



Researching Connecticut's Native and Indigenous Peoples at the Bridgeport History Center

by Meg Rinn
November 2020

Conducting Research on Connecticut's Native and Indigenous Peoples at the Bridgeport History Center

The City of Bridgeport was originally occupied by the Paugussett people, who are now recognized as the Golden Hill Paugussett Indian Nation by the State of Connecticut. Their history and ownership of the land informs both local history and Connecticut's. The Paugussett did not live in isolation either – there are currently five Indian Nations recognized within the state. Only the Mashantucket Pequot Tribe and the Mohegan Tribe are federally recognized.

In discussing the history of Connecticut's original residents, it is best practice to defer to their history and perspective, allowing them to speak for themselves. This guide is meant to provide routes for people to educate themselves on the basic history of the Golden Hill Paugussett Indian Nation and the other Nations of Connecticut.

As an archival institution, the Bridgeport History Center firmly supports the [Protocols for Native American Archival Materials](#).

Works by the Golden Hill Paugussett Indian Nation and other Connecticut Tribes

The western world view of knowledge – that it should be free and open no matter what – is often at odds with Native and Indigenous approaches. Some information is privileged and meant to be secret no matter what. With respect to this and the fact that non-Native sources often try to share histories by speaking over their subjects, this guide privileges the perspective of the Golden Hill Paugussett and other Connecticut Nations by placing resources created by them first.

The Golden Hill Paugussett Indian Nation

The Golden Hill Paugussett Indian Nation. (2020.) [The Golden Hill Paugussett Indian Reservation](#) [Facebook page]. <https://www.facebook.com/The-Golden-Hill-Paugussett-Indian-Reservation-165294113670095/>

Updated daily by the members of the Golden Hill Paugussett Indian Nation, the Facebook page represents their interests and focus. Included are videos, photographs, and connections with other Nations.

Piper, Aurelius.(1985.) [Quarter-Acre of Heartache](#). Pocahontas Press : Blacksburg, Virginia. HC 970.4 S644q

While the author of this book is listed as Claude Clayton Smith, it is more accurately the autobiography of Aurelius Piper, Chief Big Eagle of the Golden Hill Paugussett Indian Nation. Highly readable, he relates the history of the Golden Hill Paugussett Indian, their relation to other Connecticut Nations, and his own history as tribal leader. The book also focuses on the legal battle waged over the ¼ acre reservation of the Golden Hill Paugussett Nation in

Trumbull when a white neighbor tried to steal the land. It is essential reading.

Connecticut Nations Beyond the Golden Hill Paugusset Indian Nation

Native North East Portal and Yale University. (2020.) [The Native North East Portal](#) and the [Yale Indian Papers Project](#). <http://nativenortheastportal.com/> and <https://findit.library.yale.edu/yipp>

The Native North East Portal works to gather primary documents from Native and Colonial perspectives into one searchable database. It is based at Yale University but is done in conjunction with New England Tribes. A recent grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities supports the portal and the Mashantucket Pequot Museum Research Center to increase the access of 19th century Pequot and eastern Connecticut community documents.

Mashanattucket Pequot Museum (2020.) [Mashanattucket Pequot Museum](#). <http://www.pequotmuseum.org/>

The Mashanattucket Pequot maintain their own museum and provide access to their history through their web presence.

Mashanattucket Pequot Museum. (undated.) [History and Culture eBook](#). http://www.pequotmuseum.org/uploadedFiles/Content/Research_Resources/mpmrc_history_and_culture_ebook.pdf

This educational resource eBook produced by the Mashanattucket Pequot Museum contains general information about the Pequot and the environment of eastern Connecticut from prehistoric times to modern ones, focused on their Nation. It includes photographs, timelines, and explanation of how geological changes from the ice age and afterwards influenced the development of the Mashanattucket Pequot.

Peters, Robert. (2012.) *Tribes in the New England/Northeast Region*. <https://www.umb.edu/naisa/tribes>

A basic listing of tribes in New England, including various links to more information for each tribe.

Western works

All material below is authored by non-tribal members. Those who have worked in collaboration with Native leaders are noted.

The Golden Hill Paugussett Indian Nation

Archival documents and resources

Office of Federal Acknowledgement, Bureau of Indian Affairs. (2005.) *Petitioner #081: Golden Hill Paugussett Tribe, CT*. <https://www.bia.gov/as-ia/ofa/081-gldhlp-ct>

The documents available through the Bureau of Indian Affairs website provides access to material produced by Chief Big Eagle and the Golden Hill Paugussett Indian Nation in their work to gain federal recognition from 1993 to 2005, including various appeals. Note that the documents are *only* the federal government's responses to the submitted petitions of the Golden Hill Paugussett Indian Nation, not the Nation's submitted documents and petitions. As such, the material available on the Bureau of Indian Affairs website is best understood as a prosecution lawyer picking apart the defense's argument.

Of note are the two versions of "Summary Under the Criteria and Evidence for Final

Determination against Federal Acknowledgment of the Golden Hill Paugussett Tribe" from 2003 and 2004, as they contain exacting details and appendices of primary documents, although they are not favorable to the Golden Hill Paugussett Indian Nation's claims.

In the 2003 and 2004 claims, the work of Charles Brilvitch is cited extensively. His research work is cited below, and should be read in conjunction with the government documents in order to get a full picture of the case the Golden Hill Paugussett Indian Nation presented for federal recognition.

Bridgeport History Center Newspaper Clippings

Note: While some newspaper clippings were written by or with the cooperation with Native residents of Connecticut, most are not.

Populations – Native Americans – Golden Hill Paugussett

Focused solely on the Golden Hill Paugussett Indian Nation, these clippings range from the 1880s to the 2000s. They combine archaeological discoveries with State and Federal recognition and attempts to place a casino within Fairfield or New Haven counties. There is also extensive coverage of the Trumbull reservation and Chief Big Eagle (Aurelius Piper).

Of note is a particular advertisement from the Connecticut Post, published on June 11, 1993. It is a full page advertisement written by the Golden Hill Paugussett explaining their perspective regarding law suits over land ownership.

Populations – Native Americans –General

These clippings, from the 1930s into the 1970s, cover activities including archaeological digs in the greater Fairfield area, to general activities, to newspaper coverage that frame Native residents and their lands as human interest stories. Please note that in several cases the archaeological digs include the discovery of human remains. There is not always follow-up regarding the reburial of those remains, a matter that can place archaeologists at odds with the descendants of the buried wish for the dead to be treated.

Populations – Native Americans – Pequots, Mohegans, Quinnipiac, Schaghticoke

Highly scattershot, these clippings are primarily from the 1980s onwards. Their content varies widely from mourning recently passed leaders to statues to matters regarding the Mohegan Sun casino.

Secondary works

Beach, Michael D. (2000) "*Land Claims of the Golden Hill Paugussett Tribe: Are They "Holding Hostages" or Asserting Valid Property Rights?*," William Mitchell Law Review: Vol. 26: Iss. 4, Article 4. Available at: <http://open.mitchellhamline.edu/wmlr/vol26/iss4/4>

Intended for a legally savvy audience, Michael D. Beacher's article takes a close examination of the Golden Hill Paugussett's land claims in the City of Bridgeport and how the case relates to 18th century laws regarding land ownership. While it is dense and difficult, it provides additional legal context to the on-going history of the Nation. Beacher has no disclosed affiliation with the Golden Hill Paugussett.

Black Rock History Project. (undated.) *Golden Hill Paugussett Tribe Historical Timeline*. http://blackrockhistory.net/GoldenHill_index.html

A simple timeline of the Golden Hill Paugussett Indian Nation's history. Author and affiliation unknown.

Brilvitch, Charles.(2003.) *Survival of the Paugussett Tribe*. Bridgeport, Conn. HC 970.4 S963p
Written at the request of Chief Quiet Hawk, this text represents a precursor to Brilvitch's full history of the Golden Hill Paugussett Indian Nation. It begins to draw the connecting lines to the community of Ethiope/Little Liberia in Bridgeport, but does not do so to the full extent that his expanded work does. It can and should be read in conjunction with the 2007 text listed below.

Brilvitch, Charles. (2007.) *A History of Connecticut's Golden Hill Paugussett Tribe*. History Press : Charleston, South Carolina. HC 970.4 B857h.

Essential reading by Charles Brilvitch, this book's contents were presented as a part of the Golden Hill Paugussett Indian Nation's work to gain federal recognition as a tribe. Written with the assistance of members of the Nation, this book painstakingly documents the history of the Golden Hill Paugussett in Bridgeport and Trumbull. Also important in the text is the establishment of ties between the Nation and the community of Ethiope, later Little Liberia, a neighborhood for free people of color to live and work. Those interested in the history of the Mary and Eliza Freeman homes and the historical preservation work involved with them should also refer to this text.

Brilvitch, Charles. (undated.) *The Golden Hill Paugussett Tribe*. <https://bportlibrary.org/hc/south-end/the-golden-hill-paugussett-tribe/>

Essentially an abridged version of Brilvitch's research above, this article written for the Bridgeport History Center's Grassroots Historians program provides a basic overview of the Golden Hill Paugussett. Those not able to check out the above two works are well served by reading this article.

Orcutt, Samuel. (1972.) *The Indians of the Housatonic and Naugatuck Valleys*. Lockwood & Brainard Company : Hartford, Conn. HC 970.4 06

Written by Reverend Samuel Orcutt in 1882 and republished in 1972, this text is cited as one of the earliest attempts by descendants of colonizers to write a history of the original inhabitants of Connecticut. It is long since out of date, but is an important work in the *historiography* of the tribes of western Connecticut. Please refer to Brilvitch for a more accurate history and to Wojciechowski for critique and interpretation of Orcutt's research and conclusions. Orcutt had no known affiliations with the people he wrote about.

Wojciechowski, Franz Laurens. (1985.) *The Paugussett Tribes: an ethnohistory study of the tribal interrelationships of the Indians in the lower Housatonic River area*. HC 970.4 W847p

In *Quarter Acre of Heartache*, Chief Big Eagle refers to Dutch research being done into his people. He is likely referring to Wojciechowski in that statement, who ended up authoring an ethnohistory. It is a very dry text, but it includes an excellent literature review that is essential reading for secondary sources of the 19th century and their biases. Just as important are the appendices which reproduce primary docs relating to the Paugussett, Pequannock, Potatuck, Weantinock, and Schaghticoke. They are mostly deeds and court decisions however, representing the colonizer view of events. Based on Chief Big Eagle's reference to the author of this text, it is implied Wojciechowski had the approval of the Nation to conduct this work.

Wojciechowski, Franz Laurens. (1992.) *Ethnohistory of the Paugussett Tribes: an exercise in research methodology*. De Kiva : Amsterdam, Netherlands. HC 970.4 W847e.

An expanded version of Wojciechowski's book listed above, researchers are advised to consult this version. The writing style is dry, and those not accustomed to ethnohistories will likely find it hard to read. The appendices of primary documents have also been expanded. However, most of the sources are also colonial. . Based on Chief Big Eagle's reference to the author of this text in *Quarter-Acre of Heartache*, it is implied Wojciechowski had the approval of the Nation to conduct this work.

Connecticut Nations Beyond the Paugussett

Connecticut State Library. (2020.) *Researching Connecticut Native Americans*. <https://libguides.ctstatelibrary.org/hg/nativeamericans>

The Connecticut State Library's research guide is in depth and repeats many of the books and links provided in this guide, along with many more resources. These include digitized manuscripts and maps owned by the Connecticut State Library, more secondary works, and genealogical information. The PDF labeled "Native American Research Materials" is extensive and a stunning collection of resources. Cooperation with the Nations of Connecticut is unclear.

Johnson, Steven F. (1995.) *Ninnuock (The People): The Algonkian People of New England*. Bliss Publishing Company Inc. : Marlborough, Massachusetts. HC 970.4 J69n

Serving as a more general history, this book focuses on the larger region of New England and documents the residents of Maine through Connecticut. It is implied through introductory elements that Johnson had cooperation and permission of various New England peoples.

Swigart, Edmund K. (1974.) *The Prehistory of the Indians of Western Connecticut*. Shepaug Valley Archaeological Society : Washington, Conn. HC 970.4 S 977p v. 1

Focused on archaeology and archaeology alone, this text focuses on the finds of the Shepaug Valley Archaeological Society as of 1974. It is some years outdated, but of note due to the extensive photography of objects from 9000-1000 BCE included within. Moreover, it is difficult for non-archaeological aficionados to understand, and should be reviewed in conjunction with more recent sources. It is unclear if the group worked in collaboration with any Native residents in the text.

General Sources

The Institute for American Indian Studies . (2020.) [The Institute for American Indians Museum and Research Center](https://www.iaismuseum.org/). <https://www.iaismuseum.org/>

Although not affiliated with the five Connecticut tribes, the Institute for American Indian Studies Museum and Research Center is an educational center based out of Washington, Connecticut that balances archaeological studies and public education. Their [general FAQ](#) is extremely worth a read.

McDonald, Jerry N. And Woodward, Susan L (1987.) *Indian Mounds of the Atlantic Coast: a guide to sites from Maine to Florida*. The McDonald & Woodward Publishing Company : Woodward, Ohio. HC 970.4 M135i

Prior to the colonization of America, the east coast of the United States was covered in burial mounds. They were mostly destroyed as settlers encroached further and further

inland, but some survive and they contain essential information about those who lived and died in America. As this book is from 1987, it is outdated, but the general information is an introduction for understanding what else was destroyed in the quest for colonization.