

SCOTCH PLAINS

No. 591

STORIES of New Jersey

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1060 Broad Street, Newark, New Jersey

END OF THE "OLD PEOPLE"

The Indians who occupied New Jersey were the Lenapes, a tribe of the Delaware Nation. Their name is translated as "Old People" or "Original People." They were a peaceful people, numbering, at the time of the coming of the white man, between 5,000 and 7,000.

As the pioneer settlements spread from the banks of the Hudson the "Old People" retreated with their women and children, bartering great stretches of land for trinkets, rum, fire arms and gunpowder, coats and blankets. Some practically sold themselves in slavery in order to secure food and shelter.

By 1756 the Indians were in such a pitiable state that the Colonial Legislature decided to make some move to help them and at the same time secure clear title to the land for the whites.

At a conference at Burlington, August 9, 1758, an Indian delegation representing the Lenapes presented a written request to the Provincial Assembly for a section of land to be used as a permanent home for themselves. They suggested Evesham Township as a desirable location.

There were large stretches of wild woodland in which to hunt, plenty of fertile territory, with the seashore close at hand to supply their much-loved shell food. In exchange for this concession they offered the white man a formal release of all Indian land claims.

On August 12, 1758, just three days after presentation of the request, the Legislature appropriated £1,600 for the purchase of a tract of about 3,000 acres at a place called Edge Pillock. The land was to be held in trust forever for the use of the Indians. The property was given to the Lenapes free of all taxes, and, as an added sign of good will, the government built several comfortable dwellings and a large log meeting house for them.

There was one difficulty in the way, however. It was necessary for the English to gain the friendship of the tribes across the Pennsylvania border, for there was danger of their swooping into New Jersey and attempting to drive out the whites. The Lenapes, a branch of the Delawares, might make any treaty they wished but it would not be recognized by the King of the Delawares, Teedyescung. The Lenapes were considered "women," because their men entered into peace councils. The warrior tribes in making peace between themselves were too proud to meet their enemies in council and left this task to the squaws.