

## Prehistoric era

About 75,000 years ago, during the last ice age, the area of present day New York City was at the edge of the ice sheet that stretched down from Canada. The ice sheet covered the site of the present city to a depth of approximately 1000 feet (300 m). The glaciers scraped off much of the top layers of material in the region, exposing underlying much-older bedrock, including gneiss and marble that dates from 500 million years ago.

Approximately 15,000 years ago, when the ice sheet began retreating, the glacier left behind a terminal moraine that now forms the hills of Long Island and Staten Island. The two islands were not yet separated by the Narrows, which were formed approximately 6,000 years ago when the waters of the Upper Bay broke through in the Lower Bay.

Archeological excavations indicate that the first humans settled the area as early as 9,000 years ago. These early inhabitants left behind hunting implements and bone heaps. The area was abandoned, however, possibly because the warming climate of the region led to the local extinction of many larger game species upon which the early inhabitants depended for food.

A second wave of inhabitants entered the region approximately 3,000 years ago and left behind more advanced hunting implements such as bows and arrows. The remains of approximately 80 such early encampments have been found throughout the city. The region has probably remained continually inhabited from that time.

## Lenape in New York

The area was long inhabited by the Lenape; Lenape in canoes met Giovanni da Verrazzano, the first European explorer to enter New York Harbor, in 1524. Giovanni da Verrazzano named this place New Angouleme (*Nouvelle Angoulême* in french) in the honor of the French king Francis I ('François 1er' in french). (Believed to be after this event) A French explorer and mapper, Samuel de Champlain, described his explorations through New York in 1608. A year later Henry Hudson, an Englishman working for the Dutch, claimed the area in the name of the Netherlands. It was to be called New Netherlands.

The **Lenape** or **Lenni-Lenape** (later named **Delaware Indians** by Europeans) were, in the 1600s, loosely organized bands of Native American people practicing small-scale agriculture to augment a largely mobile hunter-gatherer society in the region around the Delaware River, the lower Hudson River, and western Long Island Sound. The Lenape were the people living in the vicinity of New York Bay and in the Delaware Valley at the time of the arrival of the Europeans in the 16th and 17th century. Their Algonquian language is also known as either Lenape or Delaware.

The quick dependence of the Lenape on European goods, and the need for fur to trade with the Europeans, eventually resulted in a disaster with an overharvesting of the beaver population in the lower Hudson. The fur source thus exhausted, the Dutch shifted their operations to present-day Upstate New York. The Lenape population fell into disease and decline. Likewise, the differences in conceptions of property rights between the Europeans and the Lenape resulted in widespread confusion among the Lenape and the loss of their lands. After the Dutch arrival in the 1620s, the Lenape were successfully able to restrict Dutch settlement to present-day Jersey City along the Hudson until the 1660s, when the Dutch finally established a garrison at Fort Bergen, allowing settlement west of the Hudson.

## Lenape inhabitants

*Main article: Lenape*

At the time of the arrival of the first Europeans, the area around what would later be called New York Bay was populated primarily by the Munsee branch of the Lenape, a people in the ethnic and linguistic Algonquian family, loosely connected to them by a common language-root. The Lenape called the region Scheyischbi, or "the place bordering the ocean", and perhaps Lenapehoking, meaning "place where the Lenape dwell," although there is not universal agreement among scholars regarding this. The Lenape hunted, fished, and gathered roughly 150 species of edible wild plants, as well as using slash and burn agriculture, with the women sowing such crops as the "Three Sisters" of maize, beans, and squash. The harbor and rivers also provided for rich fishing, especially of oyster and striped bass.

The Lenape lived in small inter-connected groups moving seasonally from camp to camp and, according to best historical analysis, had no concept of private ownership of land. The Lenape had no written language, but many New York place names are derived phonetically from the original Lenape words, including Raritan Bay between Staten Island and New Jersey, Rockaway in Queens, and Canarsie in Brooklyn. *Manhattan* is an interpretation of a word in the Munsee dialect meaning manna-hatta or 'hilly island.' In addition to water travel, the Lenape moved through the region on an extensive system of trails, many of which would later become major roads and thoroughfares of the city.

The Lenape engaged a network of trade among themselves and with other tribes in northeastern North America through a system of barter. The principal medium of barter was wampum, which largely consisted of ornamented hand-made belts of crafted purple and white mollusk shells. The particular species required for wampum was found exclusively in the areas around Long Island Sound, in areas controlled by the Pequots. Archaeological evidence of wampum manufactured in the New York area has been found throughout the Northeast and Great Lakes area, indicating an extensive trading network that flourished among the Lenape

and other Native ethnic groups such as the Iroquois, who at times inhabited the area of present-day western New York State. In effect, New York City was a financial center even before the arrival of the Europeans.

Source: Wikipedia

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### **Navigating the Lenape Trails**

In the spring of 1626, according to historical accounts, Peter Minuit, the director general of New Netherland, purchased the island of Manhattan from the Lenape Indians in exchange for beads, cloth, and trinkets said to be worth \$24. This legendary purchase resulted in New Amsterdam, which later became New York City.

At the time of the Dutch arrival, around 15,000 Lenape lived in the area now known as New York City. After the Dutch came to Manhattan, many Lenape moved into the area that is now Pennsylvania and Delaware. Many of those who remained in the New York City area were killed by smallpox.

There are no modern Lenape communities within New York City, but the Lenape have left their legacy in the city's streets. The old Lenape pathways on Manhattan island eventually evolved into modern streets.

New York City's "Great White Way," Broadway, used to be the Mohican Trail. Greenwich Village was a Lenape village on the banks of Manetta Creek; sacred council fires were held at Bowling Green. Franklin Square and Cherry Street were the site of vast Lenape cherry orchards.

On Saturday July 26, the South Street Seaport Museum is hosting a tour of the Lenape trails on Manhattan's Lower East Side and the South Street Seaport district.

Focusing on the trails, former cherry orchards and the ancient canoe crossings of the Lenape people of the Lower East Side, the tour will be given by Evan T.

Pritchard, author of *No Word for Time: The Way of the Algonquin People*, and a descendant of the Micmac people (part of the Algonquin Nations).

The Lenape Trails of the Lower East Side tour departs from the Melville Gallery at 213 Water Street, off Fulton Street in lower Manhattan. The tour, which lasts from 1 p.m. to 3 p.m., will cost \$5 and is free to South Street Sea Port Museum members. For more information, visit [www.southstseaport.org](http://www.southstseaport.org).

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## NYC's First Apartment Dwellers: The Lenape Indians

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About the only thing that most of us have heard about the Native Americans who inhabited the New York City area was that they sold Manhattan to the Dutch for \$24. Let's talk a bit about the fascinating people who lived in the area prior to European settlement.

Lenape means "men" or "people" in Munsee, the dialect spoken by the first New Yorkers, who called the area Lenapehoking, or "Place where the Lenape live." They were Algonquins, not Iroquois, as some of us were taught in grammar school. The Iroquois were further upstate, and they and the Lenape frequently fought. Estimates are that, at the time of the Dutch settlers' arrival, approximately 15,000 Indians lived in the area which we know call New York City, with another 30 to 50,000 residing in the larger area from Eastern Connecticut to Central New Jersey. They lived in small, loosely-formed groups based upon kinship, and did not form tribes in the way usually portrayed by Hollywood. Each group, headed by a sachem, typically occupied a series of campsites, to which they moved depending upon the seasons. During fishing season, for example, a group would be at its waterside site, where they would stay until autumn, when they would move further inland to harvest their crops.

The Lenape diet was rich and varied. They hunted deer, wild turkey and other game, and also harvested the abundant seafood in the harbor. When the Europeans arrived, they would write home about foot-long oysters and other marvelous shellfish which the Indians enjoyed. As they developed skill in agriculture, they began to grow corn, beans, squash, sunflowers and perhaps also tobacco. Their mobile lifestyle precluded making elaborate dwellings, or fashioning heavy tools. For shelter they relied upon longhouses, which were constructed by bending the trunks taken from small trees to create a series of arches, which served as the frame. Covered with bark, a longhouse would sometimes hold twelve families, making these structures the first New York apartment houses.

Although Lenape women enjoyed a fair amount of privileges, sex roles in their society were fairly rigid. The men did hunting and fishing, while the women tilled the fields and also did much of the construction. Families belonged to clans, each of which traced itself to a common female ancestor. When two or more clans came together they formed a phantry, which typically took for itself an animal name, such as Wolf. In terms of lineage, a child was considered a member of its mother's phantry.

The various campsites and planting fields which the Lenape used were linked by an extensive network of trails, many of which went on to become colonial roads and subsequently, modern streets. Kings Highway, Flatbush Avenue, Jamaica Avenue and Amboy Road all follow Lenape trails. When I research my walking tours I always look for streets which do not follow the modern grid pattern. Frequently I find that these thoroughfares followed old trails.

Unfortunately, there are no contemporary Lenape communities within New York City. However, many place names in and around town come from the names of the Lenape groups which settled there: Canarsie, Gowanus, Rockaway, Masapequa, Hackansack, Merrick, Raritan, etc.

Source: Edwin G. Burrows and Mike Wallace, GOTHAM, NY, Oxford University Press, 1999, pp. 5-13.

<http://www.nyc-architecture.com/MID/MID-Indians.htm>