Indigenous Peoples of the Susquehanna Valley

People arrived in the Susquehanna Valley near the end of the last Ice Age, more than 12,000 years ago. They lived a nomadic lifestyle, hunting and gathering foods. The domestication of plants around 1000 A.D. enabled native peoples to live in villages along the Susquehanna River. They were the area’s first farmers, growing corn, beans, squash, and tobacco. They also developed an extensive network of footpaths and engaged in far-reaching trade.

The arrival of Europeans caused many changes. Around 1575, the fur-trading Susquehannocks took control of this area. By the 1690’s, however, they were dispersed by their enemies and eventually joined with other refugee peoples to form the Conestoga Indians. The Conestogas declined until a group of frontiersmen annihilated the last of them in 1763.

Imprints from these early inhabitants still remain. Archaeologists have unearthed thousands of tools, adornments, and pottery, as well as evidence of large villages along the Susquehanna River.

Most intriguing are the carvings on rocks (petroglyphs) in the Susquehanna River. Years ago, more than 1,000 petroglyphs could be found from Columbia to Conowingo, MD. These carvings included images of birds, animals, and humans. More than 300 petroglyphs still exist on rocks a short distance below Safe Harbor Dam.