

UCLA

American Indian Culture and Research Journal

Title

The Montaukett Indians of Eastern Long Island. By John A. Strong.

Permalink

<https://escholarship.org/uc/item/09d2d9vf>

Journal

American Indian Culture and Research Journal , 26(2)

ISSN

0161-6463

Author

Mullin, Michael J.

Publication Date

2002-03-01

DOI

10.17953

Copyright Information

This work is made available under the terms of a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial License, available at <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/>

attributes a move to combine the administration of hospitals with that of schools to the official desire to keep students on the school rolls even when they were ailing. She classifies these "cottage hospitals" as more cottage than hospital. A refrain repeated throughout the book maintains that the government never accepted responsibility for Indian medical care. Lux makes no attempt to reconcile this with the fact that care, inadequate as it may have been, was available, although she admits its existence. For one example, the medicine-chest clause of Treaty Six was implemented. However, this was counterbalanced by the Indians' lack of faith in white doctors and their medicine; as Lux puts it, "the people simply did not care for the hospital," and were reluctant to avail themselves of its services (p. 115). She sees this as justified, as a comparison of death rates on reserves in 1890 found that the lowest "were among those with no medical attendants" (p. 147). Even as some Western medical practices were accepted, Native healers continued to operate throughout these years. Lux describes Native medicine as functioning on a number of levels, from the physical and emotional to the spiritual, reflecting "a world view that was remarkably well adapted to prairie existence" (p. 82).

The twentieth century saw an upswing in the conditions on reserves, a trend that continues. However, disparities still exist, some of them wide, especially in economic terms. Lux argues that improving the reserves' economies is a prime requirement for better health; "medicine that walks" is a metaphoric reference to the better diets that will result. She points to self-government as the means to achieve this, by placing in the hands of the people the means to control their own affairs.

The years of the disappearance of the buffalo herds and afterwards were years of high drama in the history of the Canadian-prairie west. Fundamental changes in ways of life entailed extreme hardships which were all-too-frequently inadequately dealt with by government. It is remarkable that the Plains Indians, in suffering the brunt of these events, resorted so rarely to violence; only a scattered few joined the Métis when the latter took up arms. In detailing events of those troubled years, Lux adds a dimension to accepted history. Despite her obvious conviction, she does this with an evenness of tone that makes her account bearable. However, it can be said that in her concentration on the negative aspect, she makes short shrift of the fact that there were attempts at relief, particularly from non-government sources; it must be admitted, though, that they fell far short of the need. On a another track, her Western focus leads her astray when she writes that "the precedent for treaty making stretched back to the British Royal Proclamation of 1763" (p. 22). Actually, treaty-making appeared very early after European arrival. The first that the British signed involving Canadian Indians was the Treaty of Portsmouth in 1713. By the time of the western numbered treaties, 123 had already been entered into. Still, this book is a must, as it presents an aspect of the history of the Canadian prairie west that is all too frequently glossed over.

Olive Patricia Dickason
University of Ottawa
University of Alberta

The Montaukett Indians of Eastern Long Island. By John A. Strong. Syracuse:

Syracuse University Press, 2001. 196 pages. \$26.95 cloth.

Perhaps no one is better qualified to write a history of the Montaukett Indians than John A. Strong. For nearly twenty years, his writings on the Algonquian people of Long Island have filled an important void in our understanding of the Northeastern Woodlands. Like the Shinnecocks and Matineocks, the Montauketts history fits neither the southern New England Algonquian experience nor the New York Indian experience under the Dutch, English, and later Americans. Strong gives the reader an overview of the Montaukett experience on Long Island from before European contact until 1997. As his use of "Montaukett" rather than "Montauk" makes clear, the author hopes to separate the Montaukett people from the place Montauk. This is important because one of the book's objectives is to establish the consistency of a Montaukett presence in and around Montauk. This is necessary because the Montauketts are in the process of trying to gain federal recognition.

In writing the Montauketts history, Strong builds upon the earlier works of Marian Fisher Ales and Gaynell Stone. Strong argues that Ales's work, while fundamentally sound, needed methodological updating. Equally important, Ales's work perpetuated a Long Island myth that the Montaukett ceased to exist after a 1910 defeat in the New York Supreme Court. By extending the Montaukett experience into the late twentieth century, Strong undoes this erroneous perception. Gaynell Stone's 1993 monograph provided researchers with tremendous amounts of information on Long Island Indians. It was, however, a compilation only a specialist could love. While relying on the information of Stone's book, Strong attempts to create "a more concise history of the Montauketts," one "that would be more accessible to a larger audience" (p. xiv). He does this in nine chapters and less than 180 pages of text.

The first two chapters explore the Montaukett presence on Long Island, their first land sales to colonial New Englanders, and the emerging Montaukett-colonial relationship. Montaukett leaders such as Wyandant used access to European goods to further their own agendas, unaware of the long-term implications trade posed for their people, economy, and land holdings. The next four chapters detail the historic treaties, transactions, and political machinations that left the Montauketts bereft of their traditional lands and struggling to retain their place on eastern Long Island. For this period, the Montaukett's story fits within our current understanding of Algonquian–New England relations. Chapter seven examines the court cases the Montauketts found themselves involved in after 1897. Using the 1909–1910 case specifically, Strong shows how the Montauketts found themselves fighting to hold on to what little land they still retained rights to, and how the dominant culture decided the Montauketts were not "real" Indians. The final two chapters document how this court case against the Long Island Railroad Company affected the Montauketts and how the decision forced the tribe to undertake its current efforts to secure federal recognition.

Strong's analysis of the Montaukett struggle for federal recognition serves as a cautionary tale to other tribes and as an example of the problems one might encounter in writing contemporary tribal history. Strong tells us that Olivia

Pharaoh (to whom the book is dedicated) and her son Robert, a leader in the Montaukett community, asked him to undertake the current project. In *Nadir and Resurgence, 1940–1990*, we discover that Robert Pharaoh is in a contested leadership fight with Robert Cooper. Both men come from the two leading families within the Montaukett community—the Pharaoh and Fowler families. Both men currently lead particular factions within the Montaukett tribe, and each is pursuing separate recognition efforts. The result is controversy and division at a time when the tribe needs unity and cohesion.

The Pharaoh-Fowler division is a familial rivalry dating back generations and it centers around who ought to lead the tribe (p. 165). The book is unclear about the origins of this division. Strong, however, leaves no doubt of his belief that Robert Pharaoh, who he calls chief at one point, ought to be the leader of the Montauketts. Here we see the difficulty of relying on one specific family for information. Strong emphasizes the Pharaoh claim to tribal leadership throughout the book, while ignoring the Fowler family role in Montaukett history. Cooper's connection to the Fowler family comes through his grandmother, but he does not appear in the analysis until the 1983 episode concerning a threat to Montaukett burial grounds. One wonders how Strong would have written about this episode if the Cooper/Fowler faction had sought him out instead of the Pharaohs. We can wonder this since neither man made a show of his "Indian heritage until the 1980s" (p. 160).

In part, the struggle between Cooper and Pharaoh remind the reader how important intratribal relations are. The Cooper-Pharaoh split ought to be a cautionary tale to all tribal leaders seeking federal recognition. As one federal officer involved in the BAR (Branch of Acknowledgement and Research) process told John Strong, "we prefer that they [the Montaukett] come together, but if they are fighting we will have to accept two different applications" (p. 174). Strong shares this desire.

One weakness in the book is Strong's tendency to raise questions in Montaukett history and then leave them unanswered. Why, for example, did Long Island settlers have "little concern about converting the Algonquian people to Christianity" (p. 63)? Were Lion Gardiner and those who followed him opposed to the work of John Eliot or New England's theocracy, or did they simply find religion unimportant? How does one know that restrictions on Montaukett grazing rights were intended to ensure "the Montaukett population did not grow" (p. 59)? Was it possible the colonists had environmental concerns about overgrazing? One could answer this question by telling the reader whether East Hampton leaders placed similar restrictions on the colonial population too. The questions, however, are not essential to Strong's primary objective. He wants the reader to understand how the Montauketts lost their land and how certain Americans worked to create the illusion of a Montaukett demise on Long Island.

It is this last purpose that makes Strong's book such an interesting read. It gives the work an importance many other tribal histories lack. In telling the Montauketts' story, Strong shows how racial prejudice against African-Americans fed into anti-Indian sentiment on Long Island. The legal system also worked against the Montauketts. For the Montauketts, their tribal identi-

ty disappeared “legally” in a Montaukett court case against Long Island Railroad Company. In 1909, the case reached the New York Supreme Court, but only after the New York legislature inserted an amendment into the Montaukett’s enabling act allowing the trail to proceed, stating the court would determine “the existence of the Montauk Tribe” (p. 127). During the trial, railroad lawyers introduced new criteria for determining who was an Indian. These lawyers argued the Montauketts were no longer Indians since the plaintiffs had not turned their backs on civilized society. Moreover, the lawyers argued the Montauketts had “diluted their ‘Indian blood’” by intermarrying with “alien races” (p. 130). Since the Montauketts did not conform to the stereotypical American view of an Indian and had married other non-Algonquian peoples, the Montaukett ceased to exist legally. The judge in the case, Abel Blackmar, concurred, finding the burden of proof was on those who claimed tribal membership. The Montauketts had ceased to exist as a legal tribal entity.

It was this decision that led Marian Fisher Ales to conclude that the Montauketts ceased to exist as a tribe. It was statements like that which make the Montauketts effort to secure federal recognition so difficult. Nevertheless, Strong’s ability to move the Montauketts experience into the present bodes well for the Montaukett effort to undo the prejudice of the past. In the end, *The Montaukett Indians of Long Island* does give the reader a new appreciation of the Montauketts’ history. Anyone interested in the question of when and how the Montauketts—or any other Indian group—suddenly found themselves no longer “real” Indians will benefit from Strong’s work. It may also serve as a cautionary tale for any Indian entity seeking federal recognition. The Fowler-Pharaoh split shows the problems of factionalism while trying to secure federal recognition. It is not a book one reads hoping to discover new insights or understandings about the historic Algonquian experience. That, however, was not Strong’s intention.

Michael J. Mullin
Augustana College

The Northern Navajo Frontier, 1860–1900: Expansion through Adversity. By Robert S. McPherson. Logan: Utah State University Press, 2001. 144 pages. \$19.95 paper.

The meat of this book is a chronicle of Navajo relations with neighboring Utes, Paiutes, and especially Mormons and other “Anglos” in southeastern Utah during the late nineteenth century. The book was originally published in 1988 by the University of New Mexico Press.

McPherson presents his story as a refutation of the idea, offered by this reviewer and others, that Navajos suffered colonial domination and capitalist exploitation by dominant classes in the United States after the US Army conquered the Navajos and held perhaps half of them captive outside their homeland at Fort Sumner, New Mexico. McPherson claims that exploitation and