

COHANZICK

The Nanticoke Lenni-Lenape Tribal Grounds

Reclaiming What Was “Taken Out”

There was a time when our tribal ancestors called all of the land from southern New Jersey and the Delaware River and Bay down through the Delmarva Peninsula to the Chesapeake Bay, “Ours.” Since the first European settlers arrived on our shores in the 16th century, what had been “ours” slowly became “ours no more.” Yet, while many left, our ancestors stayed or returned to watch over the land (and one day reclaim it) and honor our ancient ways. On June 21st, 1995, on Westcott Station Road in Fairton, New Jersey, our tribal elders, leaders, and citizens fulfilled the charge that had been passed to them; 28 acres of the land was reclaimed and set aside as “sacred.” Once again, we called this portion of our homeland, “ours.” On May 19th, 2007, we gathered to dedicate a new tribal meeting house on “our land,” thanking the Creator for the sacrifices and perseverance of those who have gone before us. We named our land, “Cohanzick – The Nanticoke Lenni-Lenape Tribal Grounds.

There are many historical references to the "Cohanzick Indians" and the Indians of "Cohansey Bridge," which was later named "Bridgeton." These "Cohansey Indians" are among the ancestors of the Nanticoke and Lenape families which have remained in the area of their ancient homeland and have continued the tribal community from that era to the present day.

The area called "Cohanzick" (with various spellings, including "Gohansik" and "Kohansik") is documented as one of several "hubs" of American Indian activity, incorporating the various tribal villages throughout southern New Jersey along the Delaware Bay, throughout the period of early European contact. The name came to be associated with the creek, and the area around it, memorializing a reference made by the Lenape Chiefs who signed the original land grant, allowing European settlement at the end of the 17th century. History records that Mahoppony, Allaways, Necomis and his mother Necosshehesco, Myhoppony, Shuccotery, Mahawskcy, Mohut, Newsego, Chechenaham, Torucho, and Shac anum appear to have called the area, or at least a portion of it, "at the long land" (variously spelled as "Gunahackink," "Canahockink," and "Conahockink") while also referring to a chief who had lived on its south side. Another similar, but lesser known, Lenape reference to the area from that period is "at the spread-out land" (variously spelled as "Schipahackink" or "Sepahacking").

Interestingly, "Cohanzick" never appears as a signer of any treaty or land grant. In Lenape, "Cohanzick," later mispronounced as "Cohansey," actually means "that which is taken out." While popular tradition holds that "Cohanzick" was the name of the honored chief of the area mentioned by the deed signers, it is possible that this is actually a reference to the land that was "taken out" of Gunahackink, by the land grant. The actual name of the chief referred to by the deed signers may be lost to history. The one history remembers as "Chief Cohansey" was a well remembered past "Chief of the Long Land" by the Lenape leaders that signed part of that land away, quite possibly without them actually sharing his real name.

The land that was "taken out" is being reclaimed in our generation. May it be preserved for many generations yet to come!