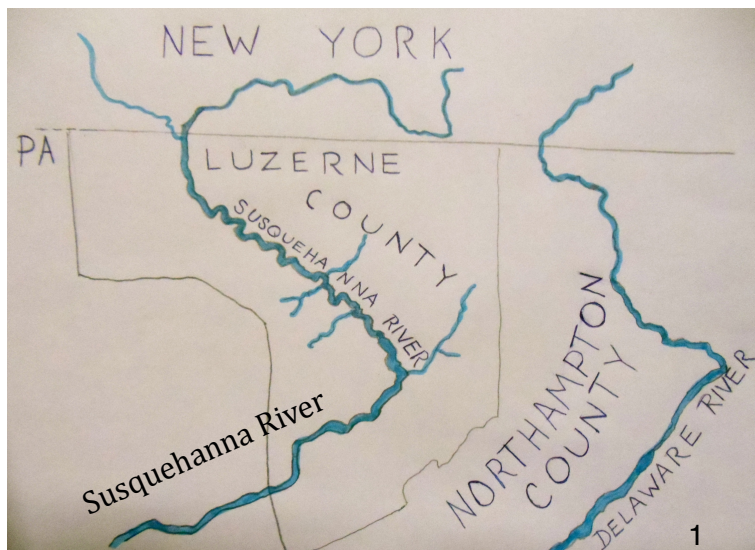


SCRATCHING THE SURFACE
A LOOK AT WYOMING VALLEY HISTORY

CHAPTER ONE
STORIES FROM THE DIRT

THE LAY OF THE LAND

“Glimmerglass”, that’s the name James Fenimore Cooper gave to New York’s Lake Otsego in his book *Leatherstocking Tales*. That body of water, of course, is the source of the Susquehanna River.



This is the sixteenth largest river in the U.S., and the largest river located entirely within the U.S. that empties into the Atlantic Ocean. Its 464 mile-length drains over 27,000 square miles. That is a larger area than Vermont, New Jersey, Massachusetts, and Delaware combined.

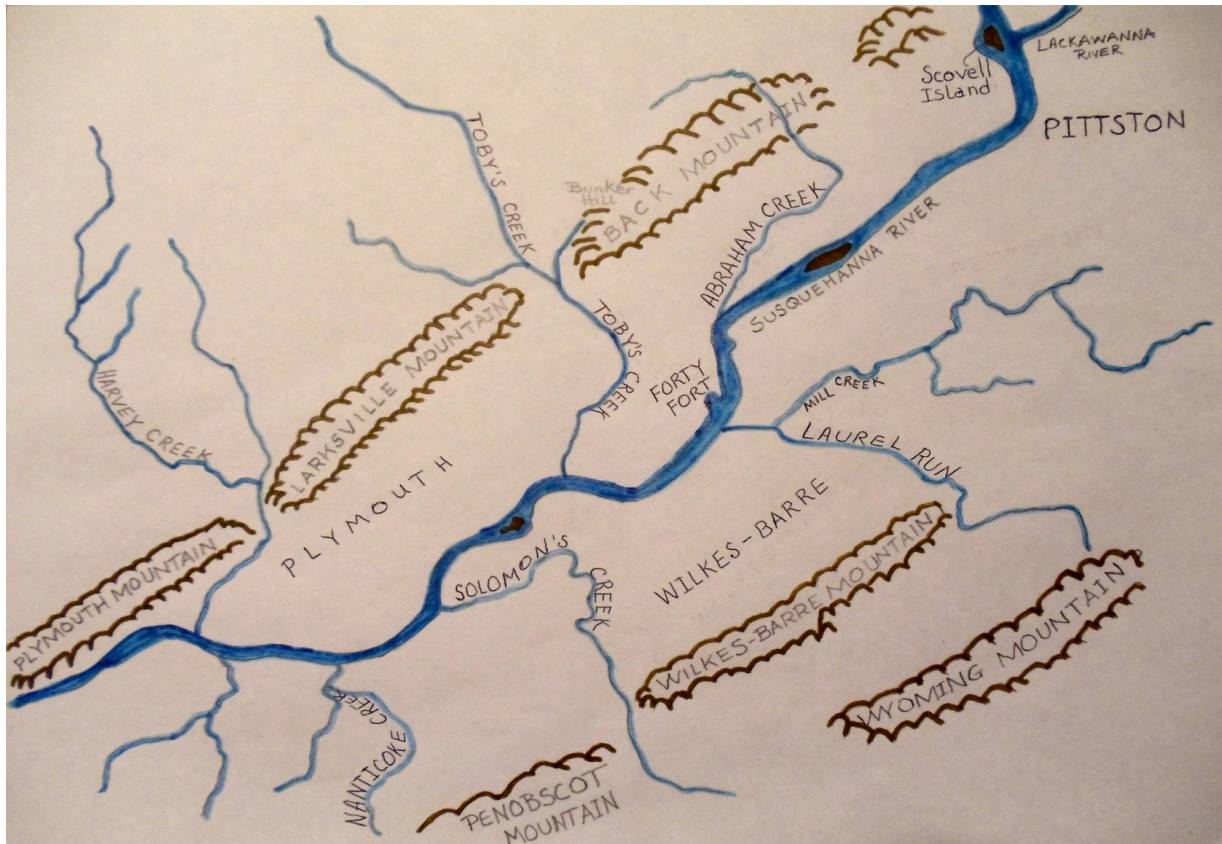
For those who live near it, the river has been a source of pleasure and pain as they hike along it, kayak on it, fish in it, and protect ourselves from the periodic devastating floods.

As the river twists and turns from its New York origin into Pennsylvania, it joins the Chemung River near Tioga Point or present day Athens. Its serpentine course continues until the Lackawanna River empties in near Pittston. It continues to meander the next 17

miles or so through Luzerne County until it exits the Valley at Tilbury Knob in West Nanticoke. Farther south, the West Branch flows in at Sunbury, making it wider and carrying more water towards its destination in the Chesapeake Bay.

At the confluence of the Lackawanna and the Susquehanna Rivers on the northern edge of the valley, is a high rock precipice. This cliff, known officially as Dial Rock, is more than 1,300 feet above sea level. On a clear day you can see all the way to Wilkes-Barre.

Less than twenty miles from Dial Rock is the town of Nanticoke, named for the Native Americans of the same name. On the west side of the valley are several mountain ranges named Back



Original map drawn by John Beck 2

Mountain that run south to other ranges until the end of the valley at Plymouth Mountain. The east side of the valley includes the ranges of Penobscot Mountain, Wyoming Mountain, and Wilkes-Barre

Mountain. In-between the mountains and the northern and southern landmarks is the Wyoming Valley.

The river contains several large islands as well as numerous unnamed ones. Scovell Island is the first island traveling south from Dial Rock. You can find it on the map. Between Exeter and Port Griffith is the next island—Wintermoot. This island was named for a family that played a role for the British in the Battle of Wyoming. Just south of the Eighth Street Bridge is Monoconock Island with Culver Island lying south of that near Forty Fort. At the southernmost part of the valley is Richard's Island. Currently, the Carey Avenue Bridge uses the western part of the island for support as it allows traffic to cross the river from Plymouth to Lee Park in Wilkes-Barre (Orlandini 2).

In the early days of the valley, shad (spelled sceadd in old English) thrived in the river. Settlers from Connecticut had several fisheries at Wilkes-Barre, Kingston, Forty Fort, and Nanticoke to catch the tasty meal. A fishery's daily haul could range anywhere from 1,500 to 4,000 of these fish that made a migration from the Chesapeake to the headwaters of the Susquehanna in New York.

Bishop deWatteville, a bishop of the Moravian church, came here in 1748 as a missionary not as a settler.

He writes:

“From the top of a high mountain we had our first view of the beautiful and extensive flats of Wyoming and the Susquehanna winding through them. It was the most charming prospect my eyes had ever seen. Beyond them stretched a line of mountains high up... We viewed the scene for several

minutes in silent admiration, then descended the precipitous mountain side, past a spring, until we got into the valley” (Lottick 29). He added that the grass grew so tall that it was difficult to see over it, even when



riding a horse. Wildlife, fish, and rich, fertile soil, combined with plentiful lumber attracted many people here.

But the Bishop was not the first to come to this picturesque place.

TRAVELERS, TRADERS, AND EARLY RESIDENTS

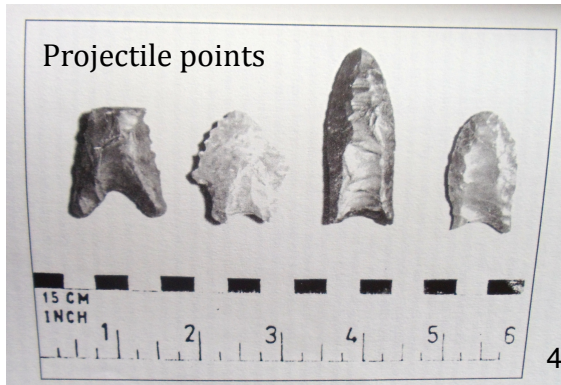


Photo by John Orlandini courtesy of the Albertson Collection

Archaeological evidence from the valley indicates that artifacts have been found from five Native American cultural periods.

Fluted projectile points known as Clovis points represent the late Paleo Indian culture. (The Clovis is the third one from left in photo.)

This period dates from 14,000 B.C. to 8,000 B.C. Ground stone implements with notched and stemmed projectile

points have been recorded for the Archaic Period 8,000 B.C. to 1,800 B.C.; soapstone vessels and other points from the Transitional Period 1,800 B.C. to 1,200 B.C. The Late Woodland Period (1200 B.C. to 1550 A.D.) sites are quite extensive and can be found from Campbell's Ledge to Nanticoke (Orlandini 49).

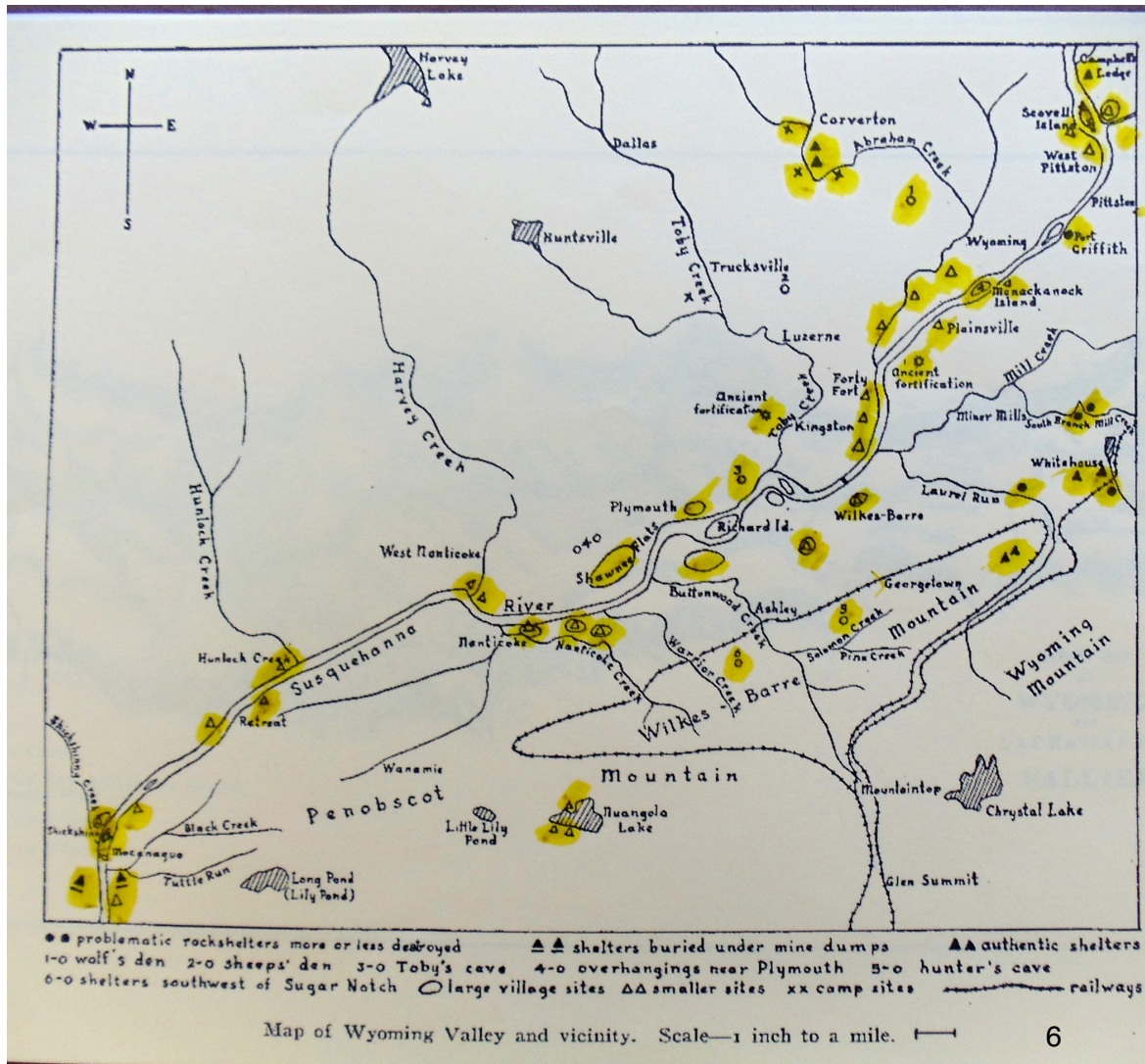
The most famous kind of Native American artifact is the projectile point—commonly (and often inaccurately) called the "arrowhead."

These sharpened stones were made in different styles throughout the centuries. The styles, depth, and location of their discovery lend priceless clues as to the type of people and activities in an area at a given time in prehistory. Other common



artifacts in the area include stone cutting tools, net sinkers, boiling stones, hammer stones, and fragments of clay pottery.

Professional archaeologists, volunteers, and valley residents have found material culture from Native American and prehistoric peoples in many places. The map shown was made by Max Schrabish, reflects where artifacts were found. Campbell's Ledge



Max Schrabish map of Native American sites

rock shelter, Conrail site, Cremard farm site, Scovell Island, the Anastasi site are located in the northern part of the valley. Mid-valley sites include: Golumb Farm site, Airport I and Airport II, Historic Burial site (O'Malia Site), and the Moonlight Drive-in site.

Slightly out of our valley are the Carverton Rock shelters (located in the Frances Slocum Park) and the Huntsville Dam site.

In fact, archeologists and the volunteers who help at the local archaeology site near Duryea ([Conrail Site](#)) have dated some of the thousands of discoveries back to almost 8000 B.C. The uncovered artifacts show what our ancient relatives ate, how they prepared their food, and what was traded. Their diet was full of fish, nuts, and berries as you might guess. It also included deer, rabbit, turkey and other animals. Some pieces that were found indicate pottery traveled a long distance—some say from what is now the southern part of U.S. or Mexico. Other pieces came from the shell fisheries along the Atlantic coast.

LOOKING OUT FROM DIAL ROCK

While the Susquehanna could provide a way for transportation North to South, it could also be a barrier for those who wanted to travel East to West or vice versa. Near Duryea was where the Susquehanna could be



crossed as well as the Lackawanna. (It is thought that the next closest place to cross was in Sunbury.) This site is located a short distance west of Campbell's Ledge and very close to the northern tip of Scovell's Island. Less than a mile from the confluence

Campbell's Ledge

often the Susquehanna and Lackawanna Rivers, this location was of practical, strategic, and spiritual importance for early Valley people (Orlandini 78).

The high ledge afforded a clear view of potential visitors or enemies. The natural fords across the two rivers and in turn, Scovell Island, afforded those who needed to cross the river with access points. These natural features made this land a valuable piece of real estate.



U.S. Geologic Survey map; colored by John Dziak

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DIGGING IN THE DIRT—What was found and what it means

One of the sites archaeologists investigated is near the Forty Fort airport. John Orlandini and Francis Garrahan excavated it in 1986 before it was made into playing fields. They were able to radiocarbon date some of the charcoal they found to A.D. 980. Although they found evidence of a diet of freshwater mussels,

hunting, and fishing, they also found that corn was grown. In addition, they found a partial stockade and indications of both round and oblong houses. There was also evidence of rebuilding which may indicate some tendency toward a sense of permanent settlement. Of course, it may have also been a seasonal place of refuge (Orlandini 78).

The Parker Site is located across the river from Forty Fort. In 1967, Robert and Alice Parker discovered a large deposit of freshwater mollusk shells, fragments of fish and animal bone, pottery shards, and projectile points (Lottick 17). The Frances Dorrance Chapter found that this site was a large ancient garbage dump that had collected beside a dirt causeway. The causeway was built across a wide ditch that completely surrounded a prehistoric 15,000 square foot stockaded village. That is a bit larger than ½ of a football field.

The ditch was about 4 feet deep and about 11 to 14 feet wide. The dirt was used to throw around the stockade that was about 6 feet inside of the ditch. The stockade was 8 feet wide and made up of five lines of posts protecting the living area with a long, narrow gateway passing through them. Eight depressions, 8 to 10 feet in diameter, were inside the main palisade. Within these depressions were layers of charred marsh grasses, burned logs, fire-cracked rocks, charred corn kernels and a variety of broken potsherds (Lottick 19).

Hoes, netsinkers, points, flints, stones uses for cutting, scraping, chopping, pestles, and hammerstones were found, too. The picture on the left shows an adze at the top; a pot lid with two notches is beneath it. Three scrapers can be viewed beneath the pot lid. The two circular pieces of flat stone with notches are net sinkers that once helped to capture fish in



9 Photo by Clark Switzer; courtesy of the Powell Collection of Wyoming Seminary

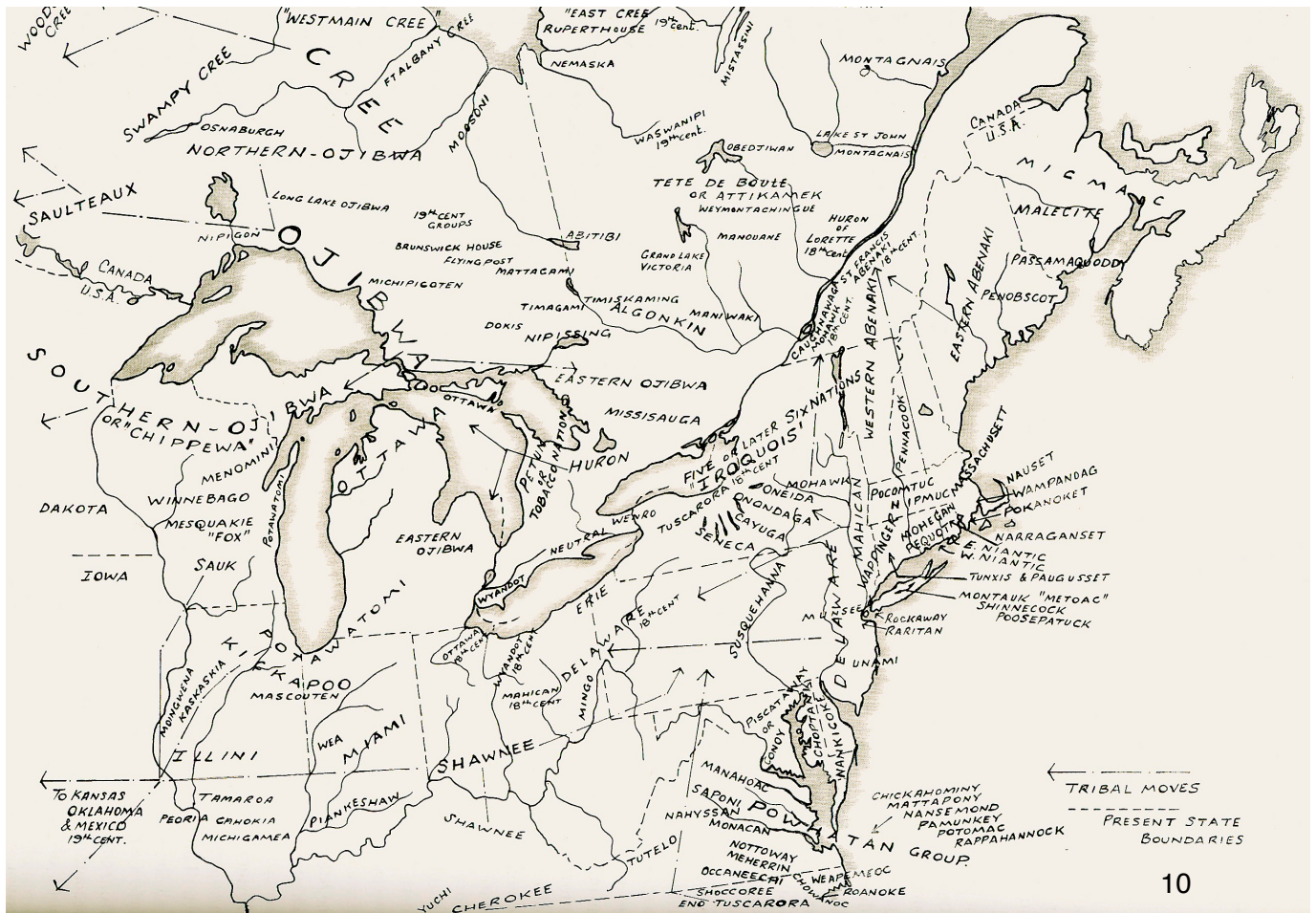
nearby streams and the Susquehanna River. Various projectile points are in the lower portion of the photo.

A number of bone and antler artifacts survived as well—hairpins, ornaments, beads, fishhooks, awls, and fragments from cups or ladles. There were also botanical remains—butternut shells, plum stones, hickory nuts, persimmon seeds, and some fragments of bean. The great bulk of the foodstuffs were corn. Radiocarbon dating puts the existence of this site somewhere between 1470 A.D. and 1600 A.D. plus or minus 100 years. The evidence found at this site shows this group was firmly entrenched (Lottick 19).

Lottick goes on to write that there were three such sites in Wyoming Valley surrounded by upright, wooden barriers and ditches outside of the tall fencing (19). Ira F. Smith III is quoted by Lottick regarding the sites of the valley early residents who lived *year round in large towns surrounded by elaborate earthen and timber stockades and entrenchments traversed by dirt causeways. Straight passages of parallel lines of posts controlled access to the interior of the village where residents occupied bark-covered, smaller versions of the Iroquoian longhouse, occasionally rested in rounded, domed sweat lodges [Wallace points out that the Indians of the 1600s were much cleaner than their European counterparts], and erected special purpose circular or oval-shaped semi-subterranean structures against the inner perimeter of the stockade wall....The material remains indicate a culture characterized by a bone, stone, and clay technology, supplemented certainly by wood, bark, skin, and fabric,... heavily dependent upon pebble or cobble tools* (Lottick 20).

However, by 1575, the villages were abandoned for reasons that are not yet clear. We just don't know what made them leave. Could it have been disease such as smallpox, measles, or influenza? Those were known to wipe out whole villages. Another theory purports that maybe they had simply used up the land. Intensive farming often forced villages to move every ten or twenty years. It may also have been that desire for better trade enticed the inhabitants away.

While no hard evidence has been found yet that might identify any of those villages, one group that did live in this area has been named—the [Susquehannocks](#) or Andaste. They inhabited the area to the north of Wyoming Valley, near the New York State border. Sometime prior to 1575, this group started to make their way south to the Lancaster area (Lottick 22). It seems they lived along the North Branch of the Susquehanna for some period before moving farther



south. They may have come into conflict with the Iroquois, or perhaps, another reason such as disease prompted their demise. Since they did not rotate their crops at this time, the soil may have simply worn out, and the small villages moved on to farm somewhere else.

Barry Kent has another idea. He postulates that the Susquehannocks moved south to get more European trade goods. That idea

was enough to stimulate [the Susquehannocks'] need to have and control their own direct access to the [European] trade. This could only come about through their residential proximity to a coastal area, or through their hegemony over other peoples not the coast or seaports. Their forays down the Delaware, as marked by scattered occurrences of [their] pottery there, may have been precisely to seek such access or control in that area. In any event, it does appear that they did band together and move rather quickly into the lower Susquehanna Valley. We also know that other indigenous cultures along their route ceased to exist at about this time. The people of the Wyoming Valley...did not survive into the contact period of the second half of the sixteenth century.....We can only guess at the role of the migrating Susquehannocks in this disappearance. (Lottick 22).

At the time of his explorations of the Chesapeake Bay in 1607, Captain John Smith believed our area was occupied by the Wassawomeke (Proceedings 1926). Schrabisch speculates that their name Wassawomeke is the origin of the name for this valley M'cheuwaming or Maughwauwama. Some historians believe that the Wassawomeke were mortal enemies of the Susquehannocks. Others, however, believe that the Wassawomeke were wiped out by the Iroquois. Still others believe that the Wassawomeke and the Susquehannocks were one and the same and had moved out of our area by 1607 (Lottick 22). Nonetheless, we have no substantiated evidence as to what happened.

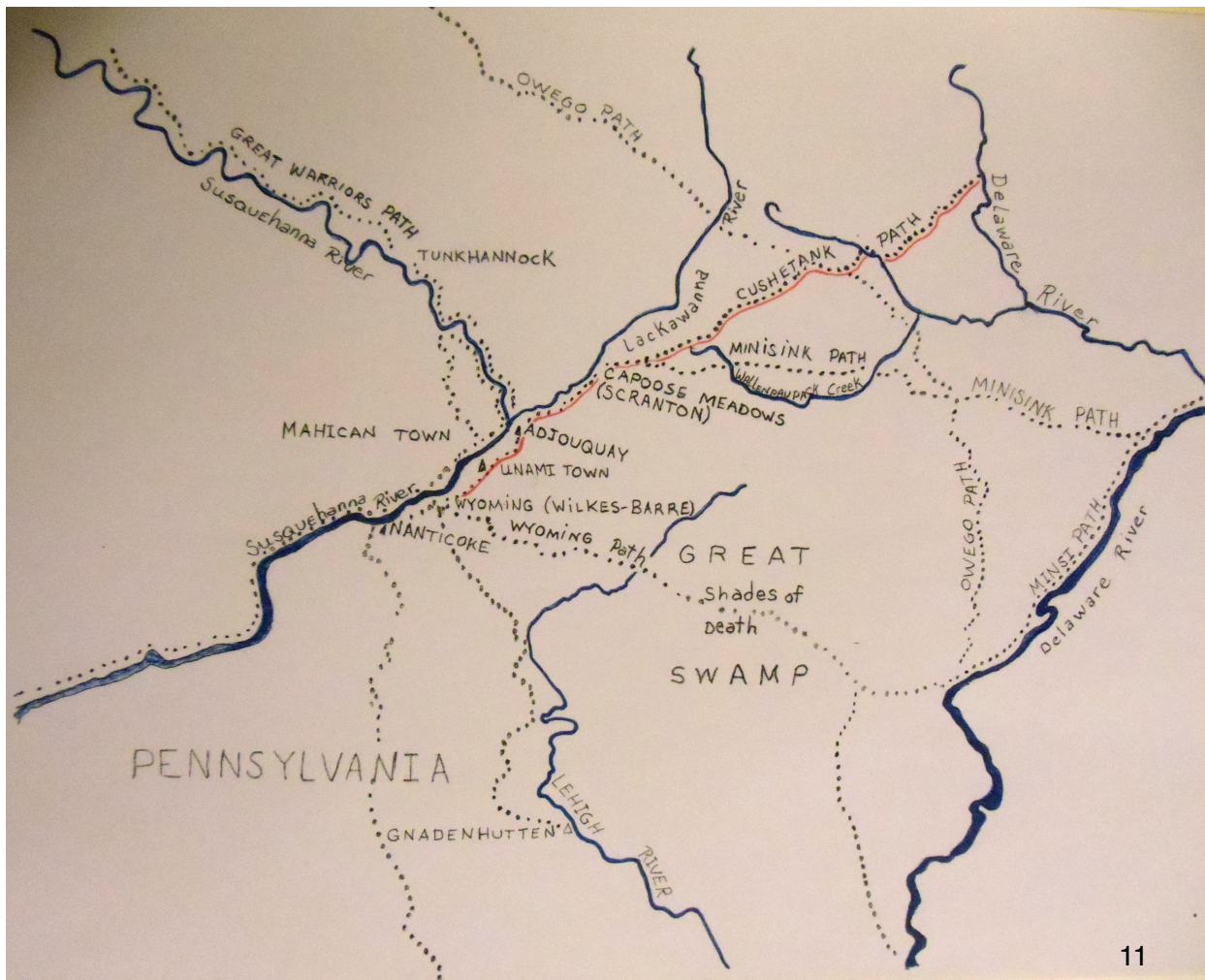
FROM THERE TO HERE—How did people get here?

During the ensuing decades, American Indian trails crisscrossed the area taking those who traveled them for whatever purpose, hunting, peacemaking, or war over the shortest distance possible. The Great Bend trail connected us with points North. You could also travel from the northeast on the Cushetank, go east on the Minisink to the shell fisheries

on the New Jersey coast, or follow other trails to Stroudsburg, Easton, and Reading. Maryland, Virginia and the Carolinas were in reach by the Great Warrior Path (Lottick 58). Trade goods also traveled along the same path.

By checking the map, you will find where the Lackawanna River joins the Susquehanna. That is very close to Dial Rock and the present day town of Pittston.

Further investigation into the work of an archaeologist can be made



through the Pan Cultural Associates in Pittston, Pennsylvania. They are professional archaeologists who guide the volunteers from the [Frances Dorrance](#) Chapter of the Society for Pennsylvania Archeology at the

Conrail site. They oversee and assist the members through the discovery and recording of the artifacts.