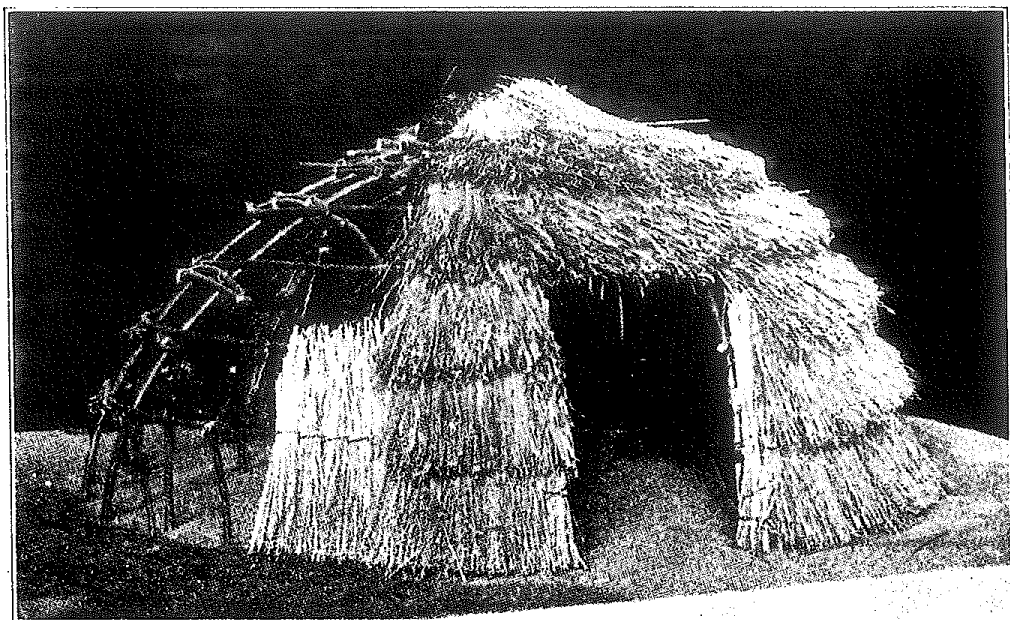


DENVER ART MUSEUM

1300 LOGAN STREET, DENVER, COLORADO

DEPARTMENT OF INDIAN ART

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MODEL OF A SHINNECOCK HOUSE
(American Museum of Natural History)

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LONG ISLAND INDIAN CULTURE

THE LONG ISLAND INDIANS were divided into thirteen tribes or bands, all belonging to the Algonkin linguistic stock. The bands were named as follows: Canarsie, Corchaug, Manhasset, Massapequa, Matinecock, Merrick, Montauk, Nesaquake, Patchogue or Poosepatuck, Rockaway, Secatogue, Setauket, and Shinnecock. All the Indians on the island were sometimes called by the general term Metoac or Matouack.

CULTURAL GROUPS. The Indians living on the eastern two-thirds of the island were related culturally and linguistically to the tribes of southern New England, such as the Pequot, Mohegan and Narragansett—see the map in leaflet 27-28. The bands on the remainder of the island were similar to the Delaware or Lenape Indians who held the New Jersey shore of New York Bay.

RECONSTRUCTION OF CULTURE is possible from information found in the writings of early Dutch and English explorers in which descriptions of the Staten Island and western Long Island Indians may be found. Other information is found in early accounts of the southern New England tribes, who were closely related to the Long Island peoples. Excavation of old village sites gives much light on many habits and crafts of these long vanished tribes. Finally some facts have been gleaned from the few survivors. This paper can only give a broad outline of known or highly probable facts, omitting many variations.

TRIBAL ORGANIZATION. Each tribe was under the leadership of a chief. The office was hereditary. If the male line failed a woman might hold the position. Matters pertaining to tribal policy and conduct were discussed at councils summoned by the chief, who ordered various persons to express their opinion of the business in hand. With the exception of the Canarsie and Rockaway, and possibly their immediate neighbors, the tribes were banded together in a confederacy under the leadership of the Montauk chief. This person was considered to be the ruler of the island, all other chiefs except those noted being his subordinates.

VILLAGES. The people lived in more or less permanent settlements generally located on or near the sea or on waterways leading to it. High, easily defended ground was favored. Excavations of old sites show that the dwellings were placed fairly close together, though without any regular arrangement. Often the villages were fortified, all or part of the houses being enclosed in a log stockade, made of upright poles planted close together in the ground. Each tribe had one or more of these strong places to which it could go in time of trouble. Villages were moved according to the kind of food most available in any one season, there being sites favorable for hunting, fishing and farming.

DWELLINGS. Except on the west end, where a house like that of the Iroquois Long House was also found, the people seem to have lived in domed wigwams. Poles were set about a circle from 10 to 20 feet in diameter and were bent and tied into intersecting arches. Several courses of horizontal poles were tied to the outside of this dome. The frame was covered with a grass thatch laid in courses beginning at the ground and tied to the frame. A smokehole with edges daubed with clay was left at the top. Thatching was also done with slabs of bark. An opening, closed with a skin, was left in one side for a door. A bench ran around the wall inside the room. In the larger houses partitions were sometimes built of wattling and thatch. The fireplace was in the middle of the floor. At the west end early visitors found a long narrow house of bark, about 60 by 15 feet, in which several families lived, each group having its own fire and section of the dwelling. Small domed sweat lodges were used.

CLOTHING. For men the essential garment was the breechcloth of skin and later of cloth, and for women a short skirt of the same materials. At the discovery both sexes wore skin robes and fur garments of several sorts. Turkey feather robes were worn. But after trading began cloth supplanted the aboriginal materials to a considerable extent. Moccasins and leggings were made of skin. All garments were decorated with fringes and beads, either of shell or glass. The men removed all their hair except for a central roach, while the women's hair was worn long and loose. Before the discovery the men seem to have trimmed their hair by singeing with hot stones. Deer hair roaches and strings of wampum were worn on the head. For decoration many beads were worn and much paint applied to the face, body and hair.

FOOD. Fish of many kinds, oysters and clams, crabs and other shell fish constituted the larger part of their diet. Though dead whales washed ashore were used, it is not known whether such large creatures were caught in the earliest times, as was done later. Fish were caught with nets and hooks. Meat came from deer, rabbit, raccoon, muskrat, beaver and perhaps wild cat and wolf. Wild turkey and other game birds were eaten, as were tortoises. Corn was cultivated and very probably beans and squash also. Various kinds of roots, berries and nuts were other kinds of vegetable food. Much foodstuff was dried for winter use. Food and other things were stored in pits in the earth.

COOKING was certainly done by boiling in pottery or soapstone vessels. Shellfish seem to have been cooked by steaming in pits. Corn was ground in wood or stone mortars and made into bread. Bowls, ladles and spoons of wood or tortoise shell were used for serving the meals.

TRANSPORTATION. There was much travel by water. The canoes were of two kinds, log dug-outs and bark—not birch bark, however. The dug-outs were made by burning and scraping away the interior of large oak or whitewood logs. They were as long as 40 feet, narrow and with sloping ends. They were propelled with wooden paddles. There seems to be no available information about the bark canoes except that they were small and fast. Land travel was on foot, burdens being carried in baskets supported by straps.

POTTERY. The clay was tempered with ground-up shell and then molded into vessels by the coiling method. The coils were smoothed out with small stones and bits of clam shell. Before baking the ware was decorated with simple patterns of dots and lines. These were applied by cutting with a sharp point, pressing with a stick or paddle wrapped with cord, pressing the round end of a stick against the clay and by drawing the edge of a scallop shell over the surface, thus producing from two to six parallel grooves. The latter method seems to have been restricted to the east end of the island. The cook pot was the common shape. It was somewhat egg-shaped, with a pointed base and slightly expanded mouth. At the west of the island, where Iroquois influence was felt, some pots showed the heavy neck rim characteristic of that race. The pots held from a few pints to several gallons.

BASKETS. During the last century certainly and perhaps earlier the Shinnecock Indians made baskets of oak and maple splints. Tall shapes were used for carrying and shallow ones for winnowing. Baskets of various kinds are described for the closely related Indians of Connecticut, so it is probable that the old Long Island peoples did this work.

STONWORK. Stone of several varieties was chipped into arrow-heads, spear points, knives, drills and scrapers. White quartz was much

used in the eastern part of the island, where it was made into a triangular, stemless arrow-head peculiar to the neighborhood. Cutting and hammering were done with stone axes, both grooved and ungrooved—the latter form is called a celt—adzes and hammerstones. The latter are round flat stones with depressions pecked in the flat sides. Nothing but small articles could be cut with stone tools alone. If anything large was to be worked charring by fire became necessary. Food was ground in stone mortars with long stone pestles. Soapstone vessels were used but not made, being imported from Connecticut.

TEXTILES. Only a few charred bits of textile have been found. The imprint of woven cords on pottery is another indication that the art was practiced. Closely related tribes are known to have made bags, burden straps, belts, etc. All this work was in variations of the twined technic, that is having interwoven warp and weft.

MATS of reeds were made by the surviving Shinnecock and by many tribes of similar culture. Hence it is safe to suppose that the practice was followed by all the New England tribes.

BONE AND ANTLER. The bones of deer and less often of birds and small animals were made into awls for use in sewing skins, making baskets and bark vessels and perhaps for forks. Sections of deer rib were made into thin flat needles with a central eye for mat making. Some bone arrow-heads were made. Antler was made into arrow-heads, flint chippers, harpoons and fish hooks. Beaver teeth were used in wood carving. Deer leg bones were split to make draw shaves used in removing the hair from skins. Flat bits of bones were carved for pottery stamps.

SHELL was ground up for pottery temper. Large bits were made into pendants, scrapers, pottery smoothers and stamps. But little shell wampum was made before the discovery, but in later years Long Island produced great quantities of shell beads. For further information about wampum see leaflet 31.

METAL. A few bits of copper have been found, which must have been brought east from the Great Lakes region.

SMOKING. Tobacco or some substitute was smoked in clay and stone pipes of both the straight and elbow types. The clay pipes were often quite elaborately decorated with incised designs.

CUSTOMS. According to the early Dutch historians marriage was a simple affair of sale to the highest bidder. Divorce was easy. Polygamy was practiced by the wealthy men. The dead were buried along with their possessions for use in the after world to the west. Mourners painted the face black and visited the grave daily until the paint had worn off. Thereafter the visits were annual. The name of the dead was not mentioned. If this name was also the name of some object in common use a new word was invented for that object. Football and cards are mentioned as favorite amusements. Drinking was common and excessive after the discovery. The people are described as naive and generous but proud and untrustworthy, though the latter characterization should not be taken too seriously because of its source, the early alien invader. The men occupied themselves with war and the chase, except that when old they worked at various crafts. The women were eternally busy with household and family duties and with producing many sorts of handwork.

Compiled from the following sources by F. H. Douglas:

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