

# Lenape Heritage in American Place Names

Dr. Jacob P. Rayapati, M.A., A.M., M.A., Ph.D.  
Professor of English, Cheyney University of Pennsylvania.  
October 10, 2014

A study of place names in any language is interesting because it gives us insights into cultures and language families. Phonological changes sometimes occur with the result that an English place name like “Brycg Stowe” in Old English of the 12<sup>th</sup> century becomes “Bristol” in Modern English. The purpose of this paper is to invite the attention of scholars in American language and literature to acknowledge our debt to the Pre-Columbian natives who spoke an Algonkian language called “Lenape” in regions that are now known as Pennsylvania, New Jersey, Delaware and parts of New York states. Such a study would make us aware of our linguistic and cultural inheritance and enable us to redefine American Heritage in more inclusive terms. [The documentation format here follows the MLA Style.]

The name “Lenape” literally means “people.” It is also applied to the language these people spoke (Hitakonanu'laxk 4). They are also called “Lenni-Lenape” which would mean “common people.” The root “Leno” means “Man” (Dean, “Lenape Language Tapes”). They were mistakenly called “Delawares” because they lived along the Delaware river which named for the then Governor, Lord de la Warr, Sir Thomas West of the Virginia Colony in 1610 (Hitakonanu'laxk 5). The region where they lived was called “Lenapehoking” meaning “the region of Lenape.”

The “-ing” suffix in Lenape language is a locative noun marker which also found in place names like “Wyoming.” Wyoming originally is the name of “a county, a valley and a former Indian village. The name is a corruption of M'cheuwamin, or M'cheuwam, having the significance of ‘great flats’ or ‘great meadows’ ... The locative of M'cheywam would be M'cheuoming, meaning ‘at the great flats’ (Donehoo 259),” It is contracted and changed to “Wyoming.” This locative place marker “...ing” can also be found place names like “Wissinoming” which “may be a corruption of the place name “Quessinawomink”. The name, however, is now applied to the small creek which enters Delaware river just above the mouth of Frankford Creek, at Wissinoming” (Donehoo 257).

The locative suffix we found in a contracted place name such as “Aramingo” which according to Donehoo is “A corruption of Tumanaraming.(7,8) which means “Wolf Walk.” The Lenape word for “wolf” is “Teme” (Hitakonamu'laxk 132). The place name “Hock Junction” in Somerset County, PA, is a good example of the several removes a Lenape place name might travel. According to Donehoo, the name is derived from “Hock Hocking” which means “place of gourds” (69). “Hock” in Lenape should stand for “gourd/s” though no dictionary mentions this word.

There are some Lenape place names that contain descriptive images. The name “Kittanning” is Armstrong County according to Donahoo “is derived from ‘kit,’ ‘great’ ‘hanna,’ ‘stream, with the locative ‘-ing’, meaning ‘at the great stream.’” (82) “Kittatinny” is another example of a place name that describes a geographical feature. According to Donehoo again, “Kittatinny” is perhaps a corruption of the Delaware “*Kit*” ‘great,’ and *Atin*, ‘hill’ or ‘mountain.’ This name is applied to a mountain range. In the early deeds “Kittatinny” could be a variation of the locative vowel “-i-“ and the back vocalized stop consonant “-g” tends to be dropped resulting in “Kittatinny.”

A good example of how many changes and contractions of a Lenape place name might undergo in “Lehigh.” According to Donehoo again, “The name [Lehigh] is an English corruption of the German shortening of the Lenape name, which was, *Lechauweekin*, *Lechauwichink*, *Lechauweing*, which the German settlers contracted to *Lecha*, which the English corrupted to *Lehi* or *Lehigh*. *Le-chau-woak* is ‘forks.’ ” The name ‘Lechauwekink,’ and other forms, signify ‘at the forks’ or ‘where there are forks’” ((89-90). “Lehightom” is “The name of a town in Carbon County; also the name of a creek, now Bushkill, which enters the Delaware at Easton. The name is a corruption of Lechauwting, or Lechauwetank, having the significance of ‘at the forks’—same as Lehigh” (Donehoo 91). Today, this place is popularly known as “Forks of the Delaware.” “Mahoning” another example of a place name containing the locative suffix –ing, “*Mahoni* was the Delaware word for ‘lick,’” according to Donehoo (92). The name “Mahoning” then would mean “at the lick.” There is a place now called “Lick Run” which must have derived from “Mahoning.” This is my guess.

The county name “Lycoming,” according to Donehoo, is “A corruption of Leagau-hanne, ‘sandy stream.’ The same stream is also known as “Pine Creek” according to Heckwelder as acknowledged by Donehoo (99).

A variation of the locative marker “-ing” or “-ink” is “-unk” as in *Manayunk*,” According to Heckwelder, the word means, “where we go to drink” (Donehoo 104). But according to Herbert Kraft, it means, “where we drink” (Donehoo 45). “Mana” or “Maneew” in Lenape must mean “drink/water” and the locative suffix “-unk” would make it “Manayunk” meaning “place where we drink.” This is my guess. The root “man” meaning “water” is also found in modern American placenames like “Manhattan” which is combination of “mana” meaning “water” and “ahten” meaning ‘hill’ plus the locative suffix “-ing” meaning “place”. Idiomatically (Mana-ahten-ing) *Manhattening* would mean an island (Donehoo 104). The name ‘tinicum’ also has a very interesting process of Anglicization from original *Manatay* plus –unk, or –ing. “Manatay” means “an island.” According to Donehoo, *Matincum* or *Tinicum* would mean “at the island” (223).

Modern “Minisink” which is “the chief village of the Minsi, a branch of the Munsee clan of the Delawares{...in} Pike County, also has an interesting history.” According to Donehoo, “The name signifies ‘the place of the Minsi’ “ (108). He goes on to speculate that the name could have been a combination of “Min-ach-sin-ink” “ which means “ ‘where the stones are gathered together’ –the name of Munsee.” He further speculates thus: “It is possible that the name Minisink is a corruption of Menichink,

which signifies 'gathering' or 'assembly,' and may have reference to the village having been the meeting place of the Minsi, or of the clas of the Munsee. The Minsi are frequently confounded with the Munsee" (108). I suspect that Donehoo is confused. My understanding is the the Munsee or Monsi are a clan of the Lenape.

"Okehocking" is "the name of the Indian town or reservation which was established by William Penn is 1701. [...] The site, four miles wst of Newtown Sqare and 17 miles west of Philadelphia, was marked by Pennsyovania Historical COMmission and the Chester County Historical Society, June 22, 1924 (Donehoo 135). The name translates as "the region of Oke" which is the name of a band of the Lenape people.

"Passayunk" is "The name of one of the Townships in Philadelphia County is 1741. Now [it is] part of the city. The name is derived from the Indian name for the tract of land between the Delaware and Schuylkill rivers ....The name a corruption of Pachsegink, or Pachsegonk, 'in the valley' " (Donehoo 145). In this example we see how the locative suffix -ing has changed to—unk which I think, is a dialectical variation in Lenape.

The place name "Paxton" was "formerly PAXTANA, PESHTANG," It is the name of a former Lenape village. According to Donehoo, it is a corruption of "Peekstank," 'where the waters stand, or possibly, Peeksting, 'the place of springs'—from tup-peek, 'a spring, or pond,' with the locative -ing" (146), You can see the influence of the English "-ton" fro Old English "tu:n" which gives us Modern English "town," and "—ton" when attached to other names.

"Perkiomen" is a corruption of "Pakhimomink" meaning " 'where the are cranberries' " (Donehoo 153). "Pakhim" in Lenape means "cranberry" and the locative suffix "-ing" or "-unk" would mean "place."

The name of the town Pocopson" in Chester County, PA, according to Donehoo, means "roaring creek" (159). The last syllable "—on" in "Pocopson," in my opinion, could be an Anglicization of Lenape locative suffix "—ing," in which case, "Pocopson" would mean "the area or place of the roaring creek."

Though it is hard to believe, a name like "Tippecanoe" in Fayette county on the west bank of Wabash River in Indiana, according to Donehoo again is "a corruption of Kitaptwanunk," buffalo-fish place." (228).

In Chester County, PA, there is a place called "Toughkenamon" which "may be a corruption of *Pethakwon*, "thunder," with the suffix *ottin* [ahten], 'hill.' But the original form of the name has disappeared (Donehoo 231)". My guess is that the last syllable of the name "—on" is a variation of the locative suffix "—ing." *Toughkenamon*, then would mean "Place of Thunder Mountain." This is another good example of a descriptive place name whose meaning is buried under its present form. It has nothing to do with a "tough" place!

Just look at a place name like “Towanda” in Tioga County, Pa that sounds like it is related to the personal name “Wanda.” Heckwelder, according to Donehoo, derives it from “Tawundeunk,” meaning “where we bury the dead.” (232). Some people have suggested, according to Donehoo, that “the name is a contraction of Ta-na-wun-da, ‘swift water’ pr ‘rapids’ (232). “In 1763 David Zeisberger, according to Donehoo again, refers to a place as “Tawandaemenk” which is a Munsee village (232). The final syllable “-enk” must have been a variation of the locative suffix “—ing, --ink, or –unk.”

The locative suffix is also found in place names like “Tulpehocken” in Bucks County. The name is “a corruption of Tulpewi-hacki, ‘turtles land’ (donehoo 235). Though ‘hacki” means ‘land’ in Iroquois languages, my guess is that “hocken” in Tulpehocken” is of Lenape derivation from “hocking” meaning “region of.” The original name must have been “Tulpewihoking.” The name then would mean “the region of turtles.”

The origin if a place name like “Wheeling” in West Virginia would never suggest to a modern American that it was derived from a combination of Lenape “Wihl” meaning “a head” with locative “—ing” “Wheeling” would, then, mean, “place of a head.” According to Heckwelder, an Indian prisoner was decapitated and his head was displayed on a pole which was the reason for the place name (Donehoo 251). But Donehoo goes on to speculate that the name was probably applied to the site of the presnt city of Wheeling, which a meeting place for the Indians[...]

A DESCRIPTIVE PLACE NAME LIKE “Wingohocking,” according to Donehoo “is a combination of “wingan’ meaning ‘sweet” and ‘hackin’ meaning ‘earth’ which would then signinfy ‘place of sweet earth’ which was, of course, good for planting’ ‘(256).

“Hanne” or “Hanna” in Lenape means “stream” or “river.” This descriptive ending is clearly found in the river name “Susquehanna” that flows by Harrisbourg, PA. Lenape wourd “Sisku: means :mud.” Thus “Susquehanaa” would mean “muddy stream” or “muddy river” (Donehoo 215-219). The people who live along this river were called “Susquehannocks.” The ending –ock or –wuk is a noun plural suffix. One can find a similar plural ending for the plural of “Lenape” which is “Lenapeyok” or “Lenapequk.”

What is presented in this paper is a brief sampling of the larger scope of research in place names derived from Native American languages and a challenge to all of us to rxplore and expand our definition of American Heritage to be all-inclusinve. I submit that we regard Lenape and other Nave American languages as “Classical American Languages.” I believe that our Native American precursors are really Classical Americans. Perhaps, we should regard Early Native Amrican Literature as Classical American Literature.

## REFERENCES:

Adams, Richard C. *The Legends of the Delaware Indians and Picture Writings*. Ed with Introduction by Deborah Nichols with translations by Nora Thompson Dean and Lucy Parker Blalock, Transcriptions by James Rementer, Syracuse, NY: Syracuse UP, 1997.

Adams, Robert H. *Songs of Our Grandfathers: Music of the Unami Delaware Indians*. Dewey, OK: Touching Leaves Indian Crafts, 1991.

Blalock, Lucy et al. *The Delaware Language*. Bartlesville, OK: Delaware Tribe of Indians, 1994.

Brinton, Daniel G. *The Lenape and their Legends: with the Complete Text and Symbols of the **Walum Olum***. Lewisburg, PA: Originally Published in Philadelphia, 1885; Wennawoods Publishing, 1999.

Brown, Jennifer and Jim Rementer. *Conversational Lenape*, Bartlesville, OK: The Delaware Tribe of Indians, 1999.

Cashman, Paul Tobacco. "The Circle of Lenapehoking." Unpublished Typescript. C. 1998.

David Zeisberger's *History of the Northern American Indians in 18<sup>th</sup> Century Ohio, New York & Pennsylvania*. Ed. Archer B. Hubert and William N. Scharze. Lewisburg, PA: Wennawoods Publishing, (Originally published in 1920), 1999.

Dean, Nora Thompson. *Lenape Language Lessons: Lessons One and Two*. With Audio Tapes. Dewey, OK. Touching Leaves Indian Crafts, 1979.

----- . *Lenape Language Lessons: Lessons Three and Four*. With audio Tapes. Dewey, OK: Touching Leaves Indian Crafts, 1980.

Donehoo, George P. *A History of Place Names in Pennsylvania*. (Originally Publ. Harrisburg, 1928), Lewisburg, PA: Wennawoods Publishing, 1999.

Fiero, Charles E. and David Balton. *Comparative Algonqian*. (©) March 6,2000 Revised March 7, 2001. Typescript.

Frye, Northrop et al. *Myth and Symbol: Critical Approaches and Applications*. Lincoln, NE: U of Nebraska, 1963.

Grumet, Robert S. *The Lenapes*. New York: Chelsea House P., 1989.

Hale, Duane K. *Peacemakers on the Frontier: A History of the Delaware Tribe of Western Oklahoma*. Anadarko, OK. Delaware Tribe of Western Oklahoma Press, 1<sup>st</sup> Edition, 1987.

Harrington, Mark R. *The Indians of New Jersey: Dickon Among the Lenape*. New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers UP. 1966.

Hawkins, Holly Blue. *The Heart Circle: A Guide to Drumming*. Freedom, CA: The Crossing Press, 1999.

Heckwelder, Johns. *Thirty Thousand Miles with John Heckwelder, or Travels Among the Indians of Pennsylvania, New York, and Ohio in the 18<sup>th</sup> Century*. Ed. A. W. Wallace, Lewisburg, PA: Wennawoods Publishing, 1998. Originally Published in 1958.

Hitakanonu'laxk. *The Grandfathers Speak: Native American Folk Tales of the Lenape People*. New York, NY: Interlink Books, 1994.

*Indian Lore*. Irving, TX: Boy Scouts of America, 1996.

Kraft, Herbert C. and John T. Kraft. *The Indians of Lenapehoking*. South Orange, NJ: Seton Hall U., 1997.

Pearson, Bruce L. *A Grammar of Delaware: Semantics, Morpho-Syntax, Lexicon, Phonology*. Dewey, OK: Touching Leaves Indian Crafts, 1988.

Ross, Allen. *Mitakuye Oyasin: "We are all Related."* Denver, CO: Wiconi Waste, 2001.

Rydjord, John. *Indian Place-Names: Their Origin, Evolution, and Meanings. Collected in Kensas from the Sioan, Algonquian, Shoshonean, Caddoan, Iroquoian, and Other Tongues*. Norman, OK: 1969.

Teme, Messochwén. *The Lenape*. Not Published. 2001.

Weatherford, Jack M. *Indian Givers: How the Indians of the Americas Transformed the World*. New York. Fawcett Columbine, 1990.

Wenning, Scott H. *Handbook of the Delaware Indian Language*. Lewisburg, PA: Wennawood Publishing, 2000.

Zeisberger, David. *A Delaware-English Lexicon of Owrds and Phrases*. Ed. Raymond Whrittenour. Butler, NJ: Lenape Texts and Studies, 1995.