individuals, the tribes were being suffocated.

Land was always a question for debate. It was difficult to determine who owned what land. This, in part, was due to illegitimate purchasing procedures by the Europeans. When land purchases went through the correct government channels, the Stockbridge – Munsee were often cheated on the price.

The Stockbridge – Munsee were forced to sell the majority of their land because the colonials continually found ways to put them in debt, most frequently with rum. Colonials would often make land deals while tribal members were drunk. Some Stockbridge – Munsee even tried

to sell their land multiple times to different settlers, all for rum money. These situations led to many court decisions that nearly always favored colonials.

Time for Change

With little land left and surrounded by colonials, the Stockbridge – Munsee wanted to move. This notion was intensified by threats from the Iroquois, who had lost men in the Revolutionary War, thanks in part to the Stockbridge – Munsee. The government would not grant the tribes specific land they asked for, but instead, granted them a tract of land that had not yet been chartered. Instead of taking this offer, the people settled in the vicinity of Oneida Lake in New York, a gift from the Oneida Indians. They were granted six square miles on an old Tuscarora village. In the spring of 1784, the young men of the tribe left to settle this new land, with the remainder of the tribes following in 1788.

The Stockbridge – Munsee may have been treated unkind and unjust by the colonials, but they were able to take a lot of valuable knowledge with them to their new home. They now had basic knowledge of the courts, lawyers and town government. They also learned skills such as milling, lumbering, surveying, house building and weaving. Most important, they learned how to read and write in English; which was an advantage that many Native American tribes had not yet fully grasped. Life at their new home began very successfully, breeding cattle and swine, which provided sufficient food. They also grew fields of wheat, maize corn and potatoes. The majority of their citizens were industrious, and they had such a surplus of food that they often traded with the Oneida.

Even though the Stockbridge – Munsee had converted to Christianity “They preferred to maintain some cultural separateness. They chose not to relinquish their Indian identity, or all of their Indian values.” They had accepted most of American culture, but maintained a sense of

Indian separateness, distinguishing themselves by “their environmental sense of harmony with nature, coupled with the value placed on sharing within the family and community” (Frazier).

Relocation Followed by More Relocation

This Land is Our Land; This Land not Your Land

Life was good for the Stockbridge – Munsee in the new location. They found a good balance of old ways and new ways. However, several land companies pressured the government to force the Stockbridge – Munsee off their land so large companies could benefit from its sale. John Metoxin, Chief Sachem of the Stockbridge – Munsee, decided that it would be best if the tribe left. Soon the tribes left for the White River in Indiana. Delaware and Miami tribes had planned to give this land to the Stockbridge – Munsee, but were forced to sell their lands before the tribe even arrived. But missionaries and commissioners from the war department bought other tribal lands in Wisconsin so the Stockbridge- Munsee could have a place of their own. Their new home was along the Fox River, on the opposite side of current- day Kaukauna. About three hundred and twenty five Stockbridge - Munsee inhabited this area, but in the early 1830’s, the Stockbridge – Munsee was driven out of this area as well, now forced to the Calumet County area, east of Winnebago.

Treaties Create False Hopes

The 1830’s also brought the Indian Removal Act, put in effect by President Andrew Jackson, which attempted to push all Native Americans west of the Mississippi River. In the 1840’s many of the Stockbridge – Munsee attempted to leave. Many died; others simply gave up and returned back to the land that was last called their home (why?). For years the Stockbridge – Munsee fought to retain any land within the boundaries of Wisconsin. Finally, in 1856, a treaty

was passed that granted the Stockbridge – Munsee land east of Lake Winnebago to Red Spring in Shawano County. The tribes were forced to share this land with the Brotherton and New York Iroquois Indians, and life on this reservation was extremely difficult. Stockbridge – Munsee lost confidence in their ability to function as a tribe. They had poor goods and services and were deep in poverty.

The Stockbridge - Munsee attempted to farm, but the sandy swampland made this impossible. Forestry became one of their only means of income. In 1887 the General Allotment Act was passed, which took the land from the tribe and divided it amongst individuals. Many individuals sold their lands, and soon, the reservation began to shrink.

In 1934, the Indian Reorganization Act was passed, which gave the tribe money and 2,250 acres of land in Bartleme, near Bowler, WI. Timberlands were planted and homes were built. Instead of traditional longhouses or wigwams, the tribes now lived in stone houses, using fieldstone to construct their homes (Oxley). The money allotted to the Stockbridge – Munsee was often inadequate, bringing the people closer together for support. It was time for the Stockbridge –Munsee to create a permanent village.

Loss of Culture

With near- constant relocation, the Stockbridge – Munsee lost many things. The optimism they found in New Stockbridge was gone. Their educational system had been severely damaged; children had to travel to Bowler or Gresham where they were often criticized and belittled. Worst of all, was a loss of culture; the people rarely wore traditional Indian dress. Instead of animal hides, they wore linen and cloth. By 1880, little of the original language was left, and crafting skills had been lost. Their ability to work sustainably with nature while still

remained, but the reservation needed serious improvements and an economic plan in order to survive.

Planning For Their Future

The Stockbridge – Munsee were in need of help. The Tribal Council created an economic development plan in 1976. They reviewed the worth of their lands and the varying successes of business ventures. The council devised development goals that they believed would help the reservation prosper. Their conclusion was to make the best of their natural resources in a commercial aspect.

In 1976, the people had 15,633 of tribal land. The landscape consisted of kettles, moraines and outwash plains. Granite and gneiss lay beneath almost the entire reservation. Roughly eighty- five percent of the reservation was covered in forests that consisted primarily of Sugar Maple, Birch, Hemlock and Hickory. Soils on the reservation consisted mainly of silt loam, though sandy loam and muck areas were found throughout the reservation.

The Stockbridge – Munsee were convinced that land acquisition would result in a better land base and greater opportunity for economic development. The Tribal Council also stated that, “There is an economic potential for the reservation that involves natural resources. The entire reservation is richly endowed with natural resources that, if used properly, could provide additional economic stability” (Bennett). The forestry industry was looking positive, and in 1973,

361,000 board feet were carried off the reservation. One of the development plans included increasing logging operations, either by lease or by private enterprise. To accomplish this, the tribes realized that old logging roads and fire lanes needed to be re-identified, upgraded gravel paths into two lane roads. They believed this would increase employment opportunity for members of the community, and offer a source of non – federal income to the community as well. A tourist enterprise was also considered, but was to be introduced as low key so as not to upset the balance of nature on a small area of land.

It was obvious that though the lengthy relocation period, the Stockbridge – Munsee culture they had kept their principle values. After all their struggles they still realized depending on nature was of utmost importance. The final page of their economic development plan came with an environmental assessment, which stated that; “due to the predominantly wilderness type of environment favoring this Reservation area and due to the desire of the Tribal Community to retain this quality, the Tribal Council has pledged its continuing care in choosing programs with a minimal effect upon the environment. The Goals, as outlined above, are designed to have little or no effect upon the environment or displacement of wildlife, on the contrary, the development of planned logging with only necessary road development as well as any tourism should have a beneficial effect upon the area” (Bennett). The Stockbridge – Munsee knew the importance of keeping their land from moving beyond the point where it could not be replenished.

Two Major Industries Save the Stockbridge – Munsee

Forestry was a crucial industry for the Stockbridge – Munsee Community. Timber harvesting methods left strong, dominant trees in their forests. This method of management allowed diversity, natural regeneration and large timber harvests. There are currently thirty different species of trees on the Stockbridge – Munsee Reservation, which shows the people’s

commitment to diversity. Over fifty percent of their forest stands are unevenly aged. The development of a hardwood pulpwood market allowed this industry to profit exceptionally.

The tribal forest management plan has a variety of timber harvesting methods. Even aged stands are sometimes used. The Stockbridge – Munsee also have tree farms, experimenting with different methods so to better understand their forest. But they cannot rely solely on this commodity for survival.

The other main industry was the gaming industry. The development of the Mohican North Star Casino provided for the financial stability that the Stockbridge – Munsee people needed, also giving many jobs to non- Indian people in Shawano County. With this new income, the Tribal Council was able to create many other opportunities for the Stockbridge – Munsee Community. Development includes a comprehensive health and wellness center; a community based residential facility, elder housing and elder programs, Headstart and daycare and its own public safety and roads department.

This is the development that the Tribal Council of the late 1970's was hoping for. The Stockbridge – Munsee went from a people who had lost almost all hope to a proud people who strive for success. Now they are part of a well- balanced community. The Stockbridge – Munsee currently have over 1,500 tribal members and 46,000 acres of land on the reservation, which continues to grow every day. This is more than double the land the people owned in the late 1970's. Their development goal of acquiring more land has obviously been a huge success. Another part of that huge success was working with nature rather than against it. The future holds great things for the Stockbridge – Munsee.

Endnotes

1 - Controversy over when the Stockbridge and Munsee tribes actually became one still exists today. Some believe that they became one during the original community of Stockbridge. Some seem to think that the connection of the two tribes was in New Stockbridge. Others believe that the two tribes connected in Indiana and moved to Wisconsin together. For the sake of this research paper Stockbridge are Munsee and Munsee are Stockbridge and will be referred to as Stockbridge – Munsee.

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