

# LENAPE—THE PEOPLE

## DELAWARE INDIANS

WHEN?  
Before 1750

WHERE? Eastern Pa.  
including Wyoming  
Valley



Lap-pa-win-soe Lenape Chief

EVENT  
Encounter with colonists and  
Haudenosaunee

VOCABULARY  
clans  
matriarchal

The Lenape—meaning *the people*—lived and moved through the eastern lands of Pennsylvania, New Jersey, Delaware, and the forested reaches of New York, Connecticut, and Maryland. While the Europeans called them the “Delaware,” a name borrowed from the river valley where many of their villages rested, they carried the far older identity of a nation bound by kinship and memory. The Lenape had about 20,000 people when the Europeans first arrived (Lenape Native).

In the north, the Munsee shaped their lives along the colder ridges and winding streams; to the south, the Unami tended the gentler valleys and fertile plains. Although the Lenape small villages were spread over a large area, together they shared beliefs and similar traditions divided only by dialect and geography.



Their world was guided by three great clans—Wolf, Turtle, and Turkey—each traced through the mother’s bloodline. That bloodline dictated a child’s place in the tribe, their stories, and their responsibilities. Female leadership is still significant in the Lenape culture (Delaware nation). According to the Delaware nation website, the Lenape society was not a “singular or centralized” nation like Europeans think of when the word “nation” is used. Since Lenape believed everyone is equal and deserves equal rights and opportunities, their leadership often convened to discuss shared approaches to issues they faced in common. The Lenape were known as skilled diplomats.



The arrival of European colonists eventually strained relationships and created arguments over the use of land. Time and again, colonists wanted to purchase land—own it, fence it, keep for self--rather than allow the land area to be used by both natives and colonists. The Lenape were more used to the idea of shared stewardship of land and resources. One of the most egregious agreements was the fraudulent Walking Purchase of 1737. That forced the removal of many Lenape resulting in the loss of much of the hunting grounds of Eastern Pennsylvania.

After William Penn died, his sons with other colonial leaders came up with a land grab scheme (Delaware nation). The Lenape were given a document by Penn’s sons supposedly

signed by their father William Penn. The paper stated that the Lenape had agreed to give land to the Penns—as much land as a man could walk in a day and a half north of Neshaminy Creek in Bucks County. From that point, a line would be drawn eastward to the Delaware River. The Penns had a path secretly cleared by three woodsmen. Three men, including Edward Marshall, started to “walk” briskly (some accounts say run) for nearly sixty miles over eighteen hours. The men did pause at night, and only one completed the full distance but it was enough. When the line was drawn eastward, it was drawn at a wide angle. The Lenape lost more than land; it included most of their hunting grounds in Northampton, Monroe, and Pike counties (Lottick 34).



The Lenape had been suspicious since they first heard about this supposed agreement and now they were furious. It wasn't the first time they were cheated and, unfortunately, not the last. By the early 1700's their numbers had dwindled to about 3,000 people. Smallpox, measles, and malaria as well as war with the Dutch and the Iroquois (Haudenosaunee) and movement of some of the nation to other areas seeking refuge took their toll.

Their bond to the land which had defined their culture for so long was beginning to fray. What had defined them for generations, their stories, their ancestors, their relationship to the water, land, and the animals on it was slipping away. While not all left their homeland, the Lenape were forced to make difficult decisions about what to do with what was beneath their feet.

#### ONLINE RESOURCES

[Lenape Nation Youtube](#)

[Delaware Nation History](#)

[Lenape Native: History of Early New Yorkers](#)

#### PRINT RESOURCES

Lottick, Sally Teller. *Bridging Change A Wyoming Valley Sketchbook*. Wilkes-Barre, PA: Wyoming Historical and Geological Society. 1992.

#### ACTIVITIES

Check out the EDUCATOR'S tab in the menu

Presentation Ideas

Topics and Ideas

Appendix