



Timeline of the Mohican Tribal Name

Pre-contact era: **Muh-hea-ken-neew**, according to the written version of the oral history of the Mohican tribe, as published by Electa Jones.¹ In its plural form it means “people of the waters which are never still.”

1614: **Mahikanders**, per Adriaen (Arjan) Block, a Dutch trader.

1788: **Muhhekaneew**, per Jonathan Edwards Jr.² (fluent speaker) Pronounced /məhikanēw/ per Ives Goddard, Ph.D., Senior Linguist, Emeritus of the Smithsonian Institute.³ Note that /ī/ is a protracted vowel like the “ee” sound in the English word “heat.”

1795-1825: **Muh-he-ka-neew** is one the ways Hendrick Aupaumut and other tribal members spelled the tribal name.¹ No spelling versions by a tribal member omit the “h” from any era.

1818: **Muh-he-ka-nuk** was the way Rev. John Sergeant wrote the locative form of the tribal name, literally “at the place of the Mohicans.”

1830: Approximate birthdate of Dennis Turkey who dictated a story which was transcribed by Estes and published by Prince in 1905.⁴ Turkey learned Mahican with /wə/ prefixes and aspirated stops using /h/.

1854: **Muh-he-con-new**, per John Quinney in his Fourth of July speech.⁵ Quinney’s nickname was **Wannaucon**, ‘a dish’ a word incorrectly written as [onākan] [sic] by Chris Harvey. **Wunaḡkan** is the correct rendering of this word.

1857: Approximate birth date of William Dick. At the time of his death in 1933⁶, he was known as the last person known to have been capable of speaking in Mahican, albeit with an unknown level of fluency. The Mahican language during his childhood clearly used /wə/ prefixes and aspiration using /h/.

1893: **Muh-he-ka-ne-ok**, John Davidson. In this year Davidson published his book, *Muh-he-ka-ne-ok A history of the Stockbridge Nation*.⁷ Davidson describes visiting the Stockbridge-Munsee community in Wisconsin in order to obtain information about the Stockbridge Indians. No tribal informant ever informed Davidson of a change in Mohican tribal name. In multiple instances he spelled the Mohican tribal name using a “double hh” providing additional evidence that there should be no glottal stop in the Mahican language version of the Mohican tribal name.

1914: **MΛhiganīu** (Edwin Miller in TM folder2 p11); **MóʷikΛnēu** (Sot Quinney in Michelson (TM) Folder3 p2).⁸ The superscript epsilon, Michelson’s glottal stop symbol, was used whenever aspirated “h” sounds were used in his Munsee transcriptions, providing evidence that the same is true for his Mahican transcriptions.

1937-38: **Mohígonak** recorded by the linguist Morris Swadesh.⁹

1949: **Moxí·kanak, mohíkanak, mǝxí·kanak** according to Webb Miller and Bernice Robinson, and recorded by John P. Harrington.¹⁰

1981: **Muh-he-con-ne-ok** or **Mahikans** Bernice Miller Pigeon and Dorothy “Dot” Davids used this term several times in a short history of the Stockbridge-Munsee tribe of Mohican Indians. This work was done in collaboration with the Rhinelander, Wisconsin school district. The tribal designations cited in bold letters have been quoted from the fourth revision of this history, prepared by the Stockbridge-Munsee Historical Committee in May, 1996.

2023: **Muh-he-con-ne-ok** or **Mohicans** The current version of the *Brief History* posted on the mohican.com website¹¹ continues to use the Mahican language tribal designation but changed the spelling of “Mahikans” to “Mohicans.” No version of this *Brief History*, prepared and reviewed by the very best minds of the tribe mentions a pronunciation change. There is no glottal stop symbol, no curly apostrophe in lieu of the “h,” and no change in the vowel after the “h” which is properly pronounced as /i:/ as in the word “heat.”

Since the tribe is now known as the Stockbridge-Munsee Community or Nation, perhaps this designation should be updated to include the Munsee. **Muh-he-con-ne-ok ndan Mun-see-ok** is one way to write it. Phonetically, Munsee Indians would be /mǝnsi·ak/. Written in a modern orthography, it would be **Mahiikaniiyak wǝk Munsiiyak**.

Conclusion: The Mohican tribal name was faithfully transmitted over the course of more than four hundred years of written historical records despite the presence of a small number of anomalous forms.

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References

- 1) “Stockbridge, past and present, or, Records of an old mission station”: Electa F. Jones: Springfield [Mass.] : *S. Bowles & company*, 1854.
- 2) “Observations on the language of the Muhhekaneew Indians”: Edwards, Jonathan: 1788 (available online at <https://archive.org/details/observationsonla01edwa/page/n11/mode/1up>)
- 3) “Notes on Mahican: Dialects, Sources, Phonemes, Enclitics, and Analogies”: Ives Goddard: *Papers of the 39th Algonquian Conference*, eds. Karl S. Hele & Regna Darnell (London: The University of Western Ontario, 2008), pp. 246-315.

- 4) "A Tale in the Hudson River Indian Language": J. Dyneley Prince: *American Anthropologist, New Series*, Vol. 7, No. 1 (Jan. - Mar., 1905), pp. 74-84 (11 pages) (available online, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/659336>)
- 5) <https://content.wisconsinhistory.org/digital/collection/whc/id/553>
- 6) <http://wisconsinhistory.org/Records/Newspaper/BA747>
- 7) "Muh-he-ka-ne-ok, a history of the Stockbridge nation": Davidson, J. N. (John Nelson): Milwaukee, S. Chapman, 1893. (<https://archive.org/details/muhhekaneokhisto00davi/page/n5/mode/2up>)
- 8) "Truman Michelson Stockbridge notes and texts, with copies by Frank Speck circa 1940s-1950s": NAA MS 2734, folders 1-4: 1914, *National Anthropological Archives, Smithsonian Institution*
- 9) "Mahican Section of the ACLS Collection": Morris Swadesh: *American Council of Learned Societies Committee on Native American Languages, American Philosophical Society*; Mss.497.3.B63c, itemsA1k.1-4
- 10) "Papers of John P. Harrington": NMNH-Harrington_mf6_r10, r11 and r12, *National Museum of Natural History, National Anthropological Archives* (available online at <https://edan.si.edu/>)
- 11) <https://www.mohican.com/brief-history/>