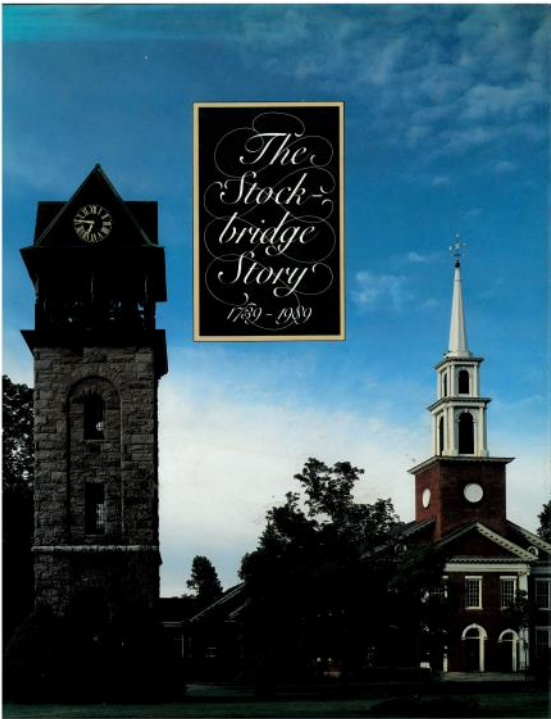


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## *Remembrance of Things Past*

### HISTORY OF STOCKBRIDGE

*Chairman*

GERARD CHAPMAN

**The Hill and the Plain**

GERARD CHAPMAN

**Glendale**

HELEN E. BEEBE

**Interlaken**

FRIEDA HEATH BELL

## History of Stockbridge

Although Stockbridge was the second town in Berkshire County to be incorporated (Sheffield being the first, in 1733), it enjoys the distinction of being unique in its origin.

Most towns, including Sheffield, were settled by white men from without the county who were intent on establishing themselves as farmers on virgin land purchased from, and displacing, the Indians who had preceded them; but Stockbridge began as a mission, the purpose of which was to Christianize those Native Americans and ensure that their land would be theirs forever.

That it didn't work out quite that way was no fault of the missionary but must be laid to the insatiable hunger for land coupled with man's avarice.

Initially the people who settled the town established themselves around the church, always a locus for people in a new land, and so the mission church was responsible for the concentration of population which became the village of Stockbridge.

As later arrivals spread into the countryside, they felt the natural tendency to form neighborhoods, and in time smaller centers of population became the villages we know as Interlaken and Glendale.

Other less well-defined attributes of Stockbridge, such as the natural beauty of the countryside, including a large lake, drew a type of resident that made the town a mecca for men and women of cultural distinction, who shaped its character.

The first chapter of the book commemorating what might be called the Quadrimilennial of Stockbridge town sets the scene for the elucidation of its multifaceted complexity in the modern world of the late twentieth century.

G.C.

### THE HILL AND THE PLAIN

When the first Englishmen left Westfield about 1725 to cross the Hoosac Range and settle in the intervale bounded on the west by the Taconic Range, they found about fifty families of Housatonic, or River, Indians of the Mahican tribe, a branch of the Algonquians.

These Native Americans had come from the Hudson Valley and were remnants of a once-proud nation of about 4,000 persons living on the west bank of the Hudson River. Their monopolization of trade with the Dutch, who first ascended the river in 1609, alienated them from the Mohawks, who about 1680 drove them across the river to the east bank. There they competed for land with the Dutch and, decimated by war and disease, in the early 1700s crossed the Taconics to settle in their former hunting grounds.

Konkapot was their sachem and he, with twenty others of the tribe, went to Westfield, and on April 25, 1724, for £460, three barrels of cider, and thirty quarts of rum, deeded to the whites land along the Housatonic River extending from the Connecticut line northward to about Rattlesnake Mountain in what is now Stockbridge, but reserving a narrow strip called Skatekook running west to the New York line. The settlers' land was divided into two townships, each seven miles square. The lower one became Sheffield and was settled in 1725, and much of the upper one became Great Barrington.

As increasingly the English settled in the townships, Konkapot saw the handwriting on the wall. He observed: "Since my remembrance, there were ten Indians where there is now one. But the Christians greatly increase and multiply, and spread over the land; let us, therefore, leave our former courses and become Christians." The sub-chief, Umpachene, was not so sure about embracing Christianity, but did accompany Konkapot to Springfield in May 1734 to receive military ranks for having stood by the English in the ongoing French and Indian Wars (1689-1763). At that time they also consulted with ministers of the established church—Puritan/Congregational—regarding the formation of a mission to the Indians along the Housatonic River.

Subsequently, two ministers, the Reverend Nehemiah Bull and the Reverend Stephen Williams, came on July 8 to Umpachene's Great Wigwam at Skatekook to lay their plan for a mission before all the Indians: the four families at Skatekook and the four or five families who came with Konkapot from the Great Meadow, or Wnahtukook, in a loop of the Housatonic River in what is now Stockbridge. For four days the Indians pondered the matter before deciding to receive a missionary.

In October, John Sergeant accompanied Bull to "Housatonnuk" for his first meeting with the Indians on that western frontier of the Province of Massachusetts. The two bands again assembled and, through interpreter Ebenezer Poopoonuck, Sergeant addressed the Indians.

It was agreed that the two bands would dwell together over the winter at a point about midway between Skatekook and Wnahtukook, on the plain below Monument Mountain. There Sergeant established a school accommodating more than twenty children. He was cognizant of the tragedy of the Mahicans, whose numbers had so diminished, and had a burning desire to better their conditions while bringing them into a state of grace with his God.

John Sergeant, born in Newark, New Jersey, in 1710, had been a tutor at Yale while preparing for the ministry. After establishing the school on the plain, he returned to New Haven in December to resume his studies, leaving Timothy Woodbridge (1709-1774) in charge. Sergeant took with him the two sons of Konkapot and Umpachene to teach him their language while they learned English.

He returned to Housatonnuk in July 1735 and on August 31, at a treaty conference in Deerfield, was ordained to the ministry in the presence of Mohawks, the British governor Jonathan Belcher, other dignitaries and the entire body of Housatonic Indians. Now the Reverend John Sergeant, he returned to the mission on October 26, taking charge of it and retaining Woodbridge as teacher.

Ministering to and teaching two groups of Indians separated by some fifteen miles of dense wilderness and the steep slope of Monument Mountain taxed the physical resources of the two men. To alleviate the situation, the colonial authorities arranged during the winter to consolidate the divided tribe on its land above the mountain at Wnahtukook, which was to be reserved for the Indians forever. Except for a sixtieth part each to Sergeant and Woodbridge, and for each of four white families to be settled there to provide role models of civilized English life, the land was to be held in common by the tribe in its traditional manner. To this "Indian Town," as it was called, Umpachene led his band in May 1736, his land Skatekook adjacent to Sheffield having been ceded to the whites in exchange for an equivalent amount above the mountain. The merged bands comprised about fifty persons.

The colonial legislature appropriated money for a meeting house and school, and the Indians cleared more land for crops. It was not until June 1737 that the first two English families arrived, headed by Ephraim Williams of Newton and his brother-in-law Josiah Jones of Weston. A year later Joseph Woodbridge of West Springfield—brother of Timothy—and Ephraim Brown of Watertown came to complete the four families recruited to live in Indian Town. Although Timothy Woodbridge with his bride, and Sergeant with them, lived in a house among the Indians on the plain, the white settlers built their homes on the hill (now Prospect Hill) aloof from the Indians.

Indian Town prospered. Using the methods demonstrated by the English, the Indians harvested more than three times their usual crops. Contributions flowed into the settlement from Governor Belcher and interested groups and persons in London. To enhance the success of the missionary enterprise, Indian Town was chartered in 1737 and, it was incorporated on June 22, 1739 (old style; new calendar July 3, 1739), as the town of Stockbridge, named for the town in Hampshire County, England; its inhabitants were thereafter known as Stockbridge Indians.

With this change in its legal status—and despite the aloofness of the whites on the hill—Sergeant's dream of the mingling of the races in brotherhood appeared to have been achieved when the elective offices of the new town were shared: Williams was moderator; Konkapot and Umpachene were selectmen; Woodbridge, the town clerk; and Jones, the constable.

John Sergeant may well be considered the father of Stockbridge.



He was a dedicated man who, on a meager salary of one hundred pounds a year, dwelt among the Indians and learned their language. They sensed his devotion to them and were pleased when he married Abigail, daughter of Ephraim Williams. Although she had a thinly veiled contempt for the Indians, she did help her husband and believed that girls as well as boys should be educated.

But her father unscrupulously took land from the Indians and increasingly the whites circumvented the provision of the town's charter that "guaranteed to the Indians forever" their land. When their protector, Sergeant, died on July 27, 1749, it was a calamity for the mission.

During the ensuing two years the situation continued to deteriorate. On August 8, 1751, the Reverend Jonathan Edwards, having been dismissed from his parish in Northampton, assumed the leadership of the mission. He worked hard, and the Indians grew to like him; but he was unable to combat Williams' pernicious control of the church and the school.

At length, learning of the situation in Stockbridge, the authorities in Boston appointed General Joseph Dwight their agent, and he took up residence in Stockbridge. A man of accomplishment, he could have arrested the deterioration of the mission; but when he and Abigail Sergeant were married, he fell under the influence of her father, Ephraim Williams. He became a party to the sale of liquor to the Indians, and mismanagement was rampant. The Indians became so dispirited that the school "mysteriously" burned down. Providentially, Dwight was reassigned to military duty elsewhere.

After Jonathan Edwards resigned in 1757 to become president of Princeton University, the Reverend Stephen West succeeded him two



*Rev. Dr. Stephen West, Pastor of Congregational Church (Courtesy of Stockbridge Library Association)*



## HISTORY OF STOCKBRIDGE

years later. But West's interests lay with the whites. He neglected the Indians, and in 1765 the legislature rescinded the prohibition against the Indians' sale of their land.

In 1775, West relinquished the Indian component of his pastorate to the young Reverend John Sergeant, son of the founding missionary, and although they now had their own church, the Indians were segregated and removed from the mainstream of Stockbridge life. They held town office for the last time in 1779.

The end of the elder Sergeant's "noble experiment" came in 1785 when, having sunk to a largely landless, improverished minority in Stockbridge, the Indians were led by the younger Sergeant to the Oneida tribe's reservation in Oneida County, New York, where they named their allotted land New Stockbridge. There they remained until 1833, when the relentless pressure of the westward migration of white settlers again displaced them. They retreated to Green Bay, Wisconsin, where they and the Oneidas merged with the Munsees. Still yielding to the inexorable tide of European migration across the continent, the Indians moved once again, in 1850, to a reservation near Shawano, Wisconsin, where their descendants live today.

Those Native Americans, the first residents of Stockbridge, are remembered here today by the Mission House on West Main Street and by the monument overlooking the golf course, erected to commemorate the "Friends of our Fathers." Several of them are buried in a corner of the cemetery.

