

Indian Stories From Connecticut

The Podunk Tribe of East Windsor

The Podunk tribe of Indians resided at or near the mouth of Podunk River or brook, a small stream entering the Connecticut River at the southwest corner of the town. A part of the same tribe, or some tribe that were in alliance with them, appear to have resided near the mouth of the Scantic River. The following traditions respecting the Indians, in this town are preserved: A party of Mohawks visited the tribe who resided at the mouth of the Scantic River, and as one of the Mohawk women was crossing the river on a log, she was pushed off into the stream and drowned. The Mohawks upon this withdrew, determined upon revenge. In the meanwhile the Scantic Indians sent a runner to the Podunk Indians for assistance, and after collecting their forces, a battle took place in which the Mohawks were defeated and fled. They remained in the vicinity however, and whenever they found a straggler from either tribe, they inflicted summary vengeance. As one of the settlers by the name of Bissell was at work at hay in the meadow, a Scantic Indian came running towards him and implored his protection. He directed him to lie down, and proceeded to place a cock of hay on top of him, and he was in this manner effectually concealed. This was no sooner done than two Mohawks came running furiously in pursuit. They wished to know of Mr. Bissell if he had seen the object of their pursuit; he pointed out a particular direction in which he gave them to understand he had seen him run, which they eagerly followed, and by this means the Scantic Indian finally escaped.

The Podunks were a small tribe, and at the time of King Philip's War consisted of between two and three hundred men, who went off to that war and never returned. They had two places of residence; one at the mouth of the Podunk River during the summer, the other, where they resided during the winter was a mile or a mile and a half east from this, over the highland. The path between these two places still retains the name of "King's Path;" (1836) their burying ground, lately discovered, was about half way between. A young Indian and squaw of this tribe having been gathering whortleberries, [blueberries] found that it was so late before they had gathered a sufficient quantity, that they were afraid to cross the meadow after dark, on account of the Mohawks, and accordingly stayed at the house of Mr. Williams. In the morning early, the young Indian woman set out upon her return; soon after a report of a gun was heard by the inhabitants in the vicinity, who immediately turned out to see the cause. They found the young woman weltering in her blood, having been shot by two Mohawks. The Podunks were aroused; they mustered sixteen or eighteen warriors and went in pursuit. After being out several days, they came to a cornfield and began plucking the ears. A party of Mohawks, who it seems were lying in ambuscade, rose upon them, and killed the whole party, with the exception of two who made their escape. This severe blow had the effect of breaking up the Podunks as a distinct tribe; they separated into two parties, one of which joined the Pequots towards New London.

In the south part of the town, where Podunk River crosses the road to Hartford, was an Indian burying ground. A few years since, a number of skeletons were discovered by digging from one to four feet deep. These skeletons were found lying on one side, knees drawn up to the breast, arms folded, with their heads to the south. A covering of bark seems to have been laid over them, with some few remains of blankets; in one

instance a small brass kettle and hatchet were found in good preservation; the remains of a gun barrel and lock, a number of glass bottles, one of which was found nearly half filled with some sort of liquid. These articles were probably obtained from the Dutch, either by present or by trade. There were also found a pair of shears, a pistol, lead pipes, strings of wampum, small brass rings, glass beads, and a female skeleton with a brass comb; the hair was in a state of preservation wherever it came in contact with the comb. After the Podunks had removed from these parts, in one instance they were known to have brought a dead child from towards Norwich and interred it in this burying place.

At Bissell's Ferry, near the mouth of the Scantic River, is a well that is supposed to have been made before any English settlements were attempted in Connecticut. The lower part of the well is walled by stones hewn in a circular manner, and the manner in which they are laid together is believed to be entirely different from that in which any Englishman would lay them – there remains no traditions respecting the time, or the persons by whom this well was constructed.

Indian Burials in East Haven

“The great burying place of the Indian tribes in this town and vicinity, is on the north end of the hill on which the fort stands, which, anciently, in allusion to this place, was called *Grave Hill*. Some of the graves have been leveled by the plow, but many of them are yet visible. In the year 1822, I examined three of these graves. At the depth of about three feet and a half the sandstone appears, on which the bodies are laid, without any appearance of a wrapper or enclosure. They all lay in the direction of southwest and northeast – the head towards the west. Of two of them, the arms lay by the side; the other had the arms across the body, after the manner of the white people. The large bones and teeth were in a sound state. The thighbones of one measured 19 inches in length, the leg bone 18, and the arm from the elbow to the shoulder 13. By measuring the skeleton as it lay, it was concluded to be of a man six and a half feet high. No article of any description appeared with the bones. It is said that about fifty or sixty years ago [1760-1770] some of these graves were opened and a number of Indian implements, of the kitchen and of war, were found in them. Few Indians have been buried there within a century past.”

This was taken from *Connecticut Historical Collections, History and Antiquities of Every Connecticut Town* by John Warner Barber, New Haven, 1836