

## **Valley Stream's Vanished Past**

### *Little is known about Indigenous Culture*

The topic of indigenous people and Valley Stream often comes up amongst researchers, historians, and the curious-minded.

Our closest proximity to indigenous people were the *Reckouwackys*, a group of Native Americans who lived on the Rockaway Peninsula. They were part of the Algonquian-speaking Lenape people. Reckouwacky, or the modern translation, Rockaway, means “place of our own people,” “sandy place,” or “place of laughing waters” — depending on what article or book you might read.

#### **Jamaica Bay**

Jamaica Bay and the south shore of Long Island were attractive places for indigenous communities because of their access to water; materials such as stone, shell, and reeds; and food—both fauna and flora. Beaver hunting was especially plentiful in the swampland; it helped support a thriving fur trade with Europe, exchanging pelts for implements, firearms, cloth, and glass beads.

Up until the mid-18<sup>th</sup> century, Valley Stream, then known as the South Woods, Fosters Meadow, or “the land between Near Rockaway and Jamaica,” was sparsely populated woodland dotted with streams. The first migrants to the area came from Hempstead’s “Town Spot,” known today as the Village of Hempstead. Hempstead’s borders, however, encompassed a much larger swath of land: it was bounded on the north by the Long Island Sound and the south by the Atlantic Ocean.

#### **The Great Migration South**

The migration south from the Town Spot was a direct result of the American Revolution. The Town Spot and the northern section of Hempstead were populated with “Patriots,” American sympathizers. Those who aligned with the British cause, “Loyalists,” or “Tories,” were not welcome, and the environment was hostile and often dangerous. This caused a deep divide in Hempstead Town, forcing the Loyalists to move south to our neck of the woods.

In 1784, a year after the war ended, Hempstead officially split in two. The northern land became North Hempstead, and the southern portion, South Hempstead. In 1796, South Hempstead was renamed Hempstead. *The Records of the Towns of North and South Hempstead* (page 6) clearly define the towns as separate entities. The designations were not merely cardinal directions; they were wrought with great political significance.

#### **Indigenous People and African Americans**

By the time the Loyalists moved to our area, the Native American population in the Rockaways was negligible due to land displacement, warfare, and European-introduced diseases. We have many written accounts and records from that time period specific to our area, and none of them mention Indigenous folks. Census records, in fact, which first appeared in 1790, do not list Native Americans. They do, however, note “Slaves.” It is common knowledge that Indigenous folks and Black folks intermarried. Although Native Americans were not specifically counted in the South Hempstead census, their Black kinfolk were. In 1790, there were 3,405 “Free Whites,” 326 “Slaves,” and 95 “Free Persons.” The slaves and free persons surely included whatever was left of the indigenous population.

#### **Hungry Harbor**

Hungry Harbor in South Valley Stream, is often cited in commentary relating to Native Americans in our general area. Literature recounts that squatters (which included both White and Indigenous folks) took advantage of the plentiful aquatic wildlife that inhabited the waterway. Fishing took place along the banks of Motts Creek (Hungry Harbor Road runs alongside the creek—hence its name.) Oysters were plentiful! Hungry Harbor Neck refers to modern-day North Woodmere

(South Valley Stream). The Neck is bounded by Hook Creek on the north, Mill Road on the east, Motts Creek on the south, and Rockaway Turnpike on the west.

## Hook Creek

In 1922, Arthur Parker, the author of *The Archeological History of New York*, recorded the findings of two archeological digs on Hook Creek where a “village site and shell heap” were found. The sites, since destroyed by modern development, documented prehistoric settlement along Hook Creek and the use of aquatic resources, particularly bivalves.

Hook Creek’s mouth, which resembles a scythe or hook, is at Jamaica Bay. The creek meanders north through Rosedale, Mill Brook, Mill Pond (Edward W. Cahill Memorial Park), and Arthur J. Hendrickson Park. It’s terminus is in Franklin Square. Up until the time the Europeans came to Long Island, Native Americans, in the warmer months, traveled north from the Rockaways, camping and fishing along the waterway.

In the mid-1850s, the “Brooklyn Waterworks,” a Brooklyn-based water company acquired, by eminent domain, Mill Pond and Cornell’s Pond (Arthur J. Hendrickson Park) to provide Brooklyn with drinkable water. The waterworks built many infrastructures—including pumping stations, gate houses, and driven wells around the ponds. The land and banks of these waterways have been so dramatically altered and excavated, it would be difficult, if not impossible, to find evidence of indigenous habitation.

That being said, a couple of oral histories the historical society conducted in the 1990s claim that when Sunrise Highway was built in the late 1920s, implements and arrowheads were found during the excavation of the roadbed. Sunrise Highway, an east-west arterial road (the sun rises in the east and sets in the west...) was believed to have once been a Native American footpath.

## Culluloo Telewana

No discussion regarding indigenous people in our area would be complete without mention of the 8-foot granite marker that stands in Woodsburgh, our neighbor to the south. In 1888, Abraham Hewlett of Woodsburgh (1812-1888) erected a monument on the site of the last “Indian” hut, occupied by Culluloo Telewana. It is said that the monument was completed the day Hewlett passed away.

Here lived and died Culluloo Telewana, A. D. 1818,  
the last of the Rockaway Iroquois Indians,  
who was personally known to me  
in my boyhood. I, owning the land,  
have erected this monument  
to him and his tribe.  
—Abraham Hewlett, 1888

Hewlett was a boy of five-years-old when Culluloo died, but memories of this gentle man persisted his entire life. He remembered seeing Culluloo in the mornings and evening, on his way to and from work. Hewlett’s encounter with Telewana’s death is described in Alfred Bellot’s 1917 *History of the Rockaways*: “He was very kind and I last saw him lying dead in a room when several colored men came and carried him away, but where they buried him was never known to me.”

The monument was first located on Broadway in Woodmere. In 1908, the property where the monument stood was sold and the marker was removed and placed in the Trinity Church graveyard in Hewlett. In 1911, it was relocated to its present-day site, on a tree-shaded triangle at the intersection of Keene and Woods lanes.

Modern-day scholars point out that Culluloo was not Iroquois, instead, a member of the Algonquin-speaking Rockaways. Doubts have also been expressed whether Culluloo was Native American, a Black man—or a combination of both. Some believe that Culluloo was a Black man named Lou, and that Culluloo is a corruption of “Colored Lou.”

### **Vanishing Indian trope**

The Vanishing Indian trope was a convenient narrative amplified by our Colonial settlers, effectively erasing indigenous life, as evidenced by scant knowledge of their presence (i.e., census records). By calling someone like Culluloo Telewana “the last of the Rockaway Indians” in the 19th century, ignores the ongoing existence and heritage of Native Americans. The myth served to eradicate Native American culture, justifying the seizure of their lands. That being said, no one questions Hewlett’s sentimental gesture and apparent respect for a long-forgotten man.