

HIDDEN HERITAGE

HISTORY BOOKS SAY THAT NATIVE AMERICANS DIDN'T LIVE IN THE ADIRONDACK UPLANDS. NEW EVIDENCE DATING BACK 13,000 YEARS REVEALS THAT THEY ARE WRONG

BY CURT STAGER

FADDEN PHOTOGRAPH BY YVONNE ALBINOWSKI. SEVENTH LAKE PROJECTILE PHOTOGRAPH FROM THE ADIRONDACK MUSEUM

THERE IS A FABLE circulating in these mountains: “The Indians didn’t live up here.”

It is false.

Nevertheless, if you ask almost anyone with a taste for Adirondack history you will likely hear one or more explanations for why the uplands were avoided by Native Americans. It was too cold for them. The soil was too sandy for crops. They were only passing through to hunt. Because of such beliefs, standard accounts of Adirondack history have more to do with white lumberjacks, hoteliers or seekers of uninhabited wilderness than indigenous people living with minimal impact on the land for thousands of years.

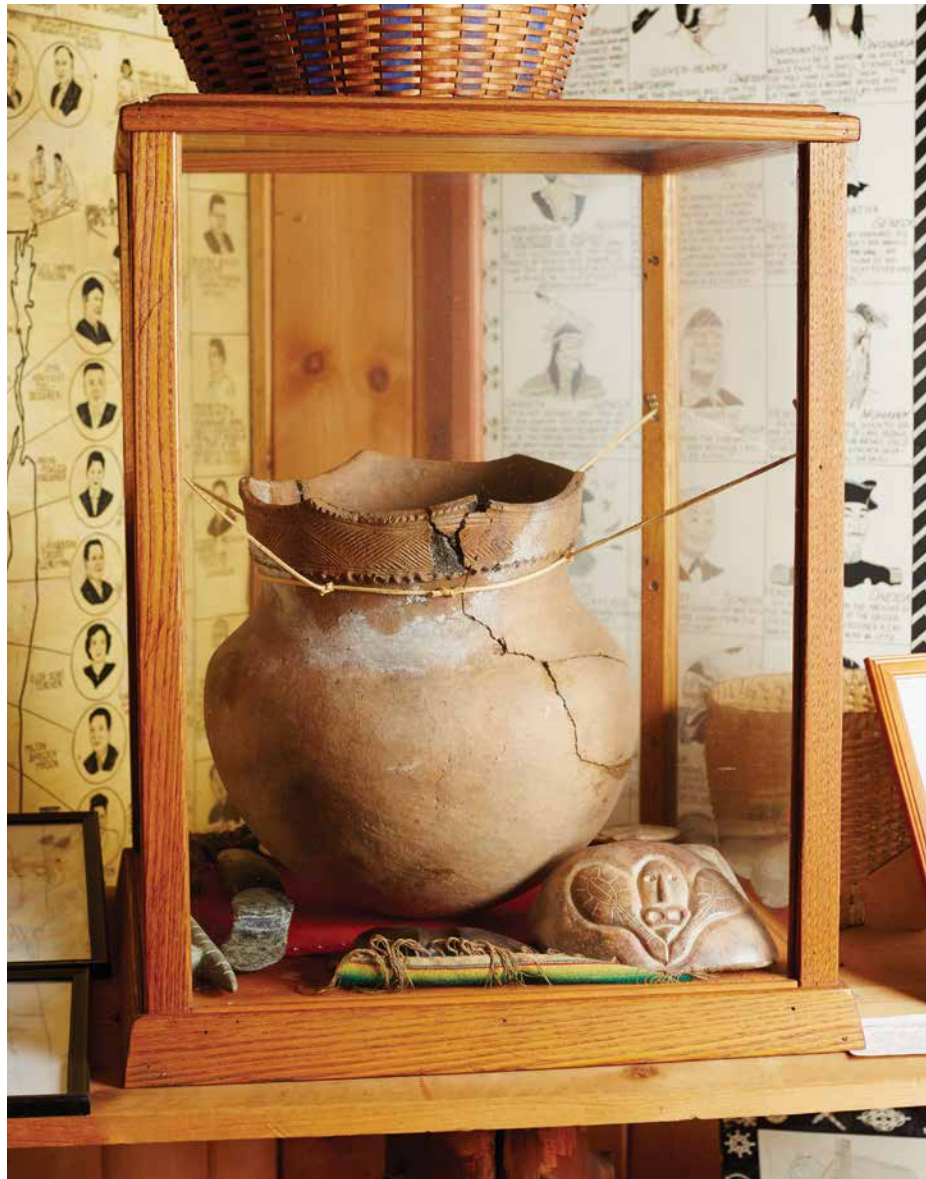
Our views of the past reflect and shape our relationships to the natural world, our sense of place in history and the management of wilderness. They can be difficult to change. I’ve studied environmental history in the Adirondacks for nearly three decades and was fascinated by “History in Fragments,” a hard-hitting review of the neglected Native American legacy of the region that Lynn Woods wrote for this magazine in 1994. Even so, it was only recently that the long human presence in these mountains felt real enough to me to transform my perception of the Adirondacks. I am therefore Exhibit A for the human frailty that sustains the classic narrative of absence and for what it takes to change it. Here is the story of how the shift happened, why it took me so long, and why it matters.

My transformation begins in earnest during the summer of 2014 with a visit to the Six Nations Indian Museum, in Onchiota, with my parents. Founded in 1954 by the late Mohawk educator Ray Fadden and his family, the privately owned museum is now operated by his son John and grandsons Dave and Don. The long wooden building, which evokes the shape of an Iroquois longhouse, is packed from floor to ceiling with stone artifacts, beaded wampum belts, photos, baskets, historical accounts hand-written by Ray and illustrations by John and Dave.



One glass case contains a large clay pot that was found in a rocky crevice near Silver Lake Mountain during the 1940s. John tells us that the conical base and diagonal incisions on the angular rim indicate that it was made three to five centuries ago. Similar Iroquois pots have turned up at Jones Pond, Rainbow Lake and other upland sites, and the museum has fragments of another one that was found near St. Regis Mountain during the 1970s. The discoverer, Jim Bickford, recently told me that he got a surprise when he reached into a cranny in a rock face while hunting. “I was thinking that I was the first person ever to touch this spot,” he recalled. “Then I felt the pieces under my hand.” Experts speculate that such pots may have stored provisions or served as territorial markers.

John Fadden and his sons Don and Dave at Six Nations Indian Museum, in Onchiota. Packed floor to ceiling, their collection includes local artifacts, among them a dugout canoe from the southern end of Lake Placid.



Three- to 500-year-old clay pot at the Faddens' museum, discovered near Silver Lake Mountain. Similar vessels have been found at other Adirondack upland sites.

On the floor in another corner of the museum lies a dry, splintered dugout canoe chipped from a white cedar log. It was found in the southern end of Lake Placid in 1960. "A pair of divers spotted it in about 15 feet of water while looking for sunken logs to salvage," John explains. "They told us that the singer Kate Smith waved to them from her camp while they were hauling it to shore. They sold it to my father for \$125." I ask how old it is. "We don't know," John replies. "We haven't had the resources to date it." My father turns to me and says, "You have a research grant. Why don't you get a date for them?"

I do have a grant from the National Science Foundation for radiocarbon dating of samples from Adirondack lakes. My students and I have already collected lake sedi-

ment cores that showed signs of lower water levels during severe droughts of the last millennium, and Lake Placid is on our list of study sites. Perhaps the dugout lay in shallower water back then, hidden there to await a hunter's return that never materialized.

With Dave Fadden's help, I later bore a cylinder of wood from the boat and send it to Beta Analytic, a reputable lab in Florida, for radiocarbon dating. While we await the results, I learn that Canton boatbuilder Everett Smith found another dugout in Lake Ozonia during the late 1950s while snorkeling. It is currently on display in the Adirondack Museum, in Blue Mountain Lake. Paul Hai, director of the Adirondack Interpretive Center, in Newcomb, told me that another one was found at Arbutus Lake and stored at the Ticonderoga Heritage Museum. An 18-foot behemoth, large enough to carry several adults, was dredged from a wetland along with a smaller one in 1984 during the development of a private estate at Twin Ponds near Malone. It is kept at the owner's residence in Jay. That discovery inspired the late Mohawk poet Maurice Kenny to compose a poem

titled "Dugout." He wrote, "This is the story of four men who boarded a boat so many years ago. Fog has covered footsteps, wind drowned voices."

Dugouts can last for centuries in the cool, oxygen-poor muck of a lake bed. Originally, they were hollowed out of soft cedar or pine logs by burning and chipping with stone tools, but the arrival of sharp steel hatchets and gouges later sped the process. Euro-Americans also used them, as Winslow Homer's painting *The Trapper* attests, and only a pre-Columbian age firmly identifies a local dugout as native in origin.

The Lake Placid boat turns out to be younger than we expected, no more than three centuries old. I should not have been surprised. None of the other Adirondack craft are particularly old, either, perhaps because rising lake levels and deeper burial over the centuries have made older

NATIVE PEOPLE WERE COOKING ON THE SHORES OF LONG LAKE WHEN THE VIKINGS SETTLED GREENLAND, AND YET MANY OF US IMAGINE THAT THEY COULDN'T HAVE LIVED HERE BECAUSE IT WAS TOO COLD.



sunken craft more difficult to find. The most ancient one discovered thus far is the Twin Ponds monster. A sample I collected from it is roughly four centuries old, and the charring and lack of sharp cut-marks suggest indigenous makers. The dark, lumpy beast seems too large and heavy to carry—especially when waterlogged—or to navigate the shallow outlet stream to or from the St. Lawrence River. It is therefore almost certainly not a war canoe as some have imagined, but was more likely made at Twin Ponds to serve as a platform for fishing, hunting or trapping by several adults or perhaps a family.

Four centuries may sound like a long time, but for a scientist who is used to thinking in terms of ice ages, these dugouts only hint at greater depths of history. I want more.

I soon learn that a new professor of archaeology at the State University of New York at Potsdam has begun an excavation on Long Lake. Tim Messner is the only archaeologist from a local university working on the deep history of the uplands, and I am eager to meet him. Woods's article describes pottery fragments and stone implements that were picked up along the shore of Long Lake during the last century, but Messner is the first to conduct a formal dig there. My wife, Kary, and I join him and his students on a chilly autumn day to watch them open a shallow pit beside a lakeshore cabin as the owner looks on.

"This is really exciting," Tim says as he points to a cluster of fist-sized cobbles on the sandy floor of the pit. Kary and I glance at each other skeptically. What's so thrilling about a bunch of rocks?

"I think it's a hearth," he explains. "See how rusty-looking and cracked they are? That's what we call 'FCR,' or fire-cracked rock." Before the age of pots and pans, people boiled stews by dropping hot rocks such as these into containers of bark, basketry, hides or animal stomachs. "This dark material mingled with the FCR is charcoal," Tim says, "which would be perfect for radiocarbon dating." I take the hint and send a pinch of it to the dating lab with my next batch of sediment core samples. The charcoal is a thousand years old.

Native people were cooking on the shores of Long Lake when the Vikings settled Greenland, and yet many of us imagine that they couldn't have lived here because it was too cold. "We shouldn't underestimate the abilities of indig-

enous peoples," Tim tells me on a subsequent visit. "Their ancestors migrated here from Siberia and they've lived all over Canada and Alaska since the last ice age in climates colder than the Adirondacks."

Mean winter temperatures in Lake Placid and Wanakena are only two to three degrees Fahrenheit colder than in the Champlain and St. Lawrence Valleys, and some days are actually warmer in the uplands than in the lowlands. Then as now, rugged forested terrain blocked fierce winter winds and created microclimates that could have been more hospitable than flat terrain at lower elevations. "People back then were tough and resourceful," Tim continues, "and they knew how to handle harsh conditions." To doubt that they could tolerate Adirondack climates says more about our own limitations than theirs.

Direct accounts confirm that at least some indigenous people wintered in the uplands centuries ago. The Jesuit missionary Isaac Jogues was held captive by Mohawks in a hunting encampment during the winter of 1642–1643, most likely in the Saranac Lake region. In *Adirondack: Of Indians and Mountains*, author Stephen Sulavik quoted a 17th-century biographer who described Jogues's ordeal. "Always, they were climbing to higher altitudes, into the towering mountains white with snow." His captors, who included elderly men and mothers with children, weathered the cold in conical shelters covered with bark and hides.

Another mistaken assumption is that maize, beans and squash—the "three sisters" crops of the Iroquois and Algonquians—can't survive in the uplands either. In her doctoral thesis, University of Toronto historian Melissa Otis documented reports of maize and other vegetables cultivated by indigenous residents at Piseco Lake, Indian Lake and the Indian Carry on Upper Saranac Lake. There seems to be a disconnect, however, in accounts of the relative abilities of natives and immigrants to grow native crops. In *Contested Terrain*, historian Phil Terrie cites poor soils and short growing seasons as reasons why indigenous peoples are said to have avoided the uplands while also describing the gardens of early settlers. The Adirondack Corn Maze at Tucker Farms, in Gabriels, and backyard vegetable plots throughout the region today confirm that suitable soils and microclimates exist in the high country. It is possible that cold-hardy strains of crops were grown in the past, as well.



Guide Mitchell Sabattis at Long Lake, 1886. Mitchell was the son of Peter Sabattis—an Abenaki veteran of the War of 1812—for whom Peter's Rock, a campsite on Lower St. Regis Lake, is named. It's likely he and other native residents camped here—the end of the river route into the uplands—before Paul Smith evicted them to build his hotel.

The feasibility of farming in the uplands is actually irrelevant to most of Adirondack history. According to archaeologist John Hart at the New York State Museum, in Albany, maize was occasionally grown in the Northeast as early as 2,000 years ago, but hunting and gathering was the predominant lifestyle until large agricultural settlements became common after 1000 AD, and it worked at least as well in the uplands as in the lowlands.

Persistent doubts that people lived in the Adirondacks may have more to do with semantics than data. They reflect whatever we mean by “live.” In ages past, a home territory was where one pursued prey as a serious, full-time occupation, not a sport like today’s recreational hunting and fishing, and camping was not a luxury but a lifestyle. Through most of human history people moved seasonally over broad geographic areas they considered home, and the same was true in the North Country. It was the only way to survive without depleting local resources.

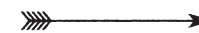
Ancient artifacts confirm the long human presence in the Adirondacks, and where soil is exposed they often appear. Projectile points thousands of years old have been found in farm fields in Gabriels, Norman Ridge, North Elba and Malone. Such stone points are particularly informative because their distinctive styles can often be linked to specific cultural periods of known age. Although commonly

described as arrowheads, most Adirondack projectile points were used to tip spears or long, slender darts that were hurled with atlatls, throwing-sticks that enhance the power of a hunter’s arm.

Rivers and lakes were both resources and travel routes to, from and through the uplands, and many beaches and lakeshore campsites that are now operated by the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation were also used by original inhabitants. A 3,000-year-old soapstone cooking bowl kept at the Adirondack Museum was discovered near the Jessup River. A grooved stone ax picked up beside Long Lake is closer to 4,000 years old. Projectile points found at Rich Lake, now on display at the Adirondack Interpretive Center, were crafted over many centuries from chert, a form of flint, that came from all over New York State and possibly western Vermont. One of them, a gray Brewerton point with a broad stem, is about 5,000 years old, roughly the age of the pyramids of Egypt.

What have we learned in the more than two decades since Woods’s overview was published? Prehistoric artifacts have now been reported by archaeologists and local residents at more than three dozen sites above 1,000 feet elevation, the zone I use here to define the Adirondacks as a coherent ecological region rather than a larger polit-

BECAUSE PEOPLE HAVE LIVED HERE LONGER THAN FORESTS, VAST TRACTS OF UNINHABITED ADIRONDACK WILDERNESS—THOUGH BEAUTIFUL—ARE AS ARTIFICIAL AS THE SKI JUMPS AT LAKE PLACID.



ical construct bounded by the Blue Line. They have more than doubled the known length of human presence in the uplands. When repairs to the Pierceland dam lowered the level of Tupper Lake in 2007, a projectile point of red-brown chert was found on the shore. A long flute or groove at the base links it to paleolithic hunters who roamed the Northeast shortly after the last ice age. Dozens of other artifacts found nearby show that indigenous people lived at Tupper Lake throughout the intervening millennia to modern times. Sediment cores from local lakes that date the transition from ice to open tundra in the uplands set a plausible starting point for local history at roughly 13,000 years ago. The implications for park management are mind-boggling. Because people have lived here longer than forests, vast tracts of uninhabited Adirondack wilderness—though beautiful—are as artificial as the ski jumps at Lake Placid.

It is difficult to grasp such large numbers on a meaningful intuitive level, even for experts, and splitting Adirondack history into simple “pre-contact” and “post-contact” categories risks making false equivalency between them. Try this instead: If a century were as long as an inch-long finger joint, then the American Revolution is less than a finger’s length away and the time since Columbus is roughly the span between the tips of your pinky finger and thumb. To touch the first inhabitants of the Adirondack uplands 13,000 years ago, a temporal gap more than six times wider than the one between us and the time of Christ, you would need to reach across a distance of more than 10 feet. The seemingly empty historical space between you and them is not vacant at all, but simply unrecorded by most modern writers.

We will never know all the details of life in that great gulf of time, but we can now infer the basics from sediment cores, upland artifacts and related cultures elsewhere in the Northeast.

Imagine, for example, that you are visiting residents of Tupper Lake on a summer day 13,000

years ago. The lake is a bit lower and smaller because it has not yet been dammed. The adjacent mountain lacks a ski resort, and there is no town or forest. Tundra and scrubby spruce thickets cover the barren landscape. Your “Paleo-Indian” hosts wear clothing of soft caribou hide that emits the sweet scent of woodsmoke, and they live a semi-nomadic lifestyle much like that of people in northern Europe and Asia at the time. They offer you a wooden ladle of musk ox stew boiled in a leathery pouch into which hot cobbles have been dropped. You leave a cluster of conical, hide-covered shelters to sit beside the shore after brushing aside the sharp chips that a tool-flaker left there earlier. Don’t wander far from camp, though. Huge brown bears live here too, as might some of the region’s last remaining mastodons.

If you linger through many generations on this lakeshore you will see more pines, oaks and birches arrive as the climate gradually warms. By about 9,000 years ago your neighbors still live in tepee-shaped shelters, but the walls are often covered with bark as well as hides. People tend to stay put longer now because they pursue deer, moose,

Rivers and lakes were resources as well as travel routes to, from and through the uplands. Many of today’s popular waterside campsites were also used by original inhabitants, as proven by this 3,000-year-old soapstone cooking bowl found near the Jessup River.



turkeys and passenger pigeons in the forest instead of following migrant caribou herds. These so-called “Archaic” hunters still use spears and atlatls, but their more diverse projectile points lack the fluting their ancestors favored. Visiting artisans bring creamy pink Flint Ridge chert from Ohio and greenish Coxsackie chert from the lower Hudson Valley to use or to trade. Local residents net white suckers that spawn in streams in spring and hook lake trout through the ice in winter. In summer they hunt deer, gather blueberries and raspberries in the woods, and harvest mussels, turtles and muskrats from lakes and marshes. Their stews, now full of venison or fish, are still stone-boiled in skin bags, baskets or bark containers.

As 6,000 years of Archaic culture pass, hemlock, beech and maple become more common in the woods. People still come

SABATTIS AND SOAPSTONE BOWL PHOTOGRAPHS FROM THE ADIRONDACK MUSEUM

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and go from all directions. Roughly 3,000 years before the Euro-American invasion, women begin to make clay pottery for cooking and storage. Some use soapstone vessels instead. Archaeologists will later describe this “Woodland” period as a time when signs of squash and maize cultivation appear first, followed in more recent centuries by beans and tobacco. They will debate whether small triangular points represent the first arrival of arrows and bows in the hunters’ arsenal and speculate about possible connections between early residents and the later Iroquoians and Algonquians who met the first Anglo visitors during the 16th century.

To summarize the entire Euro-American chapter of this long story in more proper proportion to its duration would require only a single sentence. “A recent flood of immigrants cleared forests, killed wildlife and built permanent structures, obviously expecting to remain on the ancestral territory of local residents who, in spite of it all, still live here.” Native Americans now comprise six percent of the population of Franklin County, which includes the reservation at Akwesasne, but less than one percent of upland communities.

With so much information available, why do so many of us still cling to short versions of Adirondack history? Part of the problem was the Euro-American invasion itself. Indigenous peoples were decimated during the 1600s by plagues of smallpox and measles. Genocidal wars triggered by white encroachment also destroyed and scattered native settlements. So great was the carnage that relatively few people were left to inhabit the mountains by the time the first detailed written records were made, and early accounts of the Adirondacks might have described an artificially depopulated landscape. When combined with a disregard for indigenous ways of living on the land, the assumption of absence can lead to a self-serving

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conclusion: “The Indians weren’t really using it, so we took it.” Denying that they were even here at all adds insult to that injury.

Sampling-bias among scholars is another factor. In *The Archaeology of New York State*, William Ritchie presented maps of ancient sites that left the Adirondacks mostly blank, but absence of evidence is not evidence of absence. Low-elevation sites such as Lake George and the Champlain Valley are more heavily studied, in part, because farm fields, road-cuts and cellar holes are more abundant there than in the wilder uplands, making sites easier to find. Large settlements also tend to be more productive to excavate, and therefore more tempting for archaeologists, than smaller encampments that were probably more typical of the uplands.

Private collectors also play a role. Woods mentioned a list of artifacts found in the Adirondacks by lay citizens and professional archaeologists alike that was compiled by a consulting firm, Hartgen Archaeological Associates. When I called Hartgen it no longer possessed the document, but staff at the New York State Museum later provided me with a copy to supplement my own growing list of sites. The document mentioned several upland locales, but in the process I learned that the museum and the New York State Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation also have more detailed lists that they do not readily make public. Yes, conspiracy theorists, the government really is hiding secrets from you, but it’s not a sinister plot. They do it for the same reason I am not specifying exact locations on these pages—to protect our cultural heritage.

In many other countries, laws prevent people from destroying or selling antiquities, but Americans who find artifacts on private land can legally do with them what they will. One resident of the North Country who refuses to communicate with archaeologists has

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removed numerous rare Paleo-Indian artifacts from his family's property and priced them for sale. Another private collector spray-paints the ancient objects he finds to make them unappealing to scientists. If the spectacular paleolithic art in France's Chauvet Cave had been discovered in the United States, a land-owner would have been free to scribble on it or chisel pieces loose and sell them on eBay.

Such conflicts of interest between scholars and the public sometimes lead people to hide sites and artifacts from professionals. "It shouldn't be that way," says archaeologist Ralph Rataul at the New York State Museum. "We're not out to confiscate artifacts, but we do wish people would tell us about their finds so we can better understand local history."

When I mention a recent conversation with a collector who said he would rather not have his discoveries disappear into a box on a museum shelf, Rataul shakes his head. "Anyone can visit our collections by appointment as you're doing now. If you hide things in a box of your own, nobody else can study them and they can be lost forever when you pass on or move away, especially if you don't clearly record where you found them."

The need for proper documentation becomes clearer to me when I visit two of my students, Elliott and Rory, at their rental home near Twin Ponds. After we discuss the shortage of data on indigenous agriculture in the Adirondacks, Elliott leads me into the garage and hands me a foot-long cylinder of smooth black stone. It is a pestle, possibly used for pounding maize centuries ago. They are commonly found in the lowlands of the northeastern United States but none have yet been reported from these uplands. "It was leaning in the corner when we moved in," Rory explains. Because the former owner was deceased and left no label we will never know if the pestle was used by early Adirondack farmers.

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Perhaps the main reason why so many people believe the Adirondacks was uninhabited is that influential authors have inadvertently obscured history. In his poem "The Adirondacks," Ralph Waldo Emerson described a trip to Follensby Pond in 1858 as a journey into untouched nature. In a recent lecture Tim Messner noted the irony of that depiction, in which Emerson claimed that his companions would "wield the first axe these echoes ever heard," unaware that stone axes sounded nearby for thousands of years. Alfred L. Donaldson is a more widely cited source, not because he was a formally trained historian or scientist (his primary expertise was in banking), but because he published a two-volume book in 1921 that is widely available and easy to read. Donaldson claimed in *A History of the Adirondacks* that "the Indians never made any part of what is now the Adirondack Park their permanent home." Like many other authors of his day Donaldson seemed to doubt that Native Americans had a significant history at all. In one passage he wrote that "many of the relics found in the Adirondacks indicate the presence of a people antedating the Indians, and possessing a skill in the rude arts far ahead of theirs." Even *The Adirondack Atlas*, published in 2004, reports that the "inhospitable environment was avoided by Native Americans and Europeans alike." With such accounts in circulation it is not surprising that the fable persists.

Fortunately, the fable is now beginning to fade. Complementing the labors of the Faddens, the New York State Museum scholars, and Lynn Woods are the research and outreach of new investigators like Tim Messner and Melissa Otis. The Wild Center, in Tupper Lake, is now weaving local indigenous perspectives into its natural history displays, and for the first time, a significant portion of the Adirondack Museum will soon focus on Native American history. According

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to director of interpretation Jennifer Bine, a primary aim of the new installation will be to demolish the myth of absence. “We want to challenge the idea that people didn’t live here unless they built a brick house and stayed forever.”

My own sense of Adirondack history has been most decisively transformed at Paul Smith’s College, where I live and work. Once a luxury resort on Lower St. Regis Lake, the former hotel became a college in 1946. It now trains students in natural sciences, forestry, hospitality and other professions. The standard version of its history begins with Apollos “Paul” Smith, who carved a rustic hunting lodge out of the woods in 1859. He and his wife, Lydia, turned it into a world-class destination that catered to the rich and powerful “one percent” of their day. After the hotel burned in 1930, Phelps Smith willed a fortune to establish a college in his father’s name despite resistance from relatives, and the local community has since viewed the site as Paul Smith’s legacy.

As with many such heroic versions of history, however, new findings yield a more nuanced account. In his memoir, *Footprints and Sunset on Adirondack Trails*, James Wardner, of Rainbow Lake, wrote of meeting Smith in 1855 when the young man was a squatter-farmer who also worked unhappily at his family’s hunting lodge in Loon Lake. Wardner recommended that Smith establish his own lodge on the shore of Lower St. Regis Lake “about where the Indians are camping.” When he found financial backing to buy the property and build his hotel, the native residents were evicted.

Directly across from campus, smooth gray anorthosite juts into the water near the outlet to the St. Regis River. Peter’s Rock is a popular campsite maintained by the college, but few users know who “Peter” was. Captain Peter Sabattis was an Abenaki veteran of the War of 1812. James Wardner claimed in his memoir that, as a youth, Sabattis

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earned the nickname “Pèrejeune” (Young Father) for his missionary work in Ontario and that during his military service English-speaking compatriots adjusted his nickname to “Captain Peter.” It is likely that the rock was named for him because he camped there, perhaps as part of the community that Smith’s hotel later displaced.

According to an interview with Peter’s son, Mitchell, published in the *Journal of American Folklore* in 1900, the lake was previously known as *Pokuizasne*, an Abenaki version of the Mohawk name *Akwesasne* (where the partridge drums). That label makes sense because the lake marked the end of the river route into the uplands from what is now the St. Regis Mohawk Reservation at Akwesasne on the St. Lawrence River.

On a warm, sunny day in June 2016, my wife, Kary, and I walk to the crest of a pine-capped knoll that protrudes into the lake beside the student center. A light breeze cools our faces as we look across the lake to St. Regis Mountain. This spot was known as Picnic Point since the hotel days until my colleague Craig Milewski and his students began to meet here to discuss wilderness literature and philosophies of nature. They now call it Turtle Island in reference to an Iroquoian creation story in which the world was made by smearing lake sediment on the back of a swimming turtle.

Kary lingers among the fragrant red pines while I clamber down the dusty slope to a shelf of bedrock on the water’s edge. In my imagination, a canoe bearing students back to campus becomes a dugout bearing new arrivals from Akwesasne. I envision Peter Sabattis waving to them from his campsite. Perhaps they have come to hunt moose in the woods, or to net the white suckers that spawn in a brook near the campus. Perhaps their ancestors sat here to flake stone implements where the view is grand, the sun is glorious and the wind keeps the bugs at bay.

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Lost in my thoughts, at first I don't notice Kary's voice. I turn to see her beckoning with something in her hand. It is a projectile point.

The triangle of pale gray chert bears a long stem, which suggests that it could be thousands of years old or maybe as recent as the encampment the hotel supplanted. The feel of the smooth stone between my fingers is thrilling, a direct link to people in ages past who surely loved this place as much as we do. Searching amid the camouflage of shed pine bark, I also find a sharp-edged piece of dark gray chert with a groove and end-thinning flake scars at the base. Jonathan Lothrop, curator of archaeology at the New York State Museum, will later conclude that it could be an unfinished fluted point from the end of the last ice age. It was likely shaped from Champlain or Hudson Valley chert, perhaps by a Paleo-Indian caribou hunter between 13,000 and 11,600 years ago.

Maybe it is this personal connection that suddenly allows a new perception of the Adirondacks to open for me like a flower, or maybe it is the sheer weight of new information that finally opens my eyes to this hidden heritage. The blending of people and wilderness in the Adirondacks was not invented with the establishment of hotels, colleges or the Blue Line. It is thousands of years old. The long human presence in these mountains, of which I am also a part, is more ancient than the forest that now cloaks the terrain and every bit as natural. We are not separate from nature in the Adirondacks as many of us imagine, but integral parts of it, and I feel grateful to the people who lived here before us for helping me to understand that. ▲

Curt Stager is a professor of natural sciences at Paul Smith's College and author of four books, including the upcoming *Still Waters: Reflections on Lakes in the Age of Humans (Norton)*. He wrote about crows and ravens in the February 2016 issue of this magazine.

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