

The Town of Enfield New York Christian Hill to Enfield Falls was edited by Members of the Enfield Historical Society and Sue Thompson, Enfield Town Historian. 2002.

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CHAPTER 3 - Prehistory and Resettlement History By Ellie Hobbie

With one exception, there is little evidence of pre-settlement occupation of the area now marked off as Enfield.

Since the end of the last glacial period is just to the south of Enfield, this area would have been re-occupied by plant and animal life soon after the end of the most recent glacial period. Whether there were any humans around to take advantage of this replenishment would be hard to determine. For centuries, any human presence in the Northeast would have been wandering bands following animal herds and the seasonal ripening of foods they could gather. The only remains they would have left behind would be their campfires, bones, and scattered stone tools. Around 400 years ago, the climate became more moderate, more similar to what it is now, and these bands could settle down more and depend less on the roaming of the animals they hunted. It is believed that varied cultures developed at this time, suited to the geographic area each group of people lived in, such as river valleys or lakeshores.¹

About two thousand years ago, there is evidence of the people who lived in what is now southern New York State having established trade networks with south and mid-west areas. They were making and decorating their own pottery and building burial mounds for members of their groups with high social status. They had more permanent settlements in several locations, occupied in the different seasons.²

A thousand years ago, agriculture appears in this region, with corn, beans, and squash being the main crops. This skill allowed villages to develop. Rather than the entire society moving to where the animals were to hunt or fish, only small groups would go, while the rest stayed in one place to cultivate and gather. Being more sedentary led to territoriality and the need to defend one's space. Wooden palisades were built around villages, which were located in defensible positions, and eventually groups with similar interests joined to form tribes.³ Around the 15th century the tribes in New York State area united into what is called the League of the Iroquois, or as they called themselves, the Haudenosaunee, the People of the Longhouse.

The ethnology of the Iroquois has been well documented and a number of sites excavated.⁴ In general, villages were occupied for about 30 years before resources especially wood, were depleted enough to have to move on to a new site that had been prepared. Iroquois women were the agriculturists, while the men hunted, fished, and gathered some seasonal food. Villages were located near a water source and preferably in a defensible site. The Enfield area lies at the southern edge of the Iroquois influence, near the border of the Cayuga territory with that of the Seneca to the west.

Having said all this, it is necessary to say that there is very little evidence of any occupation or use of the six square miles that is now Enfield for the vast majority of the time prior to European settlement. The archaeological work that yielded the time sequence above was done mostly in the Susquehanna and Chenango valleys to the southeast and Chemung and Schuyler counties to our west.⁵ Inquiries made of farmers in most areas of the township yield that few have found artifacts in their fields as they plowed, a dependable way of tracing occupation sites. The New York State Parks Service reports no evidence on the property under their control. Their spokesman said that if the gorge or other places were used for religious purposes, the Iroquois understandably wouldn't talk about it.⁶ Collectors say their collections come from other parts of the county.⁷

Here and there are reports of late Iroquois traces. A resident in the northeast corner of the township says that a friend, who is a Seneca, saw on his land a large oak tree with a stone at its base. This sort of tree and stone combination could have been what they called a Council Tree where meetings were held. Whoever had his foot on the stone would have "had the floor".⁸ At the lower end of the Enfield Glen, just touching Enfield township, was the "Pony Hollow Trail" which ran from the Inlet in Ithaca to the

area where Newfield Village is now.⁹ There was another trail, which ran along the southern edge of town from the Town of Catherine to Ithaca.¹⁰

The notable exception to all this lack of evidence, as noted at the beginning of this chapter, is a village site in the northwest of Enfield bordering Schuyler County. The site, first recorded in the 1930's and marked by a state historical plaque, has been excavated recently by a team of archaeologists from several colleges and universities. Their findings show that it is an Iroquois village dating from the 16th century. They have uncovered the remains of a few buildings, cooking areas, and many pottery fragments and stone tools. There is also a major waste disposal area, or midden, off to the north of the site. It lies on a bluff above a creek in the drainage area for Taughannock Creek. The professor in charge of the excavation believes that the village was abandoned after about 20 years and after this the area would once again have been virtually empty.¹¹

There are occupation sites to the south and north within the same drainage area that may be the villages that precede and succeed this one, but be would difficult to prove, and they lie outside the Enfield area.¹²

The last known village in the region was Coreorgonel, located just off Seven Mile Drive about a mile from Enfield's eastern edge. This village was still inhabited when General Sullivan's troops came through in 1779 on an eradication campaign to drive the Iroquois and their allies from Western New York. All local inhabitants fled from here to southern Canada. There were sightings of wandering bands of Indians in the early settlement period, but they were losing their attempts to hang on to their lands through treaty and soon withdrew from this area. About the last mention is from a diary in the early nineteenth century, which tells of an Indian running down an animal.¹³ With this memory we leave them.