

Historical Society of Stillwater Township

## INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY 2022

*Gender equality today for a sustainable tomorrow*

March 8, 2022

Kittatinny Regional High School



# Lenape Women

## *Doctors, Diviners and Diplomats*

*Presentation by Michelle Vosper  
Historical Society of Stillwater Township*

*at  
Kittatinny Regional High School  
Holocaust and Genocide Research Center  
International Women's Day  
March 8, 2022*

*Delaware Indian Family  
Pehr Lindestrom 1632-1691  
Arrived 1653 New Sweden*



# The Whole Story

- “Women hold up half the Sky,” the Chinese say
- Without women’s history, we have only **half of** the story
- But white women’s history is only one part of that 50%

# Lenape or Delaware people (Len A' Pay)

- Name means “Original People”
- Have been in NJ for more than 12,000 years
- Lived in NJ, PA, NY **Left around 1758**
- North Jersey is the **Munsee** tribe and language
- South Jersey Lenape were Unami and spoke that language
- Other tribes called them “**Grandfather**”
- Called themselves “**A Tribe of Women.**”
  
- **First** to encounter and exchange with the Europeans

# A People **With** a Past      Not **of** the past

Native Americans are not gone.

They are not a people of the past

They are people with a past.

Today there are more than **500 sovereign nations** (or tribes)

There are 3-4 million Native Americans in the US

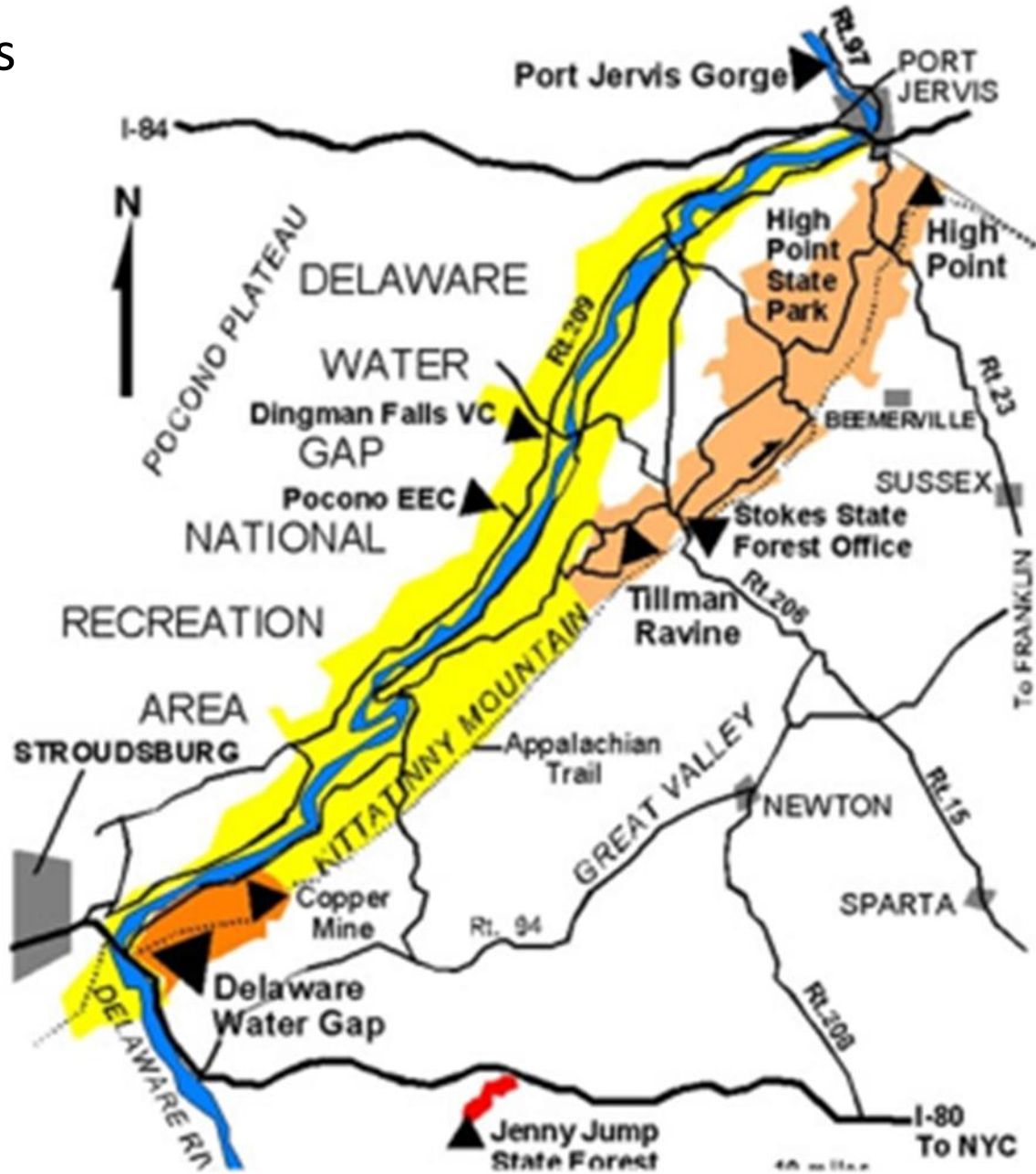
It is estimated that there were **15 million** in the year 1500

Kittatinny means

Big Hill  
Endless Mountains

Quick Question:

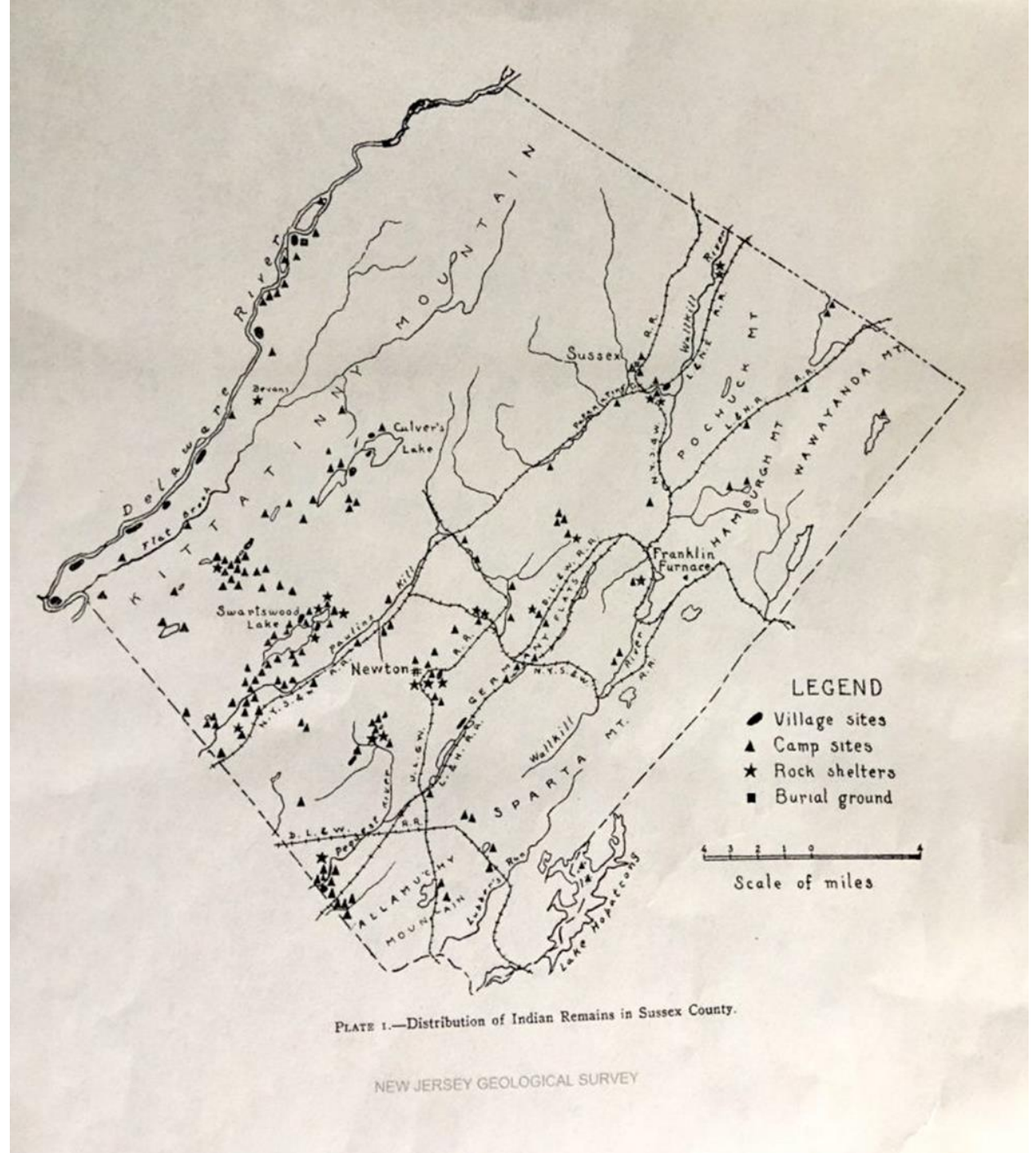
What language?



Lenapehoking, means the

“Land of the Lenape.”

This 1915 NJ Geological Survey map of **Sussex County** shows Lenape villages, rockshelters and settlements discovered during excavations in 1915.



## Bevans Rock Shelter



Dorothy Cross Jensen 1906- 1972



# The Lenape were a matriarchal society

- Lineage was passed on through the mother's line
- Women could choose their own husband and the couple moved in with the bride's parents until they had their own place
- Divorce was permitted and the children stayed with the mother
- Division of labor:
- Women were in charge of agriculture, distribution of food Pottery-making, leather tanning

**Men** were hunters, warriors, cleared the fields,

# Women had high status

- Spiritual leaders : handled rituals, ceremonies
- Healers: grew herbs and administered to sick

Diplomats/ambassadors/peacemakers

# Irony of Civilization

- American women had to fight for rights for 144 years.
- In Lenape culture women had equal status with men for thousands of years
- European missionaries tried to change this because in western Christian traditions, women were considered to be inherently evil: (seducers, witches) who could not be trusted.
- In the 1600's historians also had difficulty grasping the concept of matriarchy and often misinterpreted observations

# Lenape Communities today in Oklahoma and Ontario

1738 Walking Purchase, Thomas Penn

1758

After the Seven Year War, (“French and Indian War”) the Lenape left their ancestral homeland in the northeast and migrated west and north, as colonizing settlers pushed them further and further



# Preventing Cultural Extinction

## Preserving Traditions

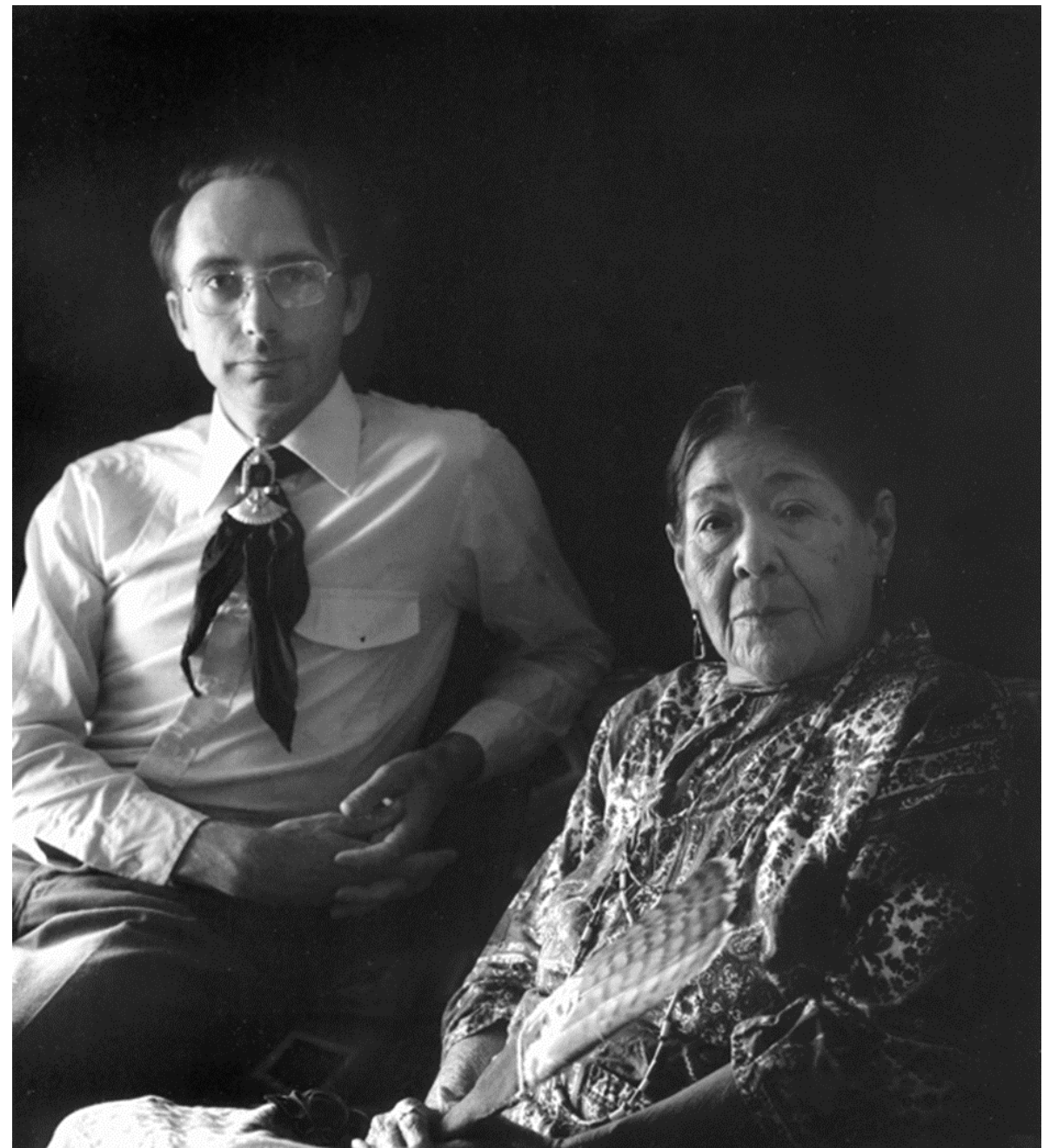
Touching Leaves Woman

Nora Thompson Dean

1907- 1984

James Rementer

Director of Lenape Language Center



# Indian Giver?

More cultural misunderstandings...

- Concept of Reciprocity and circulation of goods
- Relationship with land; no concept of ownership

*“How can you buy the sky? How can you own the rain and wind?”*

--- Chief Seattle



Deb Haaland, Secretary of the Interior 2020  
Laguna Pueblo Nation



Joy Harjo Poet Laureate 2019  
Muscogee Nation

Ramapough Lunaape Turtle Clan

Clan Mother Michaeline Picaro

Three Sisters Medicinal Farm

Newton, NJ





# Native American Civil Rights

- 1925 Native Americans became citizens of the U.S.  
but not all states gave voting rights
- 1965 Voting Rights act gave all Native Americans the right to vote

# Ever-Changing “Facts” from the Past

## 1. **Immigration Story** (previously: via Bering Strait 15,000 years ago)

- In 2021 Archaeologists in New Mexico discovered footprints from 23,000 years ago
- Latest genetic research (2022) points to coastal arrivals

## 2. **1492**

- Christopher Columbus landed in Hispaniola/Haiti (Taino People) and claimed for Spain.
- Can be considered “Father of Globalization” and Columbian Exchange
- Beginning of empire building and competition among white European countries

**3. 1493:** Pope Alexander VI issues Papal Bull: **Doctrine of Discovery**, endorses conquest of lands Inhabited by non-Christian indigenous people

## 4. **Annihilation**

Indigenous population estimated at **15 million people** (North America)

Today they number 3-4 million

5. **1801:** Thomas Jefferson---Manifest Destiny

## Universal Attitudes of Colonizers

**Indigenous people** are marginalized groups in many countries of the world, not only the U.S. Many tribes are matriarchal.

They have often been subjected to “cultural assimilation” by colonizing powers and forced to attend schools in which they are forbidden to speak their native language and where their traditional cultural values are condemned as “savage” and superstitious.

Women of Atayal Tribe  
Taiwan, 1920's



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Students assembled at the **Carlisle Industrial School** circa 1900. Founded in Carlisle Pennsylvania in 1879 by Lieutenant Richard Henry Pratt whose well-known motto was “Kill the Indian, Save the Man.” It was the flagship Indian Boarding School from 1879 to 1918.

# Environmental Wisdom

*“The voice of my grandmother said to me:*

*The earth is our mother*

*What befalls the earth, befalls all the sons and daughters of the Earth.”*

*Chief Seattle*