

Delaware Indian Villages at Philadelphia

By

C. A. WESLAGER

My good friend John Witthoft very thoughtfully sent me a typed copy of his review of my *Red Men On The Brandywine* before its appearance in this publication.¹ I promptly wrote him that, with one exception, I thought it a "fair, objective and well-written job." I took exception to his remarks about the Indian villages at or near present Philadelphia. This is what he said in his review::

Weslager defers to most of our older authors in statements concerning the Philadelphia area, and accepts their assumption that the most important Delaware settlements were at the location of modern Philadelphia and in the immediate vicinity. I know of no scrap of documentary evidence for proto-historic Indian settlements in this area. . . . I am convinced that the two communities which Weslager discusses were the only major Delaware settlements in Pennsylvania south of the falls at Trenton, N. J., during the period of Dutch and early Swedish settlements on the Delaware.

When I read this contention in his typed copy I added to my letter to Witthoft that, he was putting himself out on a frail limb. I said further that I could "overwhelmingly" prove the case for a large Indian population in the Philadelphia area. Regrettably this didn't deter my good friend from making the brash statement I have quoted above. Now, to protect my own reputation for historical accuracy, I have no alternative except to refute a misstatement I warned him against. I have no hesitancy about being called on to prove anything I have ever written, but I regret that by so doing I may make an otherwise well-informed scholar appear ignorant of readily available source material.

First, let it be understood that I do not "defer to most of our older authors." I frequently disagree with them, and in this instance I base my conclusions on my own independent research in 17th century sources, regardless of what other authors may believe.

Secondly, I am speaking of the period from about 1623 (the time of the building of Fort Nassau by the Dutch) to about 1655 (when the Dutch seized the Swedish territory on the Delaware).

Thirdly, my argument is based entirely on maps, journals, and other contemporary documents written by Europeans who actually visited the Delaware River area during this period. This evidence, some of which I will summarize below, leads me to repeat what I have said before; namely, that the archaeologist who seeks knowledge of the most important 17th century Delaware Indian towns will find his objective beneath the busy traffic of the streets of Philadelphia and suburbs. I am not unmindful of the fact that archaeological evidences may still be found at what I consider two Delaware Indian towns of lesser importance, Minguannan on White Clay Creek, and the village in the Big Bend of the Brandywine.

The Swedish clergyman, Johan Campanius, who accompanied Governor Johan Printz to New Sweden in 1643, kept a detailed journal of his observations among the Indians. His grandson, Thomas, later published a volume based on the pastor's journal in which we find the following important reference to the Lenape:

1. *The Penna. Archaeologist*, Vol. 25 No. 1, June, 1955, pp. 76-77,

Their principal towns or places are six, namely *Poaetquissing*, *Pemickpacka*, *Wequiaquenske*, *Wickquakonick*, *Passayunk* and *Nittabonck*. In each town there is a sachem or chief over the people.²

All of these places were in or near present Philadelphia, but for simplicity I will pursue only two of them in this article; namely, *Passayunk* and *Nittabonck* (also spelled *Nittabakonck*).

In 1648, Hudde, the Dutch Commissary at Fort Nassau (present Gloucester, N. J.), was approached by several Indian chiefs urging him to build a trading house on the Schuylkill River. He referred to these chiefs as "some Sachems of Passayonk." Several days later Hudde visited the Schuylkill "and sent for the Sachems to whom I stated that I now was come to build on this place which they had given me."³ This citation is quite clear that there were Indians then living at Passayunk, which place we can readily identify.

In 1654, the young Swedish engineer Peter Lindeström accompanied Governor Johan Rising to New Sweden and he promptly busied himself in mapping the Delaware River drainage system. He also prepared a journal of his observations in the New World. Lindeström was an accurate, intelligent observer, and a skillful cartographer, who evinced considerable interest in the Indians and the places they inhabited.

On his most important map of the Delaware, which Amandus Johnson has identified as Map "A," Lindeström shows many places under their original Indian names.⁴ For example, he gives the Schuylkill River under its native name, *Menejackse*, a variant of the form *Manayunk* given in several 17th century Indian deeds. Further, he indicates *Passajungh* as a place on the east bank of the Schuylkill near the Delaware River and *Nittabakonck* as another place further upstream on the east bank in the vicinity of present Fairmount Park.

In his journal Lindeström explains that the Schuylkill drainage area had a sizable Indian population:

From *Wickquakonick* [in present Philadelphia, from which the word *Wicacaoa* was derived] all the way to *Nittabakonck* which is situated at the falls of the River *Menejackse*, the land is very fine, but not so high as that which can be seen at *Nittabakonck*. This is occupied in greatest force by the most intelligent savages of several nations of savages who own this river and dwell here.⁵

Lindeström then goes on to enumerate the names of the six places in Philadelphia and environs which were settled under six Lenape chiefs:

As for instance, *Poaetquessingh*, *Pemickpacka*, *Wickquaquenske*, *Wickquakonick*, which are situated along the river [Delaware] but *Passajunk* and *Nittabakonck* are situated up at the *Menejackse* River, and these chiefs have their names after the names of the countries, which they rightfully own.⁶

The testimony introduced so far should be more than sufficient to refute Witt-hoft's statement, but I obligated myself to "overwhelmingly" prove my case. I may be pardoned, therefore, for piling on additional evidence to add finality to the question. Again I call on Lindeström following a personal visit he made to the Schuylkill region on June 5, 1654. This is what he said, based on first-hand observation at a time when the Lenape were still established in their ancestral homes:

We went up to the Schuylkill to inspect the tracts of land which her Royal Majesty had graciously donated to Commandant *Sven Schute*, namely *Passayungh*, where the principal Sachems live, i.e., chiefs or rulers of the savages now live.⁷

On June 17, 1654, Governor Rising held a conference with 10 Indian chiefs on

2. Thomas Campanius Holm, *A Short Description of the Province of New Sweden, etc.*, trans du Ponceau, *Memoirs Historical Society of Penna.*, Vol. 3, 1834, p. 46.
3. "Report of Andries Hudde, 1648" in *The Instruction for Johan Printz*, trans. Amandus Johnson, Phila. 1930, p. 272.
4. This map appears op. p. 156 in the Amandus Johnson translation of Peter Lindeström, *Geographia Americae*, Phila. 1925.
5. Lindeström, op. cit., p. 170.
6. Op. cit., p. 171.
7. Op. cit., p. 126.

Tinicum Island. Among the chiefs, the records make specific mention of "From Passajung, Ahopamen and his brother Quirocus . . . Peminacka, Speck, Weymotto, and Juncker from Nittabakonck etc."⁸ In this reference we have not only a repetition of the two village names, but the names of their chieftains!

During this conference the Indians urged the Swedes to settle near them so that the trade could be expedited. "We should settle some colonists at Passajungh, they said, where most of them lived, etc."⁹

Governor Rising is authority for the information that the chief Peminacka presented his land on the Schuylkill to the Swedes, and that the chief Ahopameck (Ahopamen) "also gave to us all the land which Captain Scute had received in donation, only excepting for himself half of the Schuylkill and the land called Passayungh."¹⁰ It is quite apparent that the Indians did not want to dispose of certain of their Schuylkill lands where, as the records make clear, their principal towns were situated. Of course, as we know, the white settlers gradually encroached on these lands, although certain sections of the Passayunk area continued to be occupied by the Indians until the latter part of the 17th century.

In 1661, it was recorded that the Delaware Indians were so afraid of the English that "they have held a gathering near Passajongh for several days" and had collected wampum to give the Minquas to intercede on their behalf.¹¹

Also, in 1661, Delaware Indian warriors living at Passayunk attacked English settlers in Maryland, and to arbitrate their differences the Maryland authorities met with the Indians at Appoquinimink, Delaware, September 19, 1661. In the articles of peace concluded between them, there is specific reference that the chief Pinna acted "on behalf of the Passagonke Indians."¹² The "Passagonke Indians" were

specifically and exclusively Delawares then living at Passayunk, which is within the area of present Philadelphia.

During this period strange Indians were observed near Wilmington and New Castle, and on Nov. 17, 1662, a servant of John Staelcop's was murdered. The authorities were unable to determine which tribe was responsible for the crime, but they feared the "river savages," i.e., Delawares, were to blame. Apparently a party of Delaware Indians from Philadelphia had been hunting in the vicinity of Wilmington where the murder occurred. The official records state that "we have summoned the Chief of Passajongh, under whom the hunting parties here belong."¹³

I cannot name an exact date when the Delawares deserted their Passayunk and Nittabonck villages, but it was after 1662. The Swedish ecclesiastical records indicate that in 1675 plans were made for the building of the church as Wicacoa "for the inhabitants of Passayunk and so upwards."¹⁴ In 1680, the land records list the names of 14 white owners at Passayunk. Thus it would appear that toward the end of the century and prior to William Penn's appearance the Indian lands were being occupied by whites.

But, as I have shown, the contemporary documents make it clear that prior to the organized movement of white settlers to Philadelphia, the land thereabouts had a large and important Indian population. I submit that the evidence herein introduced overwhelmingly proves the point and refutes Withhoft's statement of opinion which has no foundation in fact.

8. Op. cit., p. 128.

9. Op. cit., p. 130.

10. "Report of Governor Rising, 1654" in *Narratives of Early Pennsylvania, West New Jersey and Delaware*, ed. Myers, N. Y. 1912, p. 148.

11. *Documents Relating to the History of the Dutch and Swedish Settlements on the Delaware River*, ed. B. Farnow, Vol. 12, Albany, 1877, p. 334.

12. George Johnston, *History of Cecil County, Md.*, Elkton 1881 pp. 55-61 quotes the original treaty which, incidentally, I have checked in the Maryland Archives.

13. Farnow, op. cit., p. 417.

14. Op. cit., p. 526, p. 506, p. 648.

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a rebuttal by
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Place Names Translated by

Nora Thompson Dean

Appoquinimink	Ahpukwënëmink	Place where we stayed for a long time
Menejackse (Manayunk)	Mëneyunk	Place where we drink
Nittabakonck	Nitapëkunk	Place which is easy to get to
Passagonke	Pasakunk	Place where there is a fork (as in a path or stream)
Passajung	Pahsayunk	In the valley
Pemickpacka	Pëmikpeka	Where the water is flowing
Wicacoa	Wikwèko	Place where something ends
Wickquaquenscke (or) Wequiquenske	Wikwiòkwènskwèk	Where the grass ends

Personal Names in the article

Pinna	Pëna	Look! (nickname)
Quirocos	Kwilukwès	He who cannot be found