

Ridgewood's Ancient Connection to the Lenni-Lenape Indians



The Ridgewood Country Club, and in fact the entire region of northern New Jersey, has a rich and ancient connection to the Lenni Lenape Indians. It is thought that the “Original People,” or Lenni Lenape, arrived from Asia 12,000 years ago settling in the region well before the Dutch traders and English settlers.

The Lenape tribe settled in the region due to the abundance of hunting and fertile farm lands.

In fact, we can learn a great deal about the region and its roots to the tribe simply from the name “Paramus” (or historically, “Parames”, “Perampus”, etc) which is literally translated to “where there is worthwhile and fertile land.” Paramus was home to the Unalchtigo, or “turkey”, division of the Lenape tribe. A further Lenape derivation of Paramus, “peremessing”, is often translated as “a place abounding in wild turkeys.” It is therefore clear simply from the name of the town that in the time of the Indians the lands surrounding Ridgewood Country Club were ideally suited for growing crops, fishing, and hunting.

While most of the Lenni Lenape presence was gone by the 1730s, their influence can still be seen today. Many of the major roads of the region were generational Indian trails, including Franklin Turnpike and Kindermack Road, which lead to Albany. Arrowheads and artifacts are occasionally discovered on the banks of the Saddle River, and beside the Ho-Ho-Kus and Sprout Brooks. Indeed, Indian arrowheads were discovered at Ridgewood Country Club near the #2 Center tee.

With the strong historical influence of the Lenni Lenape tribe to the region, it comes as no surprise that very early Ridgewood (Country) Club logos incorporated the prominent theme of an Indian head. One trophy takes the shape of a gold candle holder and is engraved “Ridgewood Golf Club Kickers Handicap, Labor Day 1902, won by Anna M. Rodrigo” (Figure 1.) The second trophy, a 5.5” loving cup, is inscribed “Ridgewood Golf Club, June 11, 1904, Driving Contest, won by James Brendan Brady” (Figure 2.)

Both early trophy examples showcase an applied Indian chief in full headdress and period attire as the central motif of the award. In using the Chief logo, the club clearly understood the importance and significance of the Lenni Lenape Indians to the history of the region. And, considering the primary attractions of the Paramus landscape to the “Original People”, one might be safe to assume that the headdresses were comprised of turkey feathers!

- Andrew C. Mutch, PhD



Figure 1. A Ridgewood Golf Club Kickers Handicap trophy from Labor Day, 1902. The trophy features a gold etched and applied full Indian head logo. *Image courtesy of Thomas E. Mitchell.*



Figure 2. A June 11, 1904 Ridgewood Golf Club Driving Contest trophy. The trophy features a gold scalloped rim applied medallion with Indian head profile logo. *Image courtesy of Thomas E. Mitchell.*