

Where I Live: Connecticut
Learning Through Places: The Tantaquidgeon Museum



Displays in the Tantaquidgeon Museum. Courtesy of the Tantaquidgeon Museum

What do you see in the photograph?

What kind of place is this? What is it being used for?

Does it look like a museum that you have been to?

What kinds of objects have been included in the displays?

Do these objects look new or old?

Why do you think these objects are special?



Let's learn about this place!



The Tantaquidgeon Museum is the museum of the Mohegan Tribe. The Mohegans are Native Americans. Sometimes they are called First Peoples.

(left) Tantaquidgeon Museum, Uncasville, Connecticut, built in 1931. Photo: Mary Donohue, 2018

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(below right) Sculpture of Gladys Tantaquidgeon called "The Offering" by Armand LaMontagne, Tantaquidgeon Museum. photo: Mary Donohue, 2018

They lived here before the European settlers came.

The Mohegan Tribe is located in southeastern Connecticut near Norwich. The museum is on the Mohegan Tribe's reservation. A reservation is land that belongs to an Indian tribe. The tribe has governed their land and people for hundreds of years.

In 1931 members of the Tantaquidgeon family founded the museum. Harold Tantaquidgeon was the chief of the Mohegan Tribe. His sister, Gladys, was the tribal medicine woman.

Harold, Gladys, and their father John believed that the tribe needed a place to keep tribal objects. A museum would help save their tribe's history. People could learn about the Mohegans there. The Tantaquidgeons believed that "It's hard to hate someone who you know a lot about."

They built a small, stone building. Other tribal members soon brought important items to put on display. You will see turtle shell rattles, baskets, bowls, pipes, bows, arrows, and more. Clothes that are worn in important tribal ceremonies are on display, too.

Gladys Tantaquidgeon: A History Hero

Sometimes one person can make a big difference! Gladys Tantaquidgeon is a history hero. She helped save the stories and objects that tell her tribe's history. As a child, she learned about her tribe's beliefs and traditional herbal medicines. She learned them from her elders. Many of these stories and recipes were passed down by word of mouth. The information was not written down. It was told to her and others in stories, songs, chants, recipes, and folktales. Many activities, too, were taught orally or person to person.

Gladys went to college and studied anthropology. Anthropology is the study of human societies and cultures. She wrote a book about Native American medicine.



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She came back to Connecticut in the 1940s. She collected as much information as she could about the Mohegans. She wrote it down. Her records helped the Mohegan Tribe become officially recognized in 1994 by the United States government.

Things to See at the Museum

The Tantaquidgeon Museum has outdoor exhibits, too. You can visit a model Mohegan village. You can go inside a wigwam and a longhouse. There is a garden, and fire pit surrounded by a fence. There is a walking trail. The wigwam and longhouse are traditional houses. They were built from things that could be found in the Connecticut woods, such as tree saplings and bark.

photos: Mary Donohue, 2018



A wigwam is a dwelling for one or two families. The frame is made of young saplings. One end is buried in the ground. The other end is bent over and tied to other saplings. They make the shape of a dome. The frame is covered with thick

tree bark in winter. In summer it is covered in woven mats made of reeds. An opening at the top let's smoke from the cooking fire escape.

(right) Frame for a wigwam, c. 1936.
Connecticut State Library



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A longhouse is often 20 to 40 feet long. It's also covered with tree bark. Sometimes a dozen families lived in a longhouse. Each family had its own fire pit and places to sleep. Photo: Mary Donohue, 2018

ACTIVITIES

1. Become a history hero! Interview your mom, dad, or other older family members about where your family came from, family traditions, and favorite family recipes. Write down what they tell you so it can be saved for the future. Add a photograph or drawing that illustrates your family history. Or, write a song, story, or poem about what you learned about your family history and perform it for your family or your class. Record it or make a video to save it for the future.
2. Make your own museum! Look for five things around your house that would fit in a shoebox that could tell your story. Include things about your family, your school, your friends, and about you. Write a museum label for each item that says why it is important to you. What story do they tell about you? Put the shoebox, items, and the labels on exhibit at your house or in your classroom.
3. Visit a museum about Connecticut's First Peoples. Connecticut has three museums where you can learn about Connecticut's Native American tribes.

