

## Ramapough Lunaape Nation

There are around 5,000 Ramapough Lunaape people today, with 3,700 locally and 1,200 nationally.

The Ramapo were a Munsee-speaking band of the Lenape, an Algonquian language-speaking people who occupied a large territory throughout coastal areas of the mid-Atlantic states and along the Delaware River valley.

Different bands of natives that lived throughout New Jersey, New York, and Pennsylvania were all part of the whole Lenape Nation. The bands were known by the places they resided, therefore Europeans thought they were different Tribes.

Today for more than 300 years, the Ramapough Lunaape Nation can be found living around the Ramapo Mountains in Northern New Jersey (recognized in 1980) and Rockland County in Southern New York (recognized in 1979).



### History

As early as 1641, "Historical documents reflect that the tribe retreated into the Ramapo Mountains to escape being captured or killed."

In 1756, documentation reflects that many Ramapough Lenape migrated west to join the Cherokee nation on reservations. Some remained in the Ramapough Mountains, which at that time had an established community of more than thirty years.

The official border (between NJ and NY) was surveyed and mapped out in 1798 but by then, the Ramapoughs were securely entrenched.

As the years passed, other native people trekked through the Ramapo pass and some took up residence with the Ramapough Indians.

The Ramapough Lunaape also had a role in the American Revolution as the use of the Ramapough Pass came about. It was a chokepoint that the Ramapough held control over and allowed George Washington, as well as the French, to utilize. It virtually cut off any strategic use or attack on the colonies, making the Revolution a successful venture. The Ramapough Pass was surveyed by George Washington when he was a captain and Alexander Hamilton who was a Lieutenant. If not for the access allowed by the Ramapough, the rebels would have been run over by the British.

In the 1980's the EPA designated the site of the Ringwood Mines landfill as a Superfund site. Ford Auto manufacturing had dumped hazardous materials there in the vicinity of where Ramapough people live and by 2006, the Ramapough had to file a suit as lead and antimony levels were 100 times that of the safety limit. Under EPA oversight, a feasibility study is currently being prepared which will evaluate alternatives for addressing groundwater contamination at the Ringwood Mines/Landfill site.

## Early Beliefs

The Lenape didn't believe anyone could own the land or water. They believed that would be like someone owning the air. You could only own what you can hold in your hand and even that was for sharing.

They believed the Creator put the land and water here for the survival of all people. Land couldn't be owned by one person, or group of people.

They also believed that all things on Turtle Island had a life. The plants, animals, and even the rocks would give their life so the people could survive. When the whites wanted to buy the land, the natives thought they wanted to give them gifts for sharing the land with them. Of course the new settlers didn't look at things in the same way, so when they "bought" the land, they would take action against the Lenape if they tried to use any part of it. When they realized what the settlers had in mind they began to refuse, but land speculators found ways of getting the land away from the Indians.

It didn't matter if the signor was anyone of importance among his people, or if he had any claim to the land, as long as they put their mark on a deed, saying he was the rightful owner. They would also tell the person signing the deed that the boundary was at a different location than it really was, so the natives had no idea that the deed turned over rights to thousands of acres.

With a free will government, every member (man or woman) had a say in what going on.

## The Nation

Upon finding the Indians unwilling to talk about their private lives and the struggles they'd endured, people made up their own stories. Self-proclaimed historians and amateur archeologists would give their own versions.

Elders of the tribe were passing down their history and culture to their children; they were told to keep it a secret so they wouldn't be taken away. The terrible deed of being taken away was still taking place into the twentieth century. Upon hearing that a parent had died, or became ill, so called "Do-Gooders," would rush into the mountains and gather up the children and take them away. Some never had contact with their relatives again and some contacted those who were left of their family fifty or sixty years later.



Chief Dwaine Perry

"The written history of the native people in this area was always left to the non- native community to write, and with their ignorance of Lenape ways and language, their documentation was seldom accurate. Therefore, we rely on our oral history more than the writings found in the history books."

Gratitude to the New Jersey Council for the Humanities and Kidsbridge Tolerance Center for funding these programs.

*"Through the years there have been many myths perpetuated about our people. One of those myths is that we are not actually an indigenous tribe. We are taking steps to denounce these stories as fraudulent." -- Chief Perry*