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# This tribe helped win the Revolution, then were expelled and migrated to Wisconsin. What's changed now?

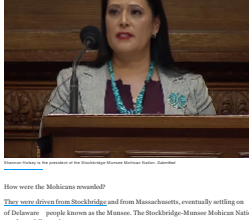
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When George Washington was struggling to keep his army together during the early days of the Revolutionary War, he received critical help from one of America's most unlikely allies.

The Mohican tribe from Stockbridge, Mass., built fortifications, ambushed British forces, scouted movements of the Redcoats and acted as colonial emissaries to other Indigenous tribes. The [Ojibwa](#) also aided the revolutionaries.



Shannon Holsby is the president of the Stockbridge-Munsee Mohican Nation. Submitted

## How were the Mohicans rewarded?

[They were driven from Stockbridge](#) and from Massachusetts, eventually settling on Menominee land in Wisconsin, where they were joined by a group of Delaware people known as the Munsee. The Stockbridge-Munsee Mohican Nation's 22,539-acres is still adjacent to the Menominee Reservation in northeast Wisconsin.

## Stockbridge was an experiment that worked, until new settlers flooded in

Stockbridge was founded in 1739 as a kind of experiment in which Indigenous peoples and colonists would live, work and govern together. The town board had both Indigenous and colonial representatives, according to White and Stockbridge historians. The experiment worked for decades. However, in the wake of The Seven Years' War, which ended in 1763, white settlers poured into the community and had little interest in maintaining any balance.

They took over Mohican land by squatting or making illegal purchases, and consolidated power on the town council and in the courts.

When the Revolutionary War erupted, tribal leaders saw a kinship in those protesting the government, as well as an opportunity to win back their land and sovereignty. Soon, they found themselves enmeshed in the struggle, earning a reputation for bravery.

In one legendary battle, Mohican Chief Abraham Ninham and 17 Mohicans were killed by the British in 1778 after tracking their movements throughout the Bronx and reporting back to the Americans, according to the [New York City Department of Parks and Recreation](#). A monument today marks where the battle took place at New York City's Van Cortlandt Park.

## Appreciation for Revolutionary War contributions faded quickly

After the war ended, there was some appreciation for the Mohican contributions.

Tribal historians in Stockbridge have uncovered evidence of a great feast in 1783 that Washington had with Mohican tribal members to celebrate and thank them for their service. "Based on our own documentary evidence, we feel very confident that there's significant evidence (it) did take place," said Bonney Hartley, historic preservation manager for the tribe. "We have specific information listed, such as the weight of the ox."

That sentiment faded quickly.

More immigrants came from Europe, and they coveted lands and developed properties held by Indigenous peoples, including property held in Stockbridge by Mohican widows and children of Mohicans who fought and died in the Revolutionary War. The Mohicans were forced out.

For decades, the Stockbridge-Munsee Mohican Nation has sought to renew ties with its ancestral home either through official tribal government efforts, such as opening an office in Stockbridge, Mass. or through non-governmental tribal organizations.

Finally, officials in Massachusetts reciprocated.

In 2021, White — the Stockbridge selectman — helped successfully lead an effort to change a commonwealth law in order to return historic documents to the Mohican Nation. The documents, including Mohican proprietor records from before the Revolution, were discovered in the trash at the old Stockbridge Town Hall as the building was being cleaned out.

Last summer, commonwealth legislators voted to approve an award of \$2.6 million to the Mohican Nation to purchase land known as Monument Mountain. With the award, the tribe is now responsible for implementing tribal conservation and forest management strategies on about 350 acres of land near the town.

This tribal land stewardship is an effort to help mitigate climate change.

"The Tribe has always engaged the Commonwealth of Massachusetts for purposes of repatriation and historic preservation," said Stockbridge-Munsee Mohican Nation President Shannon Holsby. "With increases in climate-related events, such as droughts, flooding, wildfires and extreme storms, state officials and tribal leaders are working nimbly across political lines to mitigate the costly human, natural and financial impacts of these climate-related disasters."

The funds are part of the commonwealth's [Municipal Vulnerability Preparedness Program](#), which was created to help local governments address climate change effects, such as flooding and extreme heat.

White also is leading an effort to include Mohican tribal members on an official Stockbridge committee similar to how the town was governed before the Revolution. He said it would be up to individual tribal members if they want to move back to the land of their ancestors, but they certainly would be welcome.

## Tribe welcomes new relationship with Massachusetts. To a point.

Dennis Zack of Oshkosh has not been to his tribe's ancestral homeland, but is looking forward to making the trip soon.

"I think it's good no matter who is reaching out to us from Massachusetts and we Mohicans should welcome those talks and revisit the past and look forward to the future together," he said.

**More: Oshkosh-based Tribal Sun Soap features Native-inspired products**

Zack recently started a successful personal soap retail business, [Tribal Sun Soap](#), out of his home making Native-inspired natural soaps "in a good way" that represents Mohican beliefs and gives back to Indian Country.

He thinks he could possibly sell his soap in Stockbridge, Mass., especially one called "Monument Mountain Apples" after the mountain that the Mohican Nation recently reclaimed. Zack hopes to use the soap not only to expand his business, but also as a way to open dialogues.

"We tend to waste our voices on those not open to listen about the past and what happened after 1492 and are told to get over it," he said. "But when you have folks willing to talk, do it."

Holsby welcomes the new efforts of Massachusetts officials, but said the tribe will remain realistic.

"Our connection to our homelands is inherent," she said. "We try to stay engaged and visit as often as possible ... and remind people we are not remnants of the past, but rather a 21st century nation that is thriving in spite of the systematic barriers and challenges we have faced for centuries."

"Yet, we recognize that without active participation, the current system will continue to disenfranchise, harm, erase and ignore the beautiful contributions of our Native people into the next century."

**More: New York island returned to Wisconsin-based Mohican Nation after hundreds of years**

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