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Our Towns & Schools

The Schaghticoke come home to Dover

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Editor's note: This is the first in a series of columns on the history of the Schaghticoke First Nations which, in partnership with the Town of Dover, is hosting a Unity Gathering in Wingdale with a cultural heritage festival June 4.

"Pummean weeche neentomp"
Walk with me, my friend (Algonquian)

An ancient and important part of Schaghticoke tribal history took place in Dover. But what led the tribe to return this past year?

Part of the answer lies in last June's Stone Church ribbon cutting. The Dutchess Land Conservancy had reached out to me as Town co-historian for background as they planned their new information kiosk. At the same time, the Town of Dover Historical Society was planning an open house leading into the ribbon-cutting event, and wanted to include a display. These needs nudged me to revisit my long held desire to learn more about Eunice Mauwee, the Schaghticoke

"culture keeper," who first brought the Sassacus Legend to local historian Benson Lossing back in the 1800s.

As an introduction to Heritage Days in 2011, I had attempted to involve area high schools researching and studying roots of the Schaghticoke. We scheduled a round table at Tabor-Wing followed by a Stone Church hike for Oct. 30. On that day, we had a freak blizzard and the event was not held. Time marched on with the needs of Heritage Days quickly shifting gears to preparation for the year-long events of 2013. The idea lay dormant, but I never fully let it go. In August of 2014, a query came in from Schaghticoke descendant of Sassacus, Tom Littledeer Weindl, asking what I knew of Gideon Mauwee and his people. What I knew was very limited, but I wrote back anyway. The following month Tom Littledeer came for a visit and hiked to the Stone Church. His visit opened the door. When delving back into this research, he was my first and major resource.

The historical society collection regarding the



WESTON NASH III, SCHAGHTICOKE FIRST NATIONS' VIDEOGRAPHER/COURTESY PHOTO
Aaron Dark Star Johnson, left to right, Alonda Snowbird Powell-Johnson (dan mother), Jessica Cailin Eyley, Jenny Rodriguez, Sachem Robert Hawk Storm Birch (hereditary chief), Logan Birch/Bergin, Remmy Birch/Bergin, Patrick Stands Tall Coane, Donna Little Fawn Coane (tribal council and women's spiritual healer), Brian Ashuelot Hazlewood (tribal council secretary), Ed Wolf-Walker Conley (powwaw/spiritual leader), Tom Littledeer Weindl (sagamore/sub-chief) and Travis Morey stand in front of the Tabor-Wing House sign in the Town of Dover.

Stone Church was very scant. Tom Littledeer helped expand the Schaghticoke and Pequot material by providing genealogies, web family tree links and research papers by Lucianne Lavin, research director at the Institute for American Indian Studies in Washington, Connecticut, who generously loaned us her maps and illustrations. This part of the preparation was without

doubt the most enjoyable for me. Working on the genealogy section, I discovered I shared a common ancestor with the tribe, making me a distant cousin to these people who lived here so many years before me — how thrilling!

Early on the Schaghticoke First Nations members committed to attend; the Dutchess Land Conservancy enthusiastically agreed to feature a Na-

tive-American blessing at the ribbon cutting, an addition that enriched us all. For the Schaghticoke, it served as a meaningful celebration of their reunion and return to a sacred place. Adding their blessing brought both solemn and festive notes to the ceremony, emphasizing the principles of land stewardship in perfect harmony with the site and the event. The social aspect of friendship was

highlighted as we exchanged traditions and cultures — their welcoming all to their native land and the town welcoming them to the event.

Following this event, we have realized many benefits these new friendships and associations bring, both in terms of understanding our common history and for promoting the proper use of our natural resources and open space. It has been a busy year for the tribe, with activities building on the partnership that began last June. The Schaghticoke First Nations participated in Dover Day, adopted a section of Route 22, is planning a youth program and most recently will host a three-day Intertribal Unity Gathering June 3-5, all leading up to the eventual goal of bringing a culture center to Dover. Much of the tribe's history features the surrounding area, making this an appropriate homecoming.

Valerie LaRobardier is a professional genealogist and Town of Dover co-historian. She is a member of the Schaghticoke First Nations tribe and serves as the tribal genealogist.