

# Prehistoric Times

## *Our Landscape and First People*

The countryside along the Hudson River and throughout Greene County always has been a lure for settlers and speculators. Newcomers and longtime residents find the waterway, its tributaries, the Catskills, and our hills and valleys a primary reason for living and enjoying life here. New Baltimore and its surroundings were formed and massaged by the dynamic forces of nature, the result of ongoing geologic events over millions of years.<sup>1</sup>

The most prominent geographic features in the region came into being during what geologists called the Paleozoic era, nearly 550 million years ago. It was a time when continents collided and parted, causing upheavals that pushed vast land masses into hills and mountains and complementing lowlands. The Kalkberg, the spiny ridge running through New Baltimore, is named for one of the rock layers formed in ancient times. Immense seas covered much of New York and served as collecting pools for sediments that consolidated into today's rock formations. The only animals around were simple forms of jellyfish, sponges, and arthropods with their characteristic jointed legs and exoskeletons, like grasshoppers and beetles.

The next integral formation event happened 1.6 million years ago during the Pleistocene epoch when the Laurentide ice mass developed in Canada. This continental glacier grew unyieldingly, expanding southward and retreating several times, radically altering the landscape time and again as it traveled. Greene County was buried. Only the highest

peak of the Catskills, Ulster County's 4,200-foot Slide Mountain, may have poked up out of the frozen terrain. So much water was consumed by the glaciations that seas were a few hundred feet lower than today.

The latest significant geologic activity that defined today's landscape was during the Wisconsin age with the last advance and retreat of the Laurentide ice formation. This icy accumulation covered all but a tiny sliver of New York about 22,000 years BP (i.e., before present, a common archaeological designation for time) and was gone from the state 10,000 years BP.

As the sheet melted, debris dammed outlets and led to the flooding of great glacial pools, including Lake Albany. This massive body of water existed between 15,000 and 10,000 BP, covering the Hudson River Valley area from near Lake George all the way down to around Staten Island.

As Lake Albany dried, it left hills and valleys and great deposits of silt, sand, and clay, which proved valuable for future residents in making pottery, ceramics, and bricks. This is the landscape much as we see it today after thousands of years of weathering and erosion. The remains of the sandy bottom of the lake still are very apparent in Albany's Pine Bush preserve. Some beach-like areas along the Hudson, particularly on the east side, also are remnants of Lake Albany.

One major by-product of the land shifting and upheavals and extensive glaciations was the creation of great stores of valuable chert and flint deposits that provided the earliest human arrivals with an important resource. Chert is a fine-grained, sedimentary rock related to quartz, with flint being a subcategory. The material is very hard yet susceptible to glass-like fracturing, making it well suited for crafting stone tools that were critical for survival in prehistoric times. The rock's hardness makes it very resistant to weathering and deterioration, which is why almost everyone seems to have either found or seen an old arrowhead.

### Our First Human Residents

The cycle of long periods of icing and warming made the area rather uninviting, particularly when coupled with the large and hungry feral animals that roamed the wilderness. As early people gained basic tools, skins for warmth, and weapons for protection and food gathering, they were equipped to overcome such obstacles and move from their native Europe and Asia to exploit the abundant natural resources of the lands of North America.

Solid information about prehistoric times is sketchy and based broadly on examination of geologic features and fossil remains, the types of stone tools used by people at different times, and the use of more exotic scientific methods such as radiocarbon and radiometric dating. The evidence points to about 11,000 BP as the date for the first human habitation of the Greene County and New Baltimore areas, right as the ice and water finally left.

How people got here is subject to much ongoing guesswork. The initial feelings were that adventuresome travelers came across Beringia. This long-submerged strip of land linking Asia with Alaska had been created by the lowered sea levels caused by the ice ages. Some researchers now believe that people could have come in makeshift, seagoing water craft, landing at a range of possible locations along the west coast.

The newcomers then took hundreds of years to trek across North America, perhaps in search of viable food sources. The arrival of people to our area was rather late in the game. Discoveries in Africa date man's ancestors there to be six million or more years old. Our people do not even match up well with the earliest relics of human life in the rest of North America, which date anywhere from 12,500 to 20,000 BP.

As New York was recovering from the last ice age, the land became tundra-like with clumps of foliage and various grasses and ground cover. Pine, hardwood forests, and other woods and brush were becoming re-established after the long period of icy cover. With the fresh vegetation came new sources of nuts, berries, and other nourishment that attracted foraging caribou, elk, deer, mastodons, bears, giant beavers, wolves, and turkeys. Richer aquatic life also was appearing so fishing was increasingly possible. All these factors combined to provide incentive for human residence.

### Who Were These Earliest People?

The Paleo-Indians were the first arrivals to America. These people are thought to have been hunters about 8,000 to 13,000 years BP who wandered the countryside in small groups to discover whatever adequate food supplies existed.<sup>2</sup>

As the people adopted more complex ways of life, researchers assigned other names to the groups to differentiate them. The last ancient settlers, the Woodland people, appeared about 3,000 BP in eastern North America and lasted nearly to the time of first European contact. They differed

from older classification groups primarily through their more sophisticated development of pottery and agriculture (particularly growing of the three staple crops of corn, beans, and squash) and the use of funerary mounds, earthen works to entomb their dead. The Woodland people are the direct ancestors of the more familiar Mohicans who dominated much of the Hudson Valley for many years.

Archaeologists have found the mid- and upper-Hudson region, including Greene County, to hold many treasures documenting prehistoric man, starting with the Paleo-Indian culture and extending through to the arrival of the first Europeans. The most familiar and renowned sites may be Flint Mine Hill in the town of Coxsackie and West Athens Hill in the town of Athens. New Baltimore was part of Coxsackie until the State legalized it as a separate municipality in 1811. Another major finding was made at the Goldkrest site just north of New Baltimore across the Hudson River at Rensselaer County's East Greenbush.

#### *Flint Mine Hill*

For many years, amateur relic hunters had been digging on the ridge just south of the village of Coxsackie looking for arrowheads and other stony artifacts. In 1921, state archaeologist Arthur C. Parker started to investigate the plot of land that he had been eyeing for quite a while. Called Flint Mine Hill, this site was viewed as an Indian quarrying location for a considerable period, but no organized scientific investigation had been done.

What Parker discovered was "the most remarkable archeological monument in the state of New York. It was literally a mountain of arrowheads!"<sup>3</sup> Employing much hyperbole and poetic waxing, Parker wrote the first widespread documentation of the importance of the site. Flint Mine Hill still ranks as one of the largest chert quarries ever uncovered in the East.

In the mid-1990s, a team from the State University of New York at Albany found remains of tools used in the production process and tools that were end products themselves. The objects dated from about 3,400 to 5,000 BP back to the Paleo-Indians, suggesting that the site had been used as a quarrying workshop for thousands of years.<sup>4</sup>

#### *West Athens Hill*

In 1962, a local resident, R. Arthur Johnson, was poking around on a hill in Athens after hearing that a telecommunications tower was to be

constructed on the site. Johnson began to notice significant deposits of flint and other evidence subsequently dated back to the Paleo-Indian culture. Professional archaeologists were called in, and research of the area has continued since that time.

Perched four hundred feet above its surroundings, West Athens Hill turned out to be the largest Paleo-Indian stone tool quarrying and manufacturing workshop and possible residential site found to date in New York State. The location is one of the most well-documented Paleo-Indian sites in the East. A key researcher throughout this period was longtime state archaeologist Robert E. Funk, whose work is summarized in *An Ice Age Quarry-Workshop: The West Athens Hill Site Revisited*, published by the New York State Education Department in 2004.

#### *Goldkrest Site*

Just a few miles north of New Baltimore on the opposite side of the Hudson, the Consolidated Natural Gas Transmission Corporation was planning in the early 1990s to set a natural gas pipeline across Kuyper Island in the town of East Greenbush. This formerly freestanding piece of land now is joined to Papscanee Island, which, in turn, has been linked to the mainland, mostly through deposits of dredging spoils.

As part of the required archaeological survey for such projects, investigators found numerous remnants of human life, including bone, wood, and stone artifacts, pottery pieces, and evidence of wood-fire hearths. The treasures dated from the middle of the Woodland period into the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

Goldkrest is archaeologically and historically significant for two reasons. It was an undisturbed habitation site from the latter part of the Woodland and early European periods. This discovery was the first of its kind in this region and right near the center of the Mohican territory, solidifying the location's connection to that group of people. The area around Papscanee Island was the home base for the Mohicans for many decades. Perhaps most importantly, Goldkrest also contained distinct evidence of pole-frame living quarters, including a "long house," again a first for the upper Hudson Valley.<sup>5</sup>

#### *New Baltimore*

Important archeological discoveries in Athens and Coxsackie and nearby places like Bethlehem, Catskill, and Leeds have demonstrated the wide range of time for a human presence in Greene, Albany, and Rensselaer counties. What about New Baltimore itself? No sites quite as dramatic as

Flint Mine, Athens Hill, or Goldkrest have been found yet, but exciting discoveries continue to be made. While people may have been living in village-like communities during the latter part of prehistoric times, no compelling evidence has been found to link any of them to New Baltimore. More likely, the local findings relate to hunting camps and other temporary visitors.

In his influential 1920 work, *The Archeological History of New York*, Arthur C. Parker reported evidence of “Camp sites at New Baltimore village.”<sup>6</sup> Regrettably, Parker often relied on anecdotal, ill-defined information as the basis for listing certain sites. In New Baltimore’s case, there does not appear to be any additional details on the location of the “camp sites” beyond crediting prominent geologist George H. Chadwick and local residents Egbert Beardsley and Orin Q. Flint as sources of information on Greene County discoveries.<sup>7</sup>

Early populations were largely nomadic or semi-nomadic so the findings may be linked to those periods. The later Mohican inhabitants commonly had movable living shelters and other temporary quarters like lean-tos at locations used for hunting and fishing. Since they were prominent near the northern New Baltimore border, it is not hard to suggest that there was a relationship to the Parker “camp sites.”

In 1977, Mary Ivey, Gary Berg, and Susan Halpern reported on an archaeological evaluation of the path a proposed sewer project was to take in the New Baltimore hamlet on the Hudson.<sup>8</sup> They had dug shovel test pits every fifty feet along the project’s right of way except where bedrock was present. The only substantive artifacts found were in neighboring Coeymans, where the sewer system would have emptied into that town’s waste treatment facility. As a result, they theorized that the Parker “camp sites” really were in that adjoining municipality.

Almost in New Baltimore, just a stone’s throw to the north, lies what was once Barren Island. At the mouth of the Hannacroix Creek, in the town of Coeymans, this small plot of land is now part of the mainland. It has a long, interesting history and has been rumored to be the burial place of Barent Pieter Coeymans, an important European landowner who will come up again later in this narrative.

In 1959, and later in the 1960s, archaeologists excavated a number of places on the island and made some exciting discoveries.<sup>9</sup> Included were several hearths containing numerous remnants of native life such as charcoal, bone and shell fragments, and flint chips. Many stone and pottery artifacts also were uncovered.

The bulk of the materials dated from the early and middle parts of the Woodland period, although evidence of earlier times also was found. There even were human remains that could not be identified, nor could the writers offer an idea of a burial date. The researchers proposed that Barren Island was a long-term spring and summer hunting and fishing encampment.

At a site in the southern part of New Baltimore on the Cocksackie Creek, two amateur archaeologists digging by hand in the summer of 1967 found stone projectile points, spear points, knives, scrapers, drills, and other items.<sup>10</sup> These artifacts generally were discovered in plowed fields, near the surface of the ground, and were attributed to Archaic people who lived between the Paleo-Indian and Woodland eras, about three to four thousand years ago.

The location was conjectured to have been a fishing or hunting camp or winter quarters for wandering natives. However, no evidence of fishing was found beyond one possible net sinker, despite the site being only about half a mile from the Hudson. The men also dug up the remnants of what were considered two small hearths, which lends credence to the theory that the place was a temporary camp of some sort.

Over an extended period between 1982 and 1984, the same two individuals who unearthed the Cocksackie Creek site artifacts were exploring near the Hudson River again in the southeastern corner of town.<sup>11</sup> They found more projectile points from the Archaic period. This research has never been formally published so details are lacking, and dates have not been confirmed. Interestingly, at least one of the people responsible for this work subsequently gave up such explorations because of the damage untrained searchers could do to important historic sites.

As we entered the twenty-first century, the Greene County Industrial Development Agency (IDA) was busy attempting to entice businesses to locate in a spot along New York State Route 9W straddling the New Baltimore and Cocksackie town lines. The southern portion was developed first into the Greene Business and Technology Park, becoming home first to a Save-A-Lot grocery warehouse. The northern section of the property was named the Kalkberg Commerce Park, commemorating the spiny ridge running its way through both towns. In 2004, the National Bedding Company, makers of Serta mattresses, became the initial company committed to locating in the park on the New Baltimore side.

As part of the State's requirements for evaluating the environmental impact of such projects, intensive archaeological surveys were done across

the proposed development area. To examine the section extending into New Baltimore, the IDA commissioned Edward V. Curtin, a consulting archaeologist, who identified sixteen previous reports about the locations of prehistoric archaeological artifacts within a two-mile radius of the site.

After examining the ground's surface and digging a series of test pits, Curtin and his associates uncovered a number of places with concentrations of artifacts. The materials at the Kalkberg site included a scattering of projectile points, flakes, and similar items, again indicating evidence of short-term camps.

Curtin suggested a wide spread of time for dating the bulk of the discovered objects, from the latter part of the Paleo-Indian period to the middle of the Archaic period. He also described more isolated examples of the late Archaic and middle Woodland periods. Given the site's location along a historically prominent roadway, Curtin also found artifacts from the nineteenth and twentieth centuries—glass, ceramics, and nails that would be associated routinely with more modern human settlement and buildings.<sup>12</sup>

### The Mohicans

As the seventeenth century dawned, New Baltimore was part of the area controlled by the Algonquian-speaking Mohican people.<sup>13</sup> One of their primary living places for many decades was at Schodack, right near the modern northeastern New Baltimore border. Their exact history is fragmentary and confusing given the lack of a written record from ancient times. Later, the Europeans compounded issues with their imprecision in differentiating among various native groups.

Recent studies based primarily on similarities in historical language patterns suggest that an ancient home for Algonquian speakers was near the eastern Great Lakes. From there, they migrated to many places, including the Hudson River Valley, perhaps as early as 1,500 BP.<sup>14</sup> Earlier tradition had the Mohican ancestors come from a more ill-defined "west," perhaps as far away as the Pacific northwest coast. A centuries-long migration occurred until the travelers found the curious and spiritual river that flowed both ways, the tidal Hudson. Of course, neither of these cases would be mutually exclusive.

As the Mohicans began to predominate along the Hudson, their homeland extended from around Saugerties and northern Dutchess County up to the Lake Champlain region. On the east, the territory went into

the edges of Connecticut and Massachusetts, and in the west, to near Schenectady and the foothills of the Catskills in Greene County. Keep in mind, though, that boundaries in those days were vague and prone to varying interpretation and change.

Despite having their council fires or headquarters in specific locations, the Mohicans were a relatively mobile people, establishing temporary camp sites as sustenance needs varied. The more permanent settlements were moved for various reasons. Exhaustion of fertile lands and firewood supplies, intolerably unclean living quarters, or pressure from other Indians and European settlers all took a toll. It also seems probable given the low terrain of some of their island and shoreline lands along the Hudson that occasional flooding would have forced them at times to seek higher ground. Seasonal relocations also likely occurred with shifts in available hunting and fishing stocks.

The Mohicans subsisted on foraging, fishing, and hunting, and the growing of maize, squash, beans, and other crops. The tribal members tended to be gentle, spiritual people with close-knit families and communities and a healthy respect for their children and elders. This strength of character appears often in the narratives of their meetings with white colonial administrators, even when faced with the strongly negative circumstances of their later history.

Mohican women had a prominent and honored place in society. The sachems or chiefs were selected based on heredity from a mother's side of the family. At least one woman leader was recorded, Pewasck, at Catskill in the 1640s. Women also could be involved in property transactions. In 1649, Pewasck, along with her son Supahoot, sold land at Catskill to the Van Rensselaers, early settlers in the Albany area.<sup>15</sup>

### Hendrick Aupaumut

Little was written on the history of the Mohicans before the coming of the white man. The Mohicans did not read or write. They did hold regular meetings to exchange historical anecdotes, hoping to transfer knowledge of their proud and long heritage to willing listeners and future generations. It took foreign intervention, though, to ensure that the oral tradition was carried to modern times.

The arrival of European settlers brought eager missionaries who sought to convert the native populations to Christianity. One necessary vehicle for this movement was to teach the Indians how to read

and write so they could understand Christian teachings. In 1734, John Sergeant, a Yale-educated missionary from Newark, New Jersey, came to the Mohican settlement that is today's Stockbridge, Massachusetts, and created a school to accomplish that goal.

One student, Hendrick Aupaumut, had committed to memory a good measure of the tribal history and gained sufficient literacy under Sergeant's tutelage to put some of his knowledge on paper. The Aupaumut narrative provides a brief but fascinating glimpse into the Mohicans' simple life among the natural treasures along the waters they called Muh-he-kun-ne-tuk, "the river that flows both ways."

Aupaumut says that the Mohican territory, encompassing land in New York, Massachusetts, and Vermont, was "in many places mountainous, supplied with excellent rivers, creeks and ponds; the side of these rivers, &c. was only known by natives capable of producing skommonun or Indian corn, tupohquaun or beans, and uhunnekuthkoatkun or Indian squashes, until it fell into the hands of white people, who convert even many swamps and rocky hills into fruitful fields."

Using rudimentary bone and stone tools, the managing of the fields fell largely to women, elderly men, and young boys, burning the trees and shrubs to clear for planting. Aupaumut provides a view of the riches of the area:

This extensive country abounded with almost every kind of wild game, such as moose, deer, bears, tigers, wolves, beavers, otters, minks, muskrats, martins, foxes, wild cats, fishes, ground hogs, back hogs. Of the feathered kind, turkies, wild geese, ducks, partridges, pigeons, quails, owls, &c. and the rivers, &c. abounded with variety of fish and turtles.

The inhabitants chiefly dwelt in little towns and villages. Their chief seat was on Hudson's river, now it is called Albany, which was called Pempotowwuthut, Muhhecanneuw, or the fire place of the Muhheakunnuk nation, where their allies used to come on any business whether relative of the covenants of their friendship, or other matters. . . . But the employment of men consisted in hunting and fishing. They used bow and arrow to kill game, with which they were expert. They used to catch deer by insnaring them with strings. By hunting they supplied themselves with cloathing and diet; they seldom felt much want, and they were very well contented with their condition; having food and raiment was their only

aim. . . . In fall, they hunt for deer, bear, beaver, otter, rack-oon, fishes, martin for their cloathing, and drying meat for the ensuing season; and in the beginning of March, they used to go out to hunt for moose on the green mountains, where these animals keep for winter quarters. From thence they go again for beaver hunting as soon as the rivers, ponds, and creeks are opened . . .

In this discussion, the prominence of securing beaver pelts for trade is inferred. Also, despite the reference to Albany, the center of their homeland would have been on the east side of the Hudson, moving south over decades to the Schodack islands at New Baltimore's doorstep. Aupaumut's brief discourse ends with a comment on the Mohicans' bravery and competence in war, prefaced by a poignant statement of how European afflictions and influences helped them lose their valor and their communities. Those "disorders or sicknesses" also would have included the insidious demon rum, which had a primary role in the Mohicans' decline.<sup>16</sup>

### European Gains and Mohican Losses

During the 1500s, European visitors began trading weapons and various goods for furs in eastern Canada. Aggressive entrepreneurship led to a long period of conflict as the Europeans and Indians often violently jockeyed for economic supremacy, seeking new grounds for hunting and control of trading routes. As the warring intensified, it became increasingly difficult for the Mohawks, the Mohicans, and other parties to get their furs north. Henry Hudson changed everything. His legendary voyage opened up a whole new avenue for commerce and also helped speed the destruction of the Mohicans as an independent group.

Sailing from Holland under the employ of the Dutch East India Company, the Englishman Hudson, his son John, and a small band of English and Dutch sailors set off for parts at least partially unknown. (There were some maps and narratives of ocean travel and far lands, including information sent to Hudson by John Smith of Jamestown and Pocahontas fame.) Their charge was to seek a northeast path around northern Russia to the rich spice resources of China and Japan.

Just one of four trips Hudson made for this purpose, the passage was not a pleasant adventure from the start. Just off the north coast of

Europe, there was treacherous weather with hard winds, ice, and fog. Topping it all off, the crew was in turmoil and near mutiny. Hudson, faced with a recalcitrant group of sailors and unyielding poor conditions, altered his plans and abandoned his masters' orders. He instead headed west to warmer climes and toward what may have been his preferred end, seeking an elusive northwest passage to Asia.

After exploring the territory around the modern Connecticut and Delaware rivers and floating down to Virginia, the men aboard the *Half Moon*, a relatively old and small craft, finally sailed into the bay at the future New York on September 11, 1609. Before the month was out, the band of intrepid mariners traveled north and ran afoul of the shallow and sometimes impassable waters just above New Baltimore that were to plague many other travelers in the centuries to come. One mate, the Dutchman Robert Juet, recorded that noteworthy grounding event in his journal of the expedition:

The seventeenth, faire Sun-shining weather, and very hot. In the morning as soone as the Sun was up, we set sayle, and ran up sixe leagues higher, and found shoalds in the middle of the channell, and small Ilands, but seven fathoms water on both sides. Toward night we borrowed so neere the shoare, that we grounded: so we layed out our small anchor, and heaved off againe. Then we borrowed on the banke in the channell, and came aground againe; while the floud ran we heaved off againe, and anchored all night.

Continuing his account of the voyage, Juet writes that on September 22, "This night at ten of the clocke, our Boate returned in a showre of raine from soundng of the River; and found it to bee at an end for shipping to goe in. For they had beene up eight or nine leagues and found but seven foot water, and unconstant soundings." A small band of seamen had rowed "up the Rivere neere to fortie three degrees."<sup>17</sup> This may have been as far north as the present Waterford, a few miles above Albany.

The end result was that they could sail no further. This was not the route to the hoped-for riches, not at least for those they had planned to find. Hudson was impressed greatly throughout the trip by the friendly and hospitable Mohicans, by the area's abundant natural resources, and by the surplus of fur-bearing animals whose hides would be a premium catch to satisfy willing European buyers.

Upon the expedition's return to Europe, word of the prime location, fertile lands, and temperate climate of the river and its valley spread rapidly. Dutch merchants began to take serious interest in tapping those treasures.

The small fur supply Hudson carried off with him became a particular attraction. Logistically, the voyage proved that the Europeans now had a ready supply route away from the unhealthy and volatile Canadian avenue. In the next few years, a steady assortment of Dutch traders sailed upriver in the warmer seasons to deal with the Indian suppliers of precious pelts. The Mohicans, the dominant group in the area, became fast friends and business partners with the Europeans.

In October of 1614, the Dutch government officially licensed fur traders to conduct business with the native people. That same year, Fort Nassau was established on a small island a bit south of modern Albany. It was a ready spot for the newcomers to conduct business on a more year-round and permanent basis with the Indians. Not a particularly advantageous location, it flooded regularly. A strong freshet destroyed the structure a short four years later. The die, though, was cast for further action and more organized commerce.

The problem for the aggressive Mohawks, who lived inland, was their need to pass through Mohican territory to get to Hudson's river and its link to the outer world. The two tribes were not on the best of terms, warring frequently over decades. The Dutch soon persuaded the Mohicans to relent on their fur-trading monopoly at the river, allowing the Mohawks freer access to the marketplace. Both the Dutch and Mohawks and other Indians now were increasingly infringing on Mohican territory.

### Dutch Settlers Predominate

The Dutch continued to expand their horizons. In 1621, the Netherlands government chartered the West India Company, granting that body exclusive trading rights for twenty-four years in Africa, the West Indies, and America. As part of their charter, the company built a small, stockaded outpost in 1624 near the wreckage of Fort Nassau. Named in honor of the Dutch royal family, Fort Orange was inhabited by traders and a small military force.

The early pioneers began to clear the land, planting sustenance crops and starting to build a rudimentary community. They also had to

adhere closely to a fixed set of rules established by the company, which essentially meant that they were beholden to that body, including the requirement that all profits from exports went to the head office. The hard frontier life turned out to be neither a pleasant existence for the newcomers nor an attractive motivator for additional recruits. Why would someone travel from one of the world's most preeminent commercial and cultural centers, the golden-age Netherlands of Rembrandt and Vermeer, to a rough wilderness with an ephemeral lure of possible riches but a certainty of hard work?

By 1629, the West India Company directors had come to realize that the costs of underwriting the lives and labors of a dwindling number of settlers in the wild interior of New Netherland was outstripping any profits that may have been gained. There had to be an alternative arrangement to entice people to settle in the new land for the long haul, people who would put down roots and not just seek to get rich quick through the fur trade. The Dutch response was the patroon system.

In exchange for extensive plots of land, willing participants would agree to establish a settlement of fifty adult tenants (over fifteen years old). A patroon was granted broad powers, controlling all mineral rights, all fishing and hunting, and all legal matters. Although others tried, the only successful subscriber to the plan was Kiliaen Van Rensselaer, a pearl and diamond merchant from Amsterdam. Called Rensselaerswijck, his property included present-day Albany, Rensselaer, and Columbia counties, about 700,000 acres surrounding Fort Orange. The holding stretched south as far as the Hannacroix Creek, although borders were debatable. At one point, Barren Island, at the mouth of the creek just north of the New Baltimore–Coeymans border, was a site used to guard the Hudson River entrance to the patroonship.

The patroon system beyond Van Rensselaer's fiefdom was not a success. Meeting the criteria for a patroonship and maintaining the structure were difficult tasks. A majority of new arrivals ended up being independent agents who bought their own land. Van Rensselaer's representatives, however, continued to expand his holdings with numerous additional purchases throughout the region.

By the 1660s, fur supplies near Albany became markedly depleted, and demand in Europe began to decrease. Trade ground to a near halt. This meant that hunters had to look further afield, into Canada and New England and out along the Mohawk Valley and points west, to reinvigorate the market. As the fur trade petered out, the economy broadened, at least for the Europeans. Farmers, millers, and dealers of various goods took

up the reins of business. Traffic was increasing greatly on the Hudson. Vessels sailing to and from New Amsterdam and later New York and as far away as the Netherlands and England were commonplace.

The Mohicans, though, had lost their main source of income. The need to travel further away to hunt was a great inhibitor, and there was no other lucrative vocation to take its place. The Indians were reduced to more menial tasks just to survive. Driven into rank poverty, their people often were unable to afford the basics of clothing, tools, and weapons. The men became hunting guides and cut and sold firewood. Women, children, and the elderly worked for white settlers and made and sold crafts.

By this time, European goods had become quite an attraction for the Mohicans, replacing many common items previously made by the nation's members, and increasing their dependence on the new neighbors. Metal tools and utensils became substitutes for stone tools and earthen pots, metal projectile points for bone or stone, and, subsequently, guns for bow and arrow. Cloth duffels or strouds (i.e., wool broadcloth), a very common medium of exchange, began to replace fur and leather in making blankets and clothing. Running out of trade resources, Mohican land quickly became a critical medium of exchange.

In 1664, an English naval force captured New Netherland in a surprise, nonviolent invasion during a time of relative peace. Except for a brief renewal as a Dutch colony in 1673–1674, the English were in charge for the next hundred years. The change did nothing to relieve the downward spiral of the Mohican nation.

### A Sad End

As Albany and the river valley became more populated, living space was at a premium. The Europeans coveted readily accessible fertile acreage near the tributaries that flowed into the Hudson in the modern Albany, Rensselaer, Columbia, and Greene counties. This was prime Mohican territory, and the settlers were as interested in buying as the Indians were in selling the valuable land.

Starting with the efforts by the Van Rensselaer agent, Brant Van Slichtenhorst, to expand the patroon's real estate holdings in the 1640s, the river islands and other rich Mohican territories were sold off. The attraction of Dutch goods was a tolerable medium of exchange for the millstreams, prime forests, and fertile flatlands that were a fundamentally valuable commodity for both the Indians and the Europeans. The

Mohicans regrettably did not subscribe to the European concept of land transfer and ownership. To them, the transactions were more a matter of temporary loaning for farming and hunting, a sharing of resources with the newcomers for common gain. In reality, they were losing the land for good.

Credit became a predominant economic reality with the need to pay back debts increasingly difficult. Fervent missionary work intruded on traditional spiritual practices. General exposure to Europeans and their lifestyles and diseases broke down Indian culture, beliefs, and health, splintering communities. Alcohol was another increasingly frequent medium of exchange, becoming a debilitating contributor to social dissolution. This happened despite the opposition of the colonial authorities who regulated against and punished certain liquor transactions.

Illegal alcohol sales stretched even into the future Greene County. On June 10, 1653, Jacob Clomp was brought to task by the Fort Orange magistrates for selling spirits to the Indians at Catskill and Esopus, causing the authorities to attach his “yacht” until further investigation that led to an additional financial penalty. By the following May, the Fort Orange court had had enough of the alcohol situation down the Hudson:

Whereas it is found by experience and brought to the attention of this court that some of the inhabitants of this jurisdiction venture to sail in canoes, rowboats, or other vessels from here to the Esopus and Kats[k]il plain to sell brandy or liquor to the Indians along the way, or at the aforesaid places, to the considerable detriment of the good inhabitants there, it is decided to have notices posted that no one residing within this jurisdiction and consequently belonging thereto shall be allowed to sail thither from here in any rowboats, canoes, or other vessels without having the same inspected here by the officer and without having obtained proper consent to go thither from and in the name of this court, on pain of forfeiture by those who shall be found to have acted contrary hereto of the sum of fifty guilders for each offense for the benefit of the officer here.<sup>18</sup>

All these events took their toll on Mohican society, forcing them to abandon the river valley for the most part to settle in more remote locations northeast of Albany and in New England, particularly in western Massachusetts at Stockbridge. Peaceful coexistence with the

Europeans ironically may have helped extend the Mohicans' survival in their longtime homeland. Taking such a pragmatic approach, they were able to stay on their native lands for a longer period than otherwise may have been possible.

Their numbers by this time were severely reduced from the thousands of their dominating years. In mid-summer of 1701, the Schaghticoke Indians' sachem, Soquans, spoke at an Indian conference, representing his own group and the Mohicans still on the river. His words, tinted with a futile sense of optimism, underscored the diminished size of the Mohicans' domain from Schaghticoke down to Catskill:

Itt is by Gods permission wee meet here together and wee are heartily glad to see you, and since itt is requisite you should know our strength wee have made an exact calculation and wee are now two hundred fighting men belonging to this County of Albany from Katskill to Skachkook and hope to increase in a year's time to three hundred.<sup>19</sup>

In August of 1720, a group of Mohicans traveled upstream to Albany to meet with Peter Schuyler, substituting for the absent governor, and a committee of Indian affairs. Noting their position as "antient Inhabitants of those parts," they were seeking to renew the covenant binding them in peaceful and helpful coexistence with the whites and to reassure the administrators of their desire to accept Christianity.

Schuyler was worried about the continuing fever of war among the French, British, and Mohawks, and the potential for the Mohicans to join in the conflict. Adopting a scornful, paternalistic tone, he hoped that his visitors would "behave your selfe as Dutifull Childrin and keep your selves sober and eat Drink Hunt and Plant in Peace." In granting the covenant renewal, Schuyler also provided ammunition and clothing to the Indians but managed to scold that you "Complain of your Poverty and are so bare & naked which must be ascribed to your Drinking and Laziness hopes in that you will be for the future sober and active to hunting and Plant . . ." <sup>20</sup>

In late August 1722, William Burnet, Dutch-born colonial governor of both New York and New Jersey, convened a conference with the river Indians to discuss various concerns. The Indian liaison, Ampamit, had ascended to the sachem position and lived on Moesimus (Lower Schodack) Island in the Hudson. The whole of the recorded discussion illustrates the ongoing dignity and dire straits of the Mohicans and the

paternalistic demeanor of the colony's European administrators. The crushing social problems faced by Ampamit and his small group of followers remain heartrending. Still, Governor Burnet hastened to chastise the Indians as to:

how destructive your Intemperence has proved and how much your people are diminishd by your excessive drinking of Rum the Women as well as the men being guilty of being often drunck, let me advise you to be more sober for the future, and not to spend what you get by Hunting on strong drink, but lay it out on clothing and other necessaries for your support & above all not squander your Indian Corn for Rum which you ought to keep for your subsistence all the year . . .

Ampamit, seeking to defend his group, acknowledged that a problem no doubt existed, but it was perhaps not wholly of their own making. The Europeans had a good measure of blame that could be ameliorated:

We are sensible that you are much in the right, that Rum does a great deal of Harm, we approve of all that you said on that Point, but the matter is this, When our people come from Hunting to the Town or Plantations and acquaint the Traders & People that we want Powder and Shot & Clothing, they first give us a large cup of Rum, and after we get the Taste of it crave for more so that in fine all the Beaver & Peltry we have hunted goes for drink, and we are left destitute either of Clothing or Ammunition, Therefore we desire our father to order the Tap or Crane to be shut & to prohibit ye selling of Rum, for as long as the Christians will sell Rum, our People will drink it . . .

Ampamit lamented graciously but firmly that:

our Father is very much in the right to tell us that we squander away our Indian Corn which should subsist our Wives & Children but one great cause of it is yt [yet] many of our People are obliged to hire Land of the Christians at a very dear Rate, to give half the Corn for Rent & the other half they are tempted by Rum to sell, & so the Corn goes, yt

[yet] ye Poor Women & children are left to shift as well as the [they] can . . .

Ampamit concluded the talks by emphasizing the deleterious effects that the often disadvantageous land deals of decades past had on his people:

We have no more Land the Christians when they buy a small spot of Land of us, ask us if we have no more Land & when we say yes they enquire the name of the Land & take in a greater Bounds than was intended to be sold them & the Indians not understanding what is writ in the Deed or Bill of Sale sign it and are so deprived of Part of their Lands . . .

Subsequently, Governor Burnet did little to address the alcohol and land issues. His inaction was not surprising given his condescending note at the 1722 conference that the Mohicans:

look better & are better cloathed than the other Indians that do not live among the Christians & therefore that they do well to stay among them. He beleives [*sic*] they live better since the Christians bought & improved their Lands than they did before then the Land lay waste & unimproved . . .<sup>21</sup>

The Mohicans continued their meager and deteriorating existence near New Baltimore for a bit longer.

### The Local Connection

As is obvious, New Baltimore was in the midst of active Mohican centers, although pinning down exact dates and places of native habitation is difficult. We know that Indians and early colonists certainly made steady use of the Hudson and the parallel Catskill Indian Path, a primary track between Fort Orange (later Beverwijck and Albany) and points south that followed the eastward side of the Kalkberg. Researchers also are quite sure that the Mohicans' headquarters was for many years between the modern city of Rensselaer and New Baltimore.

A handful of early Mohican villages were believed to have been in Greene County at the junction of the Kaaterskill and Catskill creeks

and at present-day Leeds, Kiskatom, and Freehold. Shirley Dunn, the distinguished historian of Mohican land dealings, has suggested that the mention in the 1662 Bronck Patent of cleared land away from the river indicates the remains of tilled fields by the Mohicans, if not an actual settlement. This also could infer that other inland settlements were within the modern bounds of Greene County.

On the north, the Hudson islands near the New Baltimore-Coeymans border were an integral part of Mohican life and history. With different names at different times, these small masses of land near the mouth of the Hannacroix Creek became known in popular usage as Aepjen's, Beeren, and Moesimus islands during the Mohican era. All of them are mentioned frequently in old deeds, maps, and in contemporary and modern narratives of the Mohican and early colonial periods.

On modern maps, they still are named even while ceasing to exist as freestanding entities. Beeren has slightly altered to be called Barren today and has become indistinguishable from the mainland on the west side of the river just north the Hannacroix Creek mouth. Beeren became a primary boundary marker for land purchased by Kiliaen Van Rensselaer in forming his patroonship in the early 1630s.

Aepjen's and Moesimus became Upper and Lower Schodack islands, respectively. These islands are across from Beeren Island and the Hannacroix. They have been incorporated through natural infill and the dumping of dredging spoils into one land mass that extends from near Castleton-on-Hudson to the southernmost tip of today's Houghtaling Island. Houghtaling probably was the land mass also called "Marten Gerritsoons Eylant" in early maps.

Schiwias, commonly called Aepjen ("Little Monkey") by the Dutch, was born in the Schodack area and ascended to be chief sachem of the Mohicans. Schiwias probably held the sachem role from the late 1630s into the middle of the 1660s and made his home on Upper Schodack Island. Upon the 1637 death of sachem Papsickene, the center of Mohican life had moved south to near Schodack after the chief's descendants sold the former headquarters on the modern Papscanee Island to Van Rensselaer agents.

Aepjen is believed to have had an engaging personality and was a born communicator, playing an instrumental role in negotiating and settling a long and violent dispute between the Indians and Europeans at Esopus (Kingston). The Dutch considered him to be the chief of all chiefs and cultivated a relatively amicable relationship with the leader.

This seemed a fortuitous strategy for the Europeans since he was a primary intermediary and principal in arranging and confirming land sales