

A PROUD HERITAGE

EXPERIENCE NEW JERSEY'S RICH NATIVE AMERICAN CULTURES

BY JOEL SAMBERG
Gateway Correspondent

While traveling the Garden State from one end to the other, it is almost impossible not to pass through a town or village in each county that derived its name from a Native American phrase. From Ho-Ho-Kus – “The Red Cedar” – to Pennsauken – “the place where tobacco is traded” – New Jersey’s original residents have left a legacy of language. The Lenapes once occupied nearly all of what is present-day New Jersey, which they called Lenapehoking, “The Land of the Lenape.”

According to experts, Native American culture has been largely misrepresented in mainstream America over the years, and that’s one reason why New Jersey’s Department of State created the Commission on American Indian Affairs in 1995. But while the commission – comprised of representatives of several tribes, including the Powhatan-Renape, Nanticoke Lenni-Lenape and Ramapough Mountain – continues its discussions, New Jersey visitors and day trippers have several opportunities to take in some solid Indian culture.



Native American art and artifacts in New Jersey include (left to right) a clay bowl by Marie Chino, courtesy of the Newark Museum; Sioux headdress, courtesy of the Montclair Art Museum; and “Christmas on the Navajo Reservation” by Juanita Tsosie, courtesy of the Newark Museum.

Indian Heritage Museum and the American Indian Arts Festival

One of the best places to begin is an Indian museum that is actually owned by Indians – the only one of its kind in New Jersey. The Indian Heritage Museum, located on the Rankokus Indian Reservation of the Powhatan Renape Nation, is in the Delaware River Region town of Rancocas, a few miles east of Philadelphia.

The museum features a wide variety of Indian tools, weapons, clothing, crafts, musical instruments, decorative arts, large dioramas depicting tribal village life, and a gallery with changing exhibitions of Indian art.

“There is nothing quite like it in New Jersey,” says museum coordinator Sheila Vasquez. “In addition to the museum itself, we have nature trails, an Indian village, a long-house, a wigwam, and much more.”

Guided tours are conducted by the Indians who live on the reservation.

The Powhatan Renape Nation traces its

ancestry to the Rappahannock Indians from Virginia and the Nanticoke Indians from Delaware. Although they had taken tremendous losses in culture due to economic strife, racism, assimilation and other influences, they were nevertheless able to retain much of their identity. In the 1960s the tribe established a center in Philadelphia and later in Moorestown, just a few miles southwest of their current location in Rancocas. In 1980, the State of New Jersey officially recognized the Powhatan Renape Nation, and the resolution called upon the Congress of the United States to do the same.

In 1982, they negotiated an agreement with the State of New Jersey to assume ownership of 350 acres of state-owned land, which is now the Rankokus Indian Reservation.

Annual events on the reservation include a juried American Indian Arts Festival, the largest of its kind east of the Mississippi River. This year’s festival, which will run from Saturday, Oct. 8 to Monday, Oct. 10, will showcase artists and artisans – tribal members only – from throughout the Americas. Visitors will also be urged to sample Indian foods, such as venison, caribou, wild rice, Navajo tacos, three sisters rice, alligator, corn soup, and several meat and vegetarian dishes.



Indian Heritage Museum

Rancocas Road
Rancocas
(609) 261-4747

George Woodruff Museum of Indian Artifacts

150 E. Commerce St.
Bridgeton
(609) 451-2620

Waterloo Village

525 Waterloo Rd.
Stanhope
(973) 347-0900

New Jersey State Museum

225 W. State St.
Trenton
(609) 292-6464

Newark Museum

49 Washington St.
Newark
(973) 596-6550

Montclair Art Museum

3 S. Mountain Ave.
Montclair
(973) 746-5555

New Jersey's Native Americans

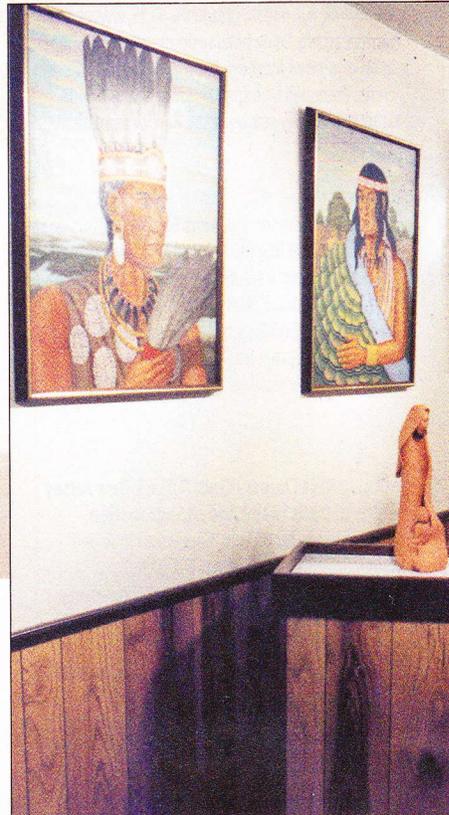
The peaceful Lenape settled New Jersey's fertile northern valleys centuries ago

Admission is \$10 for adults, \$5 for seniors and children ages 6 to 12. Children 5 and under are free. Call the museum at (609) 261-4747 for further information.

George Woodruff Museum of Indian Artifacts

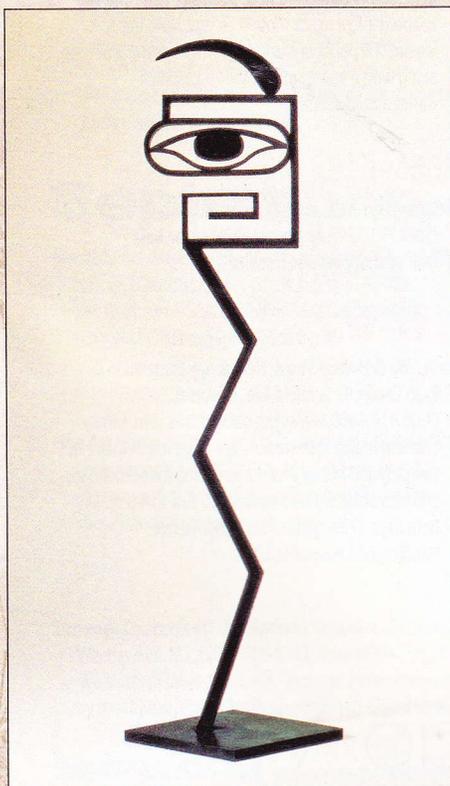
In Cumberland County, in the Southern Shore Region just north of the Delaware Bay, the George Woodruff Museum of Indian Artifacts provides another source rich in Native American culture. Located in Bridgeton, its exhibits contain more than 20,000 objects and relics related to the Lenni-Lenapes. All of the items were discovered in Southern New Jersey.

"The number of materials we have here makes it one of the largest and finest collections of its kind in all of New Jersey," says Gail Robinson, a



The Indian Heritage Museum in Rancocas (right).

1981 American Indian figure by Roy Lichtenstein (below).
Courtesy of the Montclair Art Museum



coordinator with the museum. She said visitors from all over the state come to the museum.

"On Saturdays between 11 a.m. and 2 p.m., we have volunteer guides who are very knowledgeable collectors," Robinson says. "If you bring an item with you that you had in your family for generations or found somewhere on your property, they may be able to help you identify what it is and when it was made."

Waterloo Village

Waterloo Village may not be part of an actual Indian reservation, nor a conventional museum, but it is one of the most widely respected resources for people interested in Lenni-Lenape heritage and culture.

Located in Stanhope, just west of Lake Hopatcong near Route 80, it is an entire restored colonial village steeped in Native American history.

According to representatives at Waterloo Village, what visitors *won't* find there are teepees, feathered war bonnets and fringed buckskins, all of which are items popularized by TV shows and movies based on the Indians of the Great Plains and American Southwest. Lenape Village, on

Native American history between the Atlantic Ocean and the Delaware River is almost as complex as the combined histories of all other peoples who built New Jersey into the assimilated state it is today.

Thousands of years ago, the valleys in the north comprised a particularly useful territory because of how fertile and full of wildlife it was. The natives there are often considered to be the ancestors of the Lenape Indians, who in turn came to be associated with large portions of New Jersey.

In the latter part of the 17th century, the English began calling them Delaware Indians because large bands lived along the river named after Lord Thomas De La Warr, who was the English colonial governor of Virginia in the early 1600s.

By and large, the Lenapes were a peaceful, quiet people; in fact, there is no evidence of warfare until after the Europeans came ashore.

Each small tribe was basically independent, as there was no centralized authority (and no chiefs). They were also very spiritual, a trait that may have been seriously tested once weapons, alcohol and capitalism started to appear. Many sold their land and moved west.

Those who remained, and who are still here today, seem to treasure the rewards of being who they are, and from where they came.

Most schoolchildren know that the word "Indian" is a misnomer coined by misguided Europeans who thought they had landed in India. But it hardly matters. New Jersey's Indians wear the name with extraordinary pride. — JS