

THE ARRIVAL OF THE EUROPEANS AS TOLD BY THE LENAPE

by

James Rementer

Introduction – Many accounts exist which tell of the arrival of the Europeans in America from the viewpoint of the Europeans. In this account we will look at stories told by the Lenape or Delaware Indians of the same event.

The people called Lenape lived in what is now all of New Jersey, eastern Pennsylvania, northern Delaware, and southeastern New York. Population estimates for the Lenape at the time of the arrival of the Europeans vary all the way from 8,000 up to 25,000. Two main divisions of the Lenape existed in the old homeland. In the northern area were found the speakers of the Munsee dialect, and they ranged into the area of today's New York City and north into the Catskills. In the area generally south of the Raritan River were found the Unami speakers. The Unami dialect was divided into Northern Unami, and this is the dialect mainly used by the people with whom the Moravian missionaries worked, and Southern Unami. The Southern dialect was used by both Lenape groups in Oklahoma.

Storytelling held an important place in their lives of the Lenape people. In the days before movies, television, radio, and the written word, this was not only for amusement, but also the only means of passing down tribal history and legends. Pastorius wrote of the Lenape in 1698, "They are people of the forest who instruct and teach one another by means of tradition, from the aged to the young." (Pastorius, 433)

Lenape stories can be divided into two major categories: Athiluhakàna (Wintertime Stories) and Achimèwakàna (Stories which can be told at any time). Wintertime stories should only be told during that season as to do so at other times will cause the teller to have various insects and other pests go after him/her. The Lenape had a solution for this possible problem should they have to relate such a story in other seasons. The teller would precede the story with the Lenape statement,

"Tèlèn òk nisha shkakwxèsa ntapapi! (I am seated on twelve skunk hides!)." This was apparently a potent enough threat to keep the pests away.

There were people gifted in storytelling, even as recently as the 1900s. Most were men, but some women storytellers were also known. Many Lenape speakers if asked to tell a story would begin with, "Well, I'm not a storyteller, but I will do my best." The small scene below gives an idea of how a story session might have been in pre-contact times:

It is the middle of winter and the night is cold. Somewhere in a village along what would later be known as the Delaware River there is a gathering of Lenape people who have come together in a wikèwam to listen to an elderly man tell athiluhakàna (wintertime stories). Inside the wikèwam a fire is burning, and it is warm but very little smoke. People are sitting around waiting. The old man opens a small deerskin bag he carries with him. He reaches in and pulls out a small figure carved of bone. He looks at it and says, "Wèwtunèwèsi athiluhakàn." (The wintertime story of the mermaid). And so he begins, "Niki lòmèwe wàni Lenape . . ." (Once a long time ago the Lenape people . . .). And his stories continued for several hours into the night. The stories are wonderful, the year is 1590, and the world of the Lenape is about to change forever.

Unfortunately, the earliest Europeans to arrive in the Lenape homeland had little interest in the traditional stories. Their main interest was in trading for furs or trying to acquire the land. In the book, *Mythology of the Lenape* by John Bierhorst, he states that only five stories were written down prior to 1760. Then from 1760 until 1825 only 25 additional stories, or pieces of stories, appear in manuscripts. One possible reason, other than lack of interest, might be that a trade language known as

a "pidgin" came into use for contact purposes. Such a pidgin language would not have been good to relate complicated stories.

Pidgin Talk - Lenape pidgin was a contact language used between the Lenape and Europeans during the Colonial Period. According to linguist Ives Goddard, "Pidgin Delaware developed in the 1620s, and almost all documentation of it dates from the 17th-century. . . . nearly all of its attested vocabulary has clear origins in Unami words and expressions." (Goddard, 43). As an example of pidgin Lenape or Delaware compared with proper Lenape the word for "I love you" is "ktaholël," (note that in proper Lenape the pronouns are attached to the verb), while in pidgin Lenape it was "nee tahottamen kee," or literally, "I love-it you."

The early Europeans who came to America often concluded that the native languages were less developed than those of the Europeans. William Penn was of this mind. He stated that "Their Language is lofty, yet narrow . . . one word serveth in the place of three, and the rest are supplied by the Understanding of the Hearer." (Penn, 22) What Penn did not realize was that the "language" he learned was simply a pidgin which had come into use as a trade language between the Lenape and the Dutch, Swedes, and English. The words in the pidgin were nearly all Lenape words, the grammar was extremely simplified, and the sentence structure was not unlike that used in Dutch, Swedish, and English.

Lenape Language Today - A few speakers of the Munsee dialect live at Moraviantown, Ontario. There are no longer any fully fluent Unami speakers in either group in Oklahoma, that is, people who grew up with Lenape as their first language. There are some middle-age and older speakers who have a partial command of the language.

The Stories of the Arrival of the Whites - One early story is the Lenape account of the arrival of the Europeans. This story was first recorded in the 1700s, and has been passed on by oral tradition up to the present. The different versions which follow were told by various raconteurs over the last two centuries.

The story contains several elements, one being the prediction of the arrival of the Whites, the next being the arrival of the Whites, then the gift exchange between the Lenape and the Whites, and finally how the Whites fooled the Lenape by taking their land by trickery. One part that occurs in at least two later versions of the story involves what might be called a folk etymology which explains how the Lenape came to be called "Delawares."

The first version of the story was related to the Moravian missionary John Heckewelder sometime in the latter 1700s. Heckewelder states, "I give it as much as possible in their own language," by which we assume he means his version as written in English follows as closely as possible the Lenape account he heard.

The second version of the story was recorded by Moravian historian George Henry Loskiel in 1794. It appeared in a book he wrote about the missions which was first published in German and later in English.

The third version of the story was told by Captain Pipe to C. C. Trowbridge in 1824. This account was taken down by Trowbridge during his trip to White River, Indiana, to do research on the language and customs of the Delawares as requested by Gov. Cass.

The fourth version of this story was told in Lenape by Willie Longbone to linguist Carl Voegelin in 1939 and was recorded on records. These recordings have been preserved by the Archive of Traditional Music at Indiana University, and this a rough translation of that rather scratchy recording. A review of Dr. Voegelin's field notes at the American Philosophical Society Library shows a portion of this story, but it is markedly different from the recording. This version and version six add the statement that some Lenape wished to kill the newcomers.

The fifth version was told by Bessie Snake in Lenape in 1978. Bessie was a member of the Delaware Nation located at Anadarko, Oklahoma, and the two groups

in Oklahoma have been apart since about 1795. This suggests a great antiquity for the story. Bessie's version contains several new elements, such as, "as long as the creek flows" and "the red flag," not found in other versions. The Lenape language version of this story can be heard at <http://talk-lenape.org/story.php?story=68>.

The sixth and final version was told by Nora Thompson Dean of the Delaware Tribe in northeastern Oklahoma. This was told on several occasions in the 1970s and early 1980s. For the purpose of this contribution, because different features occurred in different telling of the story, we have combined them into one so that we have the most complete version possible.

THE STORIES

Version 1 -- INDIAN ACCOUNT OF THE FIRST ARRIVAL OF THE DUTCH AT NEW YORK ISLAND.

The relation I am going to make was taken down many years since from the mouth of an intelligent Delaware Indian, and may be considered as a correct account of the tradition existing among them of this momentous event. I give it as much as possible in their own language.

A great many years ago, when men with a white skin had never yet been seen in this land, some Indians who were out a fishing, at a place where the sea widens, espied at a great distance something remarkably large floating on the water, and such as they had never seen before. These Indians immediately returning to the shore, apprised their countrymen of what they had observed, and pressed them to go out with them and discover what it might be. They hurried out together, and saw with astonishment the phenomenon which now appeared to their sight, but could not agree upon what it was; some believed it to be an uncommonly large fish or animal, while others were of opinion it must be a very big house floating on the sea. At length the spectators concluded that this wonderful object was moving towards the land, and

that it must be an animal or something else that had life in it; it would therefore be proper to inform all the Indians on the inhabited islands of what they had seen, and put them on their guard. Accordingly they sent off a number of runners and watermen to carry the news to their scattered chiefs that they might send off in every direction for the warriors, with a message that they should come immediately. These arriving in numbers, and having themselves viewed the strange appearance, and observing that it was actually moving towards the entrance of the river or bay; concluded it to be a remarkably large house in which the Mannitto (the Great or Supreme Being) himself was present, and that he probably was coming to visit them. By this time the chiefs were assembled at York island, and deliberating in what manner they should receive their Mannitto on his arrival. Every measure was taken to be well provided with plenty of meat for a sacrifice. The women were desired to prepare the best victuals. All the idols or images were examined and put in order, and a grand dance was supposed not only to be an agreeable entertainment for the Great Being, but it was, believed that it might, with the addition of a sacrifice, contribute to appease him if he was angry with them. The conjurers were also set to work, to determine what this phenomenon portended, and what the possible result of it might be. To these and to the chiefs and wise men of the nations, men, women, and children were looking up for advice and protection. Distracted between hope and fear, they were at a loss what to do; a dance, however, commenced in great confusion. While in this situation, fresh runners arrive declaring it to be a large house of various colours, and crowded with living creatures. It appears now to be certain, that it is the great Mannitto, bringing them some kind of game, such as he had not given them before, but other runners soon after arriving declare that it is positively a house full of human beings, of quite a different colour from that of the Indians, and dressed differently from them; that in particular one of them was dressed entirely in red, who must be the Mannitto himself.

They are hailed from the vessel in a language they do not understand, yet they shout or yell in return by way of answer, according to the custom of their country; many are for running off to the woods, but are pressed by others to stay, in order not to give offence to their visitor, who might find them out and destroy them. The house, some

say, large canoe, at last stops, and a canoe of a smaller size comes on shore with the red man, and some others in it; some stay with his canoe to guard it. The chiefs and wise men, assembled in council, form themselves into a large circle, towards which the man in red clothes approaches with two others. He salutes them with a friendly countenance, and they return the salute after their manner. They are lost in admiration; the dress, the manners, the whole appearance of the unknown strangers is to them a subject of wonder; but they are particularly struck with him who wore the red coat all glittering with gold lace, which they could in no manner account for. He, surely, must be the great Mannitto, but why should he have a white skin? Meanwhile, a large Hackhack (*Hackhack is properly a gourd; but since they have seen glass bottles and decanters, they call them by the same name.*) is brought by one of his servants, from which an unknown substance is poured out into a small cup or glass, and handed to the supposed Mannitto. He drinks - has the glass filled again, and hands it to the chief standing next to him. The chief receives it, but only smells the contents and passes it on to the next chief, who does the same. The glass or cup thus passes through the circle, without the liquor being tasted by any one, and is upon the point of being returned to the red clothed Mannitto, when one of the Indians, a brave man and a great warrior, suddenly jumps up and harangues the assembly on the impropriety of returning the cup with its contents. It was handed to them, says he, by the Mannitto, that they should drink out of it, as he himself had done. To follow his example would be pleasing to him; but to return what he had given them might provoke his wrath, and bring destruction on them. And since the orator believed it for the good of the nation that the contents offered them should be drunk, and as no one else would do it, he would drink it himself, let the consequence be what it might; it was better for one man to die, than that a whole nation should be destroyed. He then took the glass, and bidding the assembly a solemn farewell, at once drank up its whole contents. Every eye was fixed on the resolute chief, to see what effect the unknown liquor would produce. He soon began to stagger, and at last fell prostrate on the ground. His companions now bemoan his fate, he falls into a sound sleep, and they think he has expired. He wakes again, jumps up and declares, that he has enjoyed the most delicious sensations, and that he never before felt himself so happy

as after he had drunk the cup. He asks for more, his wish is granted; the whole assembly then imitate him, and all become intoxicated.

After this general intoxication had ceased, for they say that while it lasted the whites had confined themselves to their vessel, the man with the red clothes returned again, and distributed presents among them, consisting of beads, axes, hoes, and stockings such as the white people wear. They soon became familiar with each other, and began to converse by signs. The Dutch made them understand that they would not stay here, that they would return home again, but would pay them another visit the next year, when they would bring them more presents, and stay with them awhile; but as they could not live without eating, they should want a little land of them to sow seeds, in order to raise herbs and vegetables to put into their broth.

They went away as they had said, and returned in the following season, when both parties were much rejoiced to see each other; but the whites laughed at the Indians, seeing that they knew not the use of the axes and hoes they had given them the year before; for they had these hanging to their breasts as ornaments, and the stockings were made use of as tobacco pouches. The whites now put handles to the former for them, and cut trees down before their eyes, hoed up the ground, and put the stockings on their legs. Here, they say, a general laughter ensued among the Indians, that they had remained ignorant of the use of such valuable implements, and had borne the weight of such heavy metal hanging to their necks, for such a length of time. They took every white man they saw for an inferior Mannitto attendant upon the supreme Deity who shone superior in the red and laced clothes. As the whites became daily more familiar with the Indians, they at last proposed to stay with them, and asked only for so much ground for a garden spot as, they said, the hide of a bullock would cover or encompass, which hide was spread before them. The Indians readily granted this apparently reasonable request; but the whites then took a knife, and beginning at one end of the hide, cut it up to a long rope, not thicker than a child's finger, so that by the time the whole was cut up, it made a great heap ; they then took the rope at one end, and drew it gently along, carefully avoiding its breaking. It was drawn out into a circular form, and being closed at its ends,

encompassed a large piece of ground. The Indians were surprised at the superior wit of the whites (these Dutchmen were probably acquainted with what is related of Queen Dido in ancient history, and thus turned their classical knowledge to a good account), but did not wish to contend with them about a little land, as they had still enough themselves. The white and red men lived contentedly together for a long time, though the former from time to time asked for more land, which was readily obtained, and thus they gradually proceeded higher up the Mahicannittuck [Hudson River], until the Indians began to believe that they would soon want all their country, which in the end proved true. (Heckewelder 71-76)

**Version 2 -- Historical Account of the Indians
Since the Arrival of the Europeans**

by

George Henry Loskiel

1794

Most of the Indian nations, which our missionaries have visited, inhabited formerly that part of the East coast of North America, which now belongs to the Thirteen United States, from which they have been driven by the European settlers. The Indians relate, that, before the arrival of the Europeans, some prophets pretended to have received divine revelation, from which they foretold, that a people would come to them from a country beyond the, great Ocean, and even pointing out the very day of their arrival. They further relate, that upon seeing a ship arrive on that day they addressed their countrymen, "Behold, the Gods come to visit us." Upon their landing, the white people were adored by the Indian, to whom they made presents of knives, hatchets, guns, and other articles. But the Indians, not knowing their use, kept them carefully, wore them about their necks on solemn festival days, and even worshipped and offered sacrifices to them.

In the beginning it appeared as if the Europeans and Indians would live peaceably and quietly together. In the year 1781 there were still some very aged Indians living on the banks of the Muskingum, who were present when the first

houses were built in Philadelphia. They related that the white people treated the Indians at that time with the greatest kindness so that they appeared to be but one nation. But when the Europeans began to settle along the navigable rivers, and extended their agriculture and commerce over a great part of the country, the deer retired into the woodlands and the Indians followed them. At last the Europeans began to, attack the few Indians, who remained in their old towns, and obliged them to retire.

Thus the arrival of the Europeans occasioned the emigration of many nations. One nation crowding in upon the other, drove it out of its settlement, or lessened its territory. During all these changes the Iroquois remained unmolested in their country, where they live to this day. The Delawares lived formerly in the country about Philadelphia, extending toward, the ocean, in the Jerseys, about Trenton, Brunswick, Amboy, and other places.

Version 3 --

First Acquaintance with the Whites

By

Captain Pipe

As told to

C. C. Trowbridge

1824

The tradition of their first acquaintance with the whites has been minutely related by Mr. Heckewelder and agrees in substance with the account now given of that important event. Capt. Pipe says that in those days the Indians were accustomed to worship annually as they now do, in a large building prepared and kept for that purpose. At one of these meetings an old man prophesied the coming of some important and extraordinary events and a few days after a ship hove in sight and a boat with some of the officers came on shore. The Indians, supposing the crew to be inferior deities sent by the great Spirit, spread beaver skins upon the ground for them to walk upon. The whites refused to comply and

pointed to their hats endeavouring to make them understand the value and proper use of the skins, but they were compelled to accept the politeness of their new acquaintances who surrounded them and drove them on the skins. When they arrived at the great council house or place of worship one of them took a cup and filling it with liquor drank of it and offered it to the astonished spectators. The cup passed around, refused by all. At length three brave men supposing the Deity would be offended by their stubbornness resolved to undertake the dreadful task, and having drunk the contents of the cup they were taken out of the lodge and seated upon a log. The effect of the liquor soon prostrated them to the ground, and their recovery was despaired of. However they were closely watched and at length one of them lifted up his head and demanded more of the poison. In time they all recovered and their account of its pleasing effects induced others to join, and its use soon became universal.

After becoming familiar with them the whites solicited them to give a small piece of land upon which they might build a fire to prepare their food. They demanded only a piece as large as a Bullocks hide and the request was readily granted, when to their great astonishment the bullocks hide was soaked in water and cut into a small cord with which the land was surrounded. However, they determined to overlook the deception and be more wary in future. They whites presented them with Axes, hoes etc. and departed, promising to revisit them the next year.

Upon their return they were not a little amused to see the Indians walking about with these things suspended from their necks as ornaments. They taught them their use, trafficked a little with them, and at length told them that they wanted more lands, because it was impossible from the smallness of the size of the first grant, to build a fire upon it without being incommoded with the smoke. It was therefore resolved to add to the first piece a quantity large enough to hold the chair of the whites, without the influence of the smoke. Upon this the bottom of the chair, which was composed of small cords, was taken out and like the hide, stretched around the lands. This second deception determined them never to give

more lands without fixing some boundary understood by both parties distinctly.
(Weslager, 475-476)

Version 4 --

The Coming of the Whites

As Told in Lenape By

Willie Longbone

In 1939 to

Carl Voegelin

A long time ago when the Whites came across the water the Lenape did not know that they were coming. One man said in his vision song, "Someone wants to come to see us. He will come across the water." A warrior said, "I'll kill him when I see him."

The next year they saw a ship coming in this direction, and the chief [who had the vision] said, "Now that's the one. The one coming is our elder brother," but the warrior said, "Not mine!" When the whites had arrived the warrior began to say, "I want to overpower him," but the man [chief] said, "This one is our older brother, that's what I said! [Na nën ntëluwèn]." The white man said, "Oh, [repeating the Lenape word 'ntëluwèn'], you must be a Delaware!" That is the reason they began to call the Lenape "Delaware." [Note: At this point the sound on the record becomes very distorted, but then it resumes as] "What do you want? He [the White man] said, "I want a little piece of land, only as much as a cowhide will cover. Will you give it to me?"

[The Lenape answered], "Oh yes, we can give you that much." Ah, but they did not use just the cowhide. They began to cut it into little thin strips so that when stretched out it encircled a large piece of land. [End of recording].

As Told in Lenape By
Bessie Snake
Of the Delaware Nation
In 1978
To Jim Rementer and Bruce Pearson

This one when he was first here he wanted to fool us, our elder brother [white people]. They said, "We will treat you good for as long as the creek flows and our uncle the sun moves and as long as the grass grows every spring, for that long I will take care of you people and I will be friends to you people," he said. He just wanted to fool us and it seems that he is still fooling us.

Then he said, "I will give you this red flag." He said, "As long as you keep this you give us a little piece of land as much as [will be covered by] a cow we will kill and then skin him." Then they did not take the hide off but cut it into very small pieces. Then they [the Delawares] looked good at it. It was a big piece of land our Lenape ancestors of long ago gave to them. They thought that the land was only to be as big as the hide they put on the ground but it was a big piece.

Then they said, "You did not say, 'I want to cut it up!'" Then he [white man] said, "Now you have already finished signing this paper!" Now that is where our money now comes from that we receive and we are we are still fighting it. It was said at that time, "We will treat you good and you will be given everything. This is true, he does give us everything.

Then [to] those deceased chiefs they [the whites] gave to them an axe and a hoe for them to use. Then they [the chiefs] just put them on their necks. The white man told them, "That is not the way to use it putting it on your neck. I will give you

something else to wear around your neck." Then they handed them back to him, and he took them. Then he put them on handles so they can take ahold of them.

Then the white man told him, "This is how it is used when you plant something to make rows. Now this axe is used to cut trees, or to cut wood or to make log house, that is what you use to make it." Then he [the Lenape] said, "All right!" Then from then on they always used it. Then I told my daughter and my grandchildren that they are still fooling us.

Version 6 -- Prediction of the Arrival of the White People

Told by Nora Thompson Dean
in 1977

Long ago there was a Lenape man who had remarkable powers. He would often go and meditate. He was able to foresee the future. One day he told his people, "Soon we will have visitors. They will be real white, fair-skinned people, and they will come from the east in a huge vessel. They are a people who will change our way of life."

Not many people believed him, but finally one day the Lenape people saw a ship coming in. And when these men got out of their boat the Lenape people were much amazed as they had light skin, blue eyes, and light hair. They were very stunned and dumbfounded, but most of the Lenape were so glad that these visitors came that they put down furs for them to walk on.

But some Lenape wanted to kill the white people, and said, "We don't want these people here. We'll just kill them." But the powerful man said, "No, they came to me in a vision. We will not kill them. They might be our brothers. They might bring us good things. They are going to bring us good things, eventually. We want to treat them good."

And so they did. They put furs down for the white people to sit and walk on. They gave the white people seeds, food, and other things they needed. That's the way the prediction was told a long time ago about the arrival of the white people.

ENDNOTES

1. Throughout this paper, the two terms Lenape and Delaware are used interchangeably. Lenape is the name used by the people who speak the language to refer to themselves. Many of the younger people whose language is English more frequently use the term Delaware.

I also use the term "Indian" with the full understanding that there are some people who prefer the use of the term "Native American." I am guided by the fact that the main group of Delawares who now live in northeastern Oklahoma refer to their group as the "Delaware Tribe of Indians" and not the "Delaware Tribe of Native Americans."

LENAPE WORDS USED IN THE TEXT

[Pronunciation Key - a like **a** in English 'father'; à Like **u** in 'cup'; e Like **a** in 'fate'; è Like **e** in 'met' ; ë Like **a** in 'sofa' ; j Like **e** in 'she' ; ì Like **i** in 'fit' ; o Like **o** in 'nose' ; ò Like **o** in 'north' ; u Like **oo** in 'fool' ; ù Like **u** in 'pull' ; x has no equivalent sound in Eng. It is pronounced like the **ch** in the German word 'doch'. It is almost as if lightly trying to clear the throat.]

Achimëwakàn	a story
Athiluhakàna	a wintertime story
Ktaholël	I love you
Nìki lòmëwe	Once a long time ago
Ntapapi	I am seated
Shkakwxësa	skunk hides

Tèlèn òk nisha	twelve
Wàni Lènape	the Lenape (a plural form)
Wèwtunëwèsi'	of a mermaid
Wikëwam	a house (in early days they were mainly made of bark)

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BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCHES:

Nora Thompson Dean (1907-1984) was raised east of Bartlesville, Oklahoma. She attended many of the traditional Lenape ceremonies with her family, and was raised speaking the Lenape language. In her later years, especially after the death of her father in 1964, she began her tireless efforts to preserve the Lenape language and culture.

John Gottlieb Ernestus Heckewelder (1743–1823) was born in Bedford, England and became a Moravian missionary in the United States. He settled in Bethlehem, PA, with his parents while acting occasionally as a messenger to the Native Americans on the Susquehanna. By 1771 he was an accredited missionary who spent years with the natives of Pennsylvania who had been removed to Ohio.

George Henry Loskiel (1740 – 1814) was born in Latvia and was presiding bishop of the northern district of the American province of the Moravian Church (1802–1811). He was an eloquent preacher and a good writer. His wrote a

history of Native Americans, *Geschichte der Mission der Evangelischen Bruder unter den Indianern in Nordamerika* (Leipzig, 1789). He died in Bethlehem, PA, in 1814.

Willie Longbone (1869-1946) was born in Indian Territory (later Oklahoma) and grew up speaking the Lenape language. He was respected as a singer and drummer at the old Lenape ceremonial functions. In 1939 he worked with linguist Carl Voegelin at the University of Michigan where he recorded some old Lenape stories.

Francis Daniel Pastorius (1651-1720) was born in Frankenland, Germany. Pastorius met William Penn and converted to Penn's Quaker doctrines. Pastorius led the settlement in Germantown in 1683 as a settlement of Mennonites and Quakers, and soon became the town's leader and lawmaker. In 1688 he drafted the first protest against slavery in America. He died in Germantown in 1720.

William Penn (1644-1718) was born in England, and in 1681 he purchased an area of land in America from King Charles II. Penn hoped to establish a colony where people of all creeds and nationalities could live together in peace. The first settlers began arriving in Pennsylvania in 1682 settling around Philadelphia at the junction of the Delaware and Schuylkill Rivers.

Jim Rementer grew up in southeastern Pennsylvania and developed a great interest in the Lenape. In 1962 he moved to Dewey, Oklahoma, to study the Lenape language. He was adopted into the Thompson family by James H. Thompson who was one of his earliest tutors in the language.

Bessie Snake (1896-1999) was raised near Anadarko, Oklahoma, and was a speaker of the Unami dialect of Lenape. She and her husband both spoke the Lenape language. Bessie was a highly respected elder and worked with several linguists to help preserve her language. She also worked with anthropologists and historians to help preserve knowledge of Lenape ways.