



NATIVE PEOPLE OF THE EASTERN WOODLANDS

Think to yourself for a moment, and try to imagine a Native American. If you are like many people, the image may include a dark-skinned man with flowing jet-black hair. The long fringe from his buckskin garments blows in the wind. He may be sitting astride a fine spotted pony, bow in hand, poised to strike down a passing buffalo. In the background looms a tall buffalo skin tipi painted with colorful designs of birds and animals. If this is the type of image that came to mind, it is by no means incorrect. A scene such as the one formerly described would be a common sight across the Mississippi on the Great Plains. But what about the Native American people here in West Virginia? What did they look like and how did they live? The answers may surprise you.

THE MOUND BUILDERS

Long before the time of Pricketts Fort, a native group now called the Mound Builders, built a number of mounds along the Monongahela, Ohio and Mississippi Rivers. Many artifacts have been discovered, such as beads, pottery, stone implements, pipes and arrowheads. At the time of the first settlements, arrowheads were so numerous, that they were picked up and reworked into gun flints. Mounds were used as fortifications, burial grounds, and religious sites and are not only found in North America, but all over the world.

NATIVES AT THE TIME OF PRICKETTS FORT



During the 1770s, there were three main groups of native people living here. The largest of these were the Shawnee, a tribal group who are part of the Algonquin language and culture group. Of all Native American groups from the region, the Shawnee had the best claim to the territory. They had populated the area very early, and most researchers believe they are descendants of the Fort Ancient people, a prehistoric Native American group that lived in the river valleys of the Ohio, Kanawha, and

Monongahela. During the seventeenth century, the Shawnee were forced out by the Iroquois, who were pushing down into the area in order to gain new territory to trap and hunt animals for their valuable furs, which they used to trade with the Europeans for much prized trade goods. Although the Shawnee were dispersed from the Ohio Valley in the 1600s, by the 1740s most of the Shawnee had returned to their Ohio homelands where they reformed their tribe and rebuilt their villages. These Shawnee would prove to be the fiercest in defending their territory from white invasion.

The second largest tribal group was the Delaware, or Lenape. The original homeland of the Delaware was in the Susquehanna and Delaware River valleys of present day eastern Pennsylvania, New Jersey, and Delaware. By the



1770s, these Native Americans had been pushed further and further west as white settlement crept increasingly westward, and they began to move their villages to the Ohio Valley among their Shawnee relatives. The Delaware are also an Algonquin-speaking people and their culture is very similar to the Shawnee. All Algonquin-speaking Native American groups, of which there are several, refer to the Delaware as “grandfathers,” because it is believed that they were the original group of Algonquin people from which the several others branched off. Many Delaware had already been Christianized by a number of Moravian missionaries who lived among the Native Americans for the purpose of converting them. For this reason, the Delaware were more inclined to be peaceful, as opposed to the Shawnee, who were more likely to fight the incoming whites.

The last major group was a mixed group of Native Americans who called themselves Mingo. The Mingo were made up of many western Senecas and some Cayugas, Susquehannahs, Oneidas and other Iroquois peoples. These Native Americans relocated to the Ohio Valley as white settlement pushed into their original homelands, and like the Shawnee, the Mingo were more inclined to fight white encroachment. These Native Americans differed from the Shawnee and Delaware in that they were from the Iroquoian language and culture group. Even though cultural differences existed between the Mingo and their Algonquin neighbors, they enjoyed very good relationships with the Shawnee and Delaware, and when the time came to fight they took up the hatchet alongside their brothers.

An important thing to understand about these Native Americans is that by the 1770s they had already been involved in the fur trade with the Europeans for almost one hundred years. This dramatically affected their cultures as they adopted new, and often better, European technologies. For example, they traded furs for muskets, which replaced the traditional bow and arrow. Instead of relying on their own skills to make tools and clothes, the Native Americans were now trading for new steel tools and nice cotton, linen, and wool clothing. Their self-sufficient lifestyle was replaced by a dependency on European trade goods, so that over the generations, they began to lose some of their former skills and their culture began to change. The fur trade was very big business, and the Native Americans traded for anything and everything including tools, blankets, jewelry, cooking pots and utensils, and even china plates. Anything the frontier whites had, the Native Americans had, too, and often more of it.

CONFLICT

The 1770s was a particularly violent time. In 1763 the British passed the Royal Proclamation Line, which stated that no whites were to go beyond the crest of the Appalachian Mountains. That territory was to be Native American land, but this arrangement was to be the beginning of many problems, as white hunters called “longhunters” began to encroach on Native American hunting territory, and groups of settlers began to push over the mountains. It was the Native Americans understanding that the “father across the great waters,” (the English king) forbade his subjects from invading Native American lands. So when the whites began to flow across the Appalachians, conflict became inevitable. Things came to a head in 1774 during what became known as Lord Dunmore’s War. This was a war fought between the frontier Virginians and the Ohio tribes, the Shawnee in particular. The Native Americans were defeated at the Battle of Point Pleasant in October 1774 and afterwards signed the Treaty of Camp Charlotte, which



ceded all lands south of the Ohio River to the British. The treaty was certainly not the end of the conflict, though. For the next twenty years, the Native Americans would fiercely fight to defend their homelands, and white settlers on the frontier spent their days and nights very nervous, not knowing when the next Native American attack might occur. Conflict did not really end until the Native Americans were defeated at the Battle of Fallen Timbers in 1794. After the signing of the Treaty of Greenville, there were no more Native American attacks and the tribes found themselves pushed west out of their homelands.

THE FUR TRADE AND EUROPEAN INFLUENCE

Let us imagine again. This time, envision that an alien spaceship has just landed on Earth. Notice how differently the aliens look compared to us. Their clothing and physical features would be much different from our own. Also, take note of their bizarre technology and strange language. Picture the feelings of wonder, confusion, and fear that we would all have towards our visitors from outer space. These are the exact feelings that the Native people in the New World undoubtedly had when they met the first European sailors. And as would certainly happen in our example above, the Europeans and Native Americans began a material and cultural exchange almost upon contact. This exchange drastically altered both the European and Native American lifestyle; however, it was the Native American who changed most dramatically.

If the aliens we pictured had, for example, figured out the secret of cold nuclear fusion, we here on Earth would surely try to procure their more advanced technology. The same thing happened to the native peoples of the New World. When the people here found out that they could use metal tools instead of ones laboriously chipped from flint, hunt with a musket instead of a bow, or clothe themselves with European cloth instead of skins they gladly traded their technology for that of the Europeans. In doing so, however, they became dependent on these new technologies, and all those wondrous things certainly did not come for free.

Originally, when the Europeans began to explore the New World, they were in search of gold and other precious metals. The Spanish found such riches in Mexico and South America, but the early explorers to our part of the country had no such luck. However, they did discover something just as valuable. What they found in the eastern forests was an abundance of fur-bearing animals. These furs were to become the main currency for the Native people here to obtain the European trade goods they so desperately wanted. By that time in Europe, most of the fur-bearing animals were near extinction from centuries of over-hunting. The only place in Europe that fur-bearing animals still roamed was in the region of present day Russia, but the trade routes to that area had become disrupted by Moorish invasions in the Middle East. When the Europeans came here and found all of our furry creatures, they immediately began to employ the Native Americans to trap them so they could be sent back to Europe. The fur trade was born.

Besides the fact that the fur trade and subsequent influx of European trade goods greatly altered native culture and lifestyle, it also more importantly changed the natives' self-sufficiency and relationship to the land. Before the



introduction of trade goods, the natives here utilized the natural world around them for all of their needs. Trees provided bows, arrows, housing, and many other things. Animals were used for food clothing and tools. Everything the Native Americans required for their survival was found and taken from Mother Nature. After the Native Americans began using European technology, they realized that it was much easier, for example, to trade for a metal knife rather than knap one from flint. After years of substituting European technology for their own, the Native Americans began to forget their old ways. They forgot how to knap flint, cook with clay pots, and hunt with a bow. Now, instead of being dependent only on the world around them, they were dependent on the Europeans. Trade was no longer an option; it was a necessity for survival. Once the Native Americans were dependent on trade goods, the need for hunting animals increased. Before, the Native Americans hunted only for what they needed, but now that they were hunting animals only for their fur, they began to over-harvest them. Animal carcasses were often left to rot, the meat not utilized at all. Many fur-bearing animals were hunted to near extinction by the Native Americans here in the East.

APPEARANCE

The appearance of the Eastern Woodland Native American depends greatly upon the time period being examined. At the time of Pricketts Fort, the European influence was very evident in the way the natives dressed; however, their clothing style remained unchanged to allow them a comfortable existence in their woodland environment. Beginning from the bottom up, the native people here wore center-seam, puckered toe moccasins. The moccasin was basically a slipper made from one piece of deerskin. On the sides of these moccasins were trapezoidal shaped flaps, which could be tied up around the ankle. These moccasins, as well as most Native American leather goods, were usually dyed black using a dark walnut dye. This soft-soled shoe allowed for quiet movement across the forest floor, a very important feature for a hunting culture.

In place of pants, the Native American men in the east wore breechcloths and leggings. Leggings were basically tubes that covered the bottom part of the leg from just above the knee down to the ankle. By the 1770s, most of these leggings were made of wool. The most common colors for leggings, as well as most woolen goods, were red, black, or blue. The seams of the leggings were usually worn on the outside of the leg. Leggings were decorated with strips of colorful silk or wool ribbon and were held in place on the leg by garters tied just below the knee. Garters could be simple pieces of leather, or elaborate finger-woven straps decorated with beads and quillwork. A strap extended from the top outside of the legging and was tied to a belt worn around the waist to hold the leggings up. This belt around the waist also held the breechcloth in place. A breechcloth is a long narrow piece of cloth that protects the Native American's modesty. The cloth is passed over the belt, through the legs, and over the belt again in the back. Breechcloths and leggings allow for freedom and ease of movement, so much so, that some European hunters adopted this native style of dress. In place of a breechcloth, women wore a wrap skirt. A wrap skirt is a piece of cloth, usually red, black, or blue wool that is wrapped around the waist and tied in place. Skirts were usually worn just above the knee. On their lower legs women wore leggings similar in style to the men's.



On their top half, both men and women commonly wore European style shirts. White linen shirts were the most common, although, as in European society, a myriad of colors and patterns could be found. Fancy ruffled shirts were often desired. Sometimes shirts were ripped down the center in the front. The shirt could then be worn open or kept shut with a belt tied around the waist. It is interesting to note that, although the Native Americans kept themselves very clean, they were notorious for never washing their clothing. Shirts were often worn, unwashed, until they literally rotted off the body. Also interesting to note is the lack of leather used in native clothing. Most clothes by this period were made from European cloth. By the 1770s, furs and skins were more valuable as a trade item than as a material to make clothes. In comparison, a pair of pants can be made from dollar bills. A person could collect the bills, and sew them together to make a pair of pants. However, this would be quite silly. It is much easier and more practical to use those dollar bills to buy a pair of pants. The same principal holds true for the Native Americans and their skins.

From the few simple articles of clothing, one may assume that the native people here were relatively plain dressers. However, quite the opposite is true. The Native Americans here, especially the men, were notorious for being flashy dressers. Most of the native clothing was decorated in some way. Leather articles were most commonly decorated with quillwork. Porcupine quills can actually be dyed a variety of colors and intricately sewn to the leather in strikingly beautiful designs and patterns. Cloth goods could be decorated with beads and ribbon. Strands of colorful beads were also worn around the neck. Native people were also extremely fond of trading for silver jewelry. Silver ring brooches decorated much of their clothing. Wide silver bands encircled their wrists and arms, silver pieces hung from their ears and noses, and large silver gorgets hung from their necks. Silver was even entwined into their hair, along with colorful pieces of ribbon and feathers. This picture is much different from our buckskin clad Native American from the Plains.

LIFESTYLE

As mentioned before, the most prevalent groups of native people here in West Virginia during the 1770s were the Shawnee and Delaware. Most nations here in the east were relatively similar; however, the Shawnee will be discussed in particular. One of the easiest ways to discuss the Shawnee lifestyle is to break it up by gender. Regardless of sex, a child was not considered human until the age of two to three years. At this point, when the child starts walking on two legs (as a human does) and starts speaking a human language, he or she is given a name. At this time, if you were a male child, the septum of nose would be pierced and a tiny bark tube would be inserted into the hole until it healed. After it healed, you could wear rings in the nose for the rest of your life, and you would be very proud of it because it showed that you were a man. In between the ages of three to about thirteen, a male child would learn the duties that he would be responsible for as a man. Hunting, fishing, trapping, survival skills, and most importantly warfare would be taught to him during this time period. It was not uncommon for a male child to leave the home and live with an uncle or grandfather who could further instruct him in his learning. At the time of puberty, a male child would go through another special ceremony. This time he would have the outer edge of his earlobe split until it was almost completely severed from the ear. This would be stretched with heavy weight until it



healed, giving the child long loops. This was a rite of passage, an outward symbol of the changes going on inside the boy's body. From this day on, the child was a man and he was expected to act like one. He could now participate in war parties if he chose. For the rest of his life, the male would hunt to provide food and goods for his family and, for a time, participate in warfare. When not engaged in the chase, the Native American men were infamously lazy.

Life for the women was quite different. Around the same time a male child was given his name, a female would be named as well. However, the girls did not pierce the nasal septum. Just as a male child would spend part of his childhood learning from a male relative, the females would also. While a male child was learning how to hunt and fight, the girls would learn to farm and tend to the domestic chores. In many eastern native societies, farming was a woman's job. The women cleared the land, planted the crops, tended the crops, and harvested the crops. Women in native societies often held more power than their European counterparts. Women were expected to meet in council to make many of the important decisions for the tribe. Their chores also included cooking and preserving food, tanning hides, making clothing, and care and maintenance of the family home or wickiup. The Shawnee and other Eastern tribes, did not live in tipis. The tipi is a highly mobile structure found on the Plains. The Plains people followed the roaming buffalo herds. When the herd decided to move, the people would pack up and move with them. The people here in the East were more sedentary. First of all, there were no large herds of buffalo in this region to follow, and, second, the people here were agriculturists.

As you can see, the native people living here in the East are quite different from the ones that many of us picture in our minds. Hollywood has done a good job stereotyping Native American people and placing them into one category. However, it is important to remember that there were over 500 Native American tribes present here at the time of Columbus. Each tribe may be as different as English is to Japanese, and the people living in the east were much more diversified than many of us have ever imagined.

REFERENCES

Archer, Butler and Hubert.

David Zeisberger's History of the Northern American Indians.

O'Neil, J. F.III.

Their Bearing is Noble and Proud.

Wallace, Paul, AW.

The Travels of John Heckwelder in Frontier America.