Brief Outline of the History of the Quinnipiac People

The people who identified themselves as Quinnipiac according to the Dutch and English circa 1600 resided in a section of South Central Connecticut.

The approximate area where the Quinnipiac lived was along the north shore of Long Island Sound from the current towns of West Haven in the west to Clinton in the east and then inland to Bethany, Cheshire, and Meriden.

Circa 1600 their neighbors to the west were the Paugassetts, to the north the Tunxis and Wangunk, and to the east the Nehantic. They were all integrated socially, culturally, economically, and politically.

At the time of the arrival of the Dutch to trade in the early 1600’s, they were identified as the Quirpi as was their language. The Dutch had by the early 1620’s established an outpost/fort in what is now the Indian Neck section of Branford (Totoket). By then the Quinnipiac were tributaries of the Pequot due to the trade with the Dutch.

Like other Indigenous people in Connecticut, the Quinnipiac suffered catastrophically from a smallpox epidemic in 1633-34 that originated along the Connecticut River because it spread from of either Dutch or English traders. John Menta, Yale historian, estimated the Quinnipiac lost up to 80% of their population.

By the early 1630’s, the English identified the Quinnipiac as living in four main villages or Sachemdoms; the main village of the Grand Sachem at Mioonkhtuck (New Haven) under the leadership of Momauguin, Totoket (Branford) under the leadership of Qussuckquansh, uncle of Momauguin, Mennunkatuck (Guilford) under the sachem Shaumpishuh, sister of Momauguin, and a village located up the Quinnipiac River under the sachem Montowese.

When the Pequot War broke out, the Quinnipiac remained neutral and because they did not support the Pequot, many fled to the English towns on the Connecticut River centered around Hartford for safety. There they saw the benefits of living near the English – protection from their enemies and trade.

In 1638, following the war, a group of 500 Puritan English arrived at New Haven Harbor having negotiated with Momauguin and his counsellors an agreement that an English town could be built on the west side of the harbor and the Quinnipiac would remain on 1200 acres on the eastern shore. Both groups were free to utilize lands outside their immediate villages. In return, the English promised to protect the Quinnipiac from their potential enemies.

In 1639, another group of English under the leadership of Rev. Henry Whitfield negotiated an agreement to settle at Mennunkatuck and Shaumpishuh agreed to lead her remaining people across the Kuttawo (East) River to what is now Madison. In 1641 they agreed to join their people at Mioonkhtuck under pressure from Uncas who turned around and sold the land east of the Kuttawo to the English in Guilford.

By the 1650’s and 1660’s, pressure from a growing English population and their expansion of farms and towns into “shared” lands began to limit the ability of the Quinnipiac to practice their traditional way of life. As a result, they possessed the one commodity the English wanted – land. In order to function in a changing economy dominated by the English the Quinnipiac began to sell off land. By the end of the 17th century, only two shrinking villages remained: Mioonkhtuck and Totoket.

By then many Quinnipiac began to join refugees from other groups, moving inland away from the growing English presence. Many joined with the Tunxis along the Farmington River becoming known as the “Farmington Indians”. By 1730 the last of Quinnipiac lands were turned over to English. Some joined with better established groups such as the Mohegan and Pequots or merged with others to form the Schaghticoke in northwestern Ct.

By the later decades of the 18th century, the remaining Quinnipiac and Tunxis moved to Stockbridge Ma. Under the protection of Moravian Christian Missionaries and just before the Revolution moved with them to Brothertown, NY joining other groups as well. Eventually pressure from European-American settlers forced the Brothertown Indians to migrate westward, eventually settling in Wisconsin in an area near Green Bay where they are living today.

A small group of Quinnipiac along with refugees from other groups did however remain in their traditional land. Under the leadership of Shaumpishuh’s son Nausup, a village was established at West Lake in North Guilford where they remained until the early 1830’s. Others blended in with the Euro and African Americans and either lost their identity or “hid in plain sight”. Up until the early 1830’s, others would return to what had been Mioonkhtuck for a “harvest festival” until the land owner eventually forbade them.