



Fort George, currently Battery Park, in the early days of British control. Trinity Church is to the left.



A 1768 view from the West Village, looking south over the Sand Hills. (The palm tree was added by an imaginative illustrator.)



An engraving of the Collect Pond and Bayard's Mount, circa 1798. The city proper is in the distance.

**King of the Forest**  
The American chestnut was the largest tree in the forests that were Mannahatta's most widespread ecosystem—some were likely 120 feet tall and four feet wide. (There are few American chestnuts left on the East Coast, the result of a blight first noticed at the Bronx Zoo in 1904.)

**Manhattan Burning**  
As in many of the forests of the northeast, the Lenape managed their environment on Mannahatta by controlled burning. Much of the forest was burned regularly. The Harlem plain seems to have been kept open by regular burning, probably for use as a hunting ground.

**Deep Waters**  
The Collect Pond, as much as 70 feet deep, was the largest body of freshwater on the island, and was a center of lower-Mannahatta culture for eons. The Lenape settlement just to its southwest may have had three longhouses and six wigwams, housing possibly 100 people. The Dutch and English used it for fishing and drinking—fishing with nets was banned in 1734. During the Revolution, there were rumors of a Loch Ness-type monster that was said to have consumed a Hessian soldier. The tanning industry that sprang up on its banks terminally poisoned it by the early-nineteenth century, and a canal was dug along the course of Lispenard's Creek—roughly, today's Canal Street—to drain it. The slum known as Five Points was built on the swampy, fetid infill—part of what gave the neighborhood its particular charm.

**Contact**  
On September 12, 1609, Henry Hudson, a British captain sailing for the Dutch East India Company in search of a passage to the east, anchored the *Half Moon* off Manhattan. "It is as pleasant a land as one can tread upon," the log noted. The Lenape came out by canoe to meet the ship, and Hudson traded with them for beans and oysters. Later, possibly at Jeffrey's Hook, now the Manhattan terminus of the George Washington Bridge, the Lenape attacked Hudson's ship.

**Spring Is Here**  
Aaron Burr's Manhattan Water Company commercialized this spring near the corner of Broadway and Spring Street. On January 2, 1800, the body of a woman named Juliana Elmore Sands was said to have been found in a well at the spring, after which there were legends of ghosts. In 1974, a resident of a building on the corner claimed that a mossy apparition rose from his water bed.

**Hunter and Hunted**  
In Mannahatta as everywhere in the northeastern forest, wolves were the dominant predators. Their population was decimated in the 1720s after a determined hunt in the forests of Inwood.

**Crossing the Water**  
The Lenape crossed from Manhattan to the Bronx over Spuyten Duyvil Creek at what was known as the Wading Place, near 220th Street and Broadway.

**Crosstown East**  
The Saw Kill had the biggest watershed of all of Mannahatta's streams and creeks, with its headwaters near 85th Street and Columbus Avenue. The island's streams tended to flow southeast, following the glacier's course.

**Swampy Terrain**  
Great Kill drained much of midtown, emptying into the Hudson at 42nd Street. There may have been a beaver pond in Times Square.

**Hill of a Town**  
Mannahatta was known as the "island of many hills," some 573 in all. The tallest was, and is, Mount Washington, in Washington Heights. Downtown's tallest hill was Bayard's Mount, just north of the Collect Pond. Another notable feature was the Sand Hills, a miniature dunelike range covered with scrub oak running from Tribeca into the Village that separated the salt marshes of downtown from the heavy chestnut-and-oak forests of the West Village extending north.

**Island Tribes**  
The Lenape are more commonly known as the Delaware. William Penn called them "the most merry Creatures that Live, Feast and Dance almost perpetually; they never have much, nor want much: Wealth circulateth like the Blood, all parts partake." At least three separate communities seem to have inhabited Manhattan. They grew corn, beans, squash, and tobacco, and hunted the abundant wildlife, but agriculture probably provided only a secondary part of their diet. Seafood was the staple. They fished for shad in the spring, trapped eel in the fall, and ate huge numbers of shellfish. Downtown's Indians were known as the Manahate. They had a settlement on the Collect Pond as well as on harbor islands. They may have been connected to the Canarsee, of Brooklyn. Their enemies were the Sankhikan, of central New Jersey.



The vegetation on the Sand Hills may have looked much like this pitch-pine-and-scrub-oak barren in Long Island.



A Lenape ceremonial mask (in the collection of the American Museum of Natural History) from Lenape in Ontario, Canada.

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