

Up and Down the River: Historical Understanding

A Mohegan History Film for America at 250

This film was created by the Mohegan Tribe with support from the National Park Foundation

The Mohegan Tribe of Indians of Connecticut is located along the Thames River (aka Massapequotuck). For Mohegans, the American Revolutionary War was not a win, despite the Tribe's longstanding alliance with the colonists. A generation of Tribal men was nearly wiped out. Mohegan women lost their freedom of expression and gender equality. Mohegan men and women were denied the right to speak their language and practice their religion. For Mohegan lands and the river, the 1700s began an ecological devastation that continues.

Colonial Era: Challenges to Indigenous Land, Water & Sovereignty:

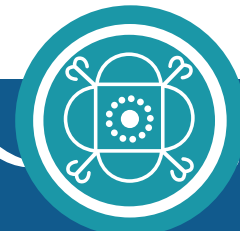
Sachem Uncas (*Mohegan, 1598-1683*): Allied with the English colonists to survive. Nonetheless, land dispossession ensued. One of Uncas's successors, Sachem Mahomet Weyonamom (Mohegan, 1700-1736c.) died of smallpox in England, while awaiting an audience on his land issue with King George II.

Sachem Anne Uncas (*Mohegan, c. 1730*): Selected by the Tribe as Mahomet's successor. But Connecticut Governor Talcott declared her "a queen or imposter" per the colony's "civilizing measures" which opposed women leaders. The Governor forced her to marry Ben Uncas, Junior, whom they inserted to lead in Anne's stead. For a century thereafter, Mohegans used the titles of Headman and Headwoman, instead of Sachem/Chief for leaders.

Revolutionary Era: Challenges to Gender Equality, Education & Language:

Rev. Samson Occom (*Mohegan, 1723-1792*): A scholar-educator who travelled to England and Scotland from 1766-7 where he raised twelve thousand pounds to build a coeducational Indian College in Connecticut. His colonial colleague, Rev. Eleazar Wheelock, promised but failed to feed Occom's family while he was abroad because Mary Fowler Occom spoke her Native language and wore her traditional clothing. Soon after Occom's return, Wheelock used the funds raised by Occom to build Dartmouth College in New Hampshire for colonial men.

Samuel Ashbow Jr. (*Mohegan, 1748c-1775*): Was the son of Samuel Ashbow, Senior and his wife, Hannah Maminash Ashbow, who had family ties to the Occoms. Hannah suffered the same indignities as Mary from her husband's colleagues. She opposed their sons' participation in the colonists' War of Independence from England because their society treated women as property. Her son, Samuel Ashbow Jr., was the first Native American soldier to die for this country at The Battle of Bunker Hill on June 17, 1775. He left behind his pregnant wife, Jerusha Tantaquidgeon Ashbow, who died a few years after the war, followed by their son, Joshua, who drowned in the Massapequotuck.



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Legacy of the Revolution: Circling Back to Rights, Freedoms, & Balance:

Martha Shantup Uncas (*Mohegan 1761-1859*): was Samuel Ashbow Junior's niece. She became a famous Mohegan Headwoman who passed down the tribe's language and a beaded belt (that signifies the wearer's responsibility to maintain traditions) to her granddaughter, Fidelia.

Fidelia Fielding/Jeets Bodernoshor (*Mohegan, 1827-1908*): preserved the Mohegan language in her diaries. Because she was beaten by her schoolteacher for speaking it, she became Mohegan's last speaker for a century but passed down Mohegan stories, traditional medicine and spirituality, along with Martha's belt, to her mentee, Gladys.

Gladys Tantaquidgeon (*Mohegan, 1899-2005*): was the first Native American student at the University of Pennsylvania's Anthropology Department. She published scholarly books and articles on Mohegan traditions & co-founded Tantaquidgeon Museum. It is the oldest Native American-run museum in the USA. Admission has always been free to the public.

Lynn Malerba/ Mutáwi Mutáhash (*Mohegan, Living*): was appointed the first Mohegan woman sachem in nearly 300 years, in 2010. She holds a doctorate in nursing from Yale and has published and advocated for Native sovereignty, health and economic issues. In 2022, President Biden appointed Sachem Malerba as the first Native American Treasurer of the United States of America.

Sources:

Mohegan Oral History & Genealogies

Mohegan Archival Papers

The Samson Occom Papers

The Fidelia Fielding Papers

The Leffingwell Museum Papers

The Tantaquidgeon Museum Papers

The Yale Indian Papers and The Occom Circle of Dartmouth

Key Articles:

Den Ouden, Amy E. Beyond conquest: Native peoples and the struggle for history in New England. U of Nebraska Press, 2005.

Wyss, Hilary E. "Mary Occom and Sarah Simon: Gender and Native Literacy in Colonial New England." *The New England Quarterly* 79.3 (2006): 387-412.

Scholars whose consultation informed this film's interpretations of Hannah Ashbow, Samson Occom and Fidelia Fielding include Anthony Trujillo, Dr. Lisa Brooks & Dr. Marge Bruchac

