

Land Heist in the Highlands: Chief Daniel Nimham and the Wappinger Fight for Homeland

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Although many residents of the Highlands are familiar with *Last of the Mohicans*, surprisingly few have heard of Chief Daniel Nimham. Nimham has been described **“as the most prominent American Indian associated with the Hudson Valley in the second half of the 18th century.”**¹ A member of the Wappinger tribe residing in what today would be Putnam and Dutchess counties, according to American Indian scholar, Larry Hauptman, Nimham was a “diplomat, soldier, and sachem” who chose diplomacy over the sword in an age when his white counterparts rebelled violently against overreaching and overbearing landlords.

Daniel Nimham is believed to have born in 1726 and reportedly was baptized in 1745 when he likely received his Christian name Daniel.² One of his allies was a pioneering and intrepid woman named Catheryna Brett, who, as a widow, ran a mill, managed thousands of acres of land in Fishkill, and set up the first produce cooperative in the Hudson River Highlands.³ Catheryna was friends with Nimham’s grandfather and may have taught Daniel how to speak English. Her boys and the chief may have even grown up playing together.⁴

As Lenape scholar Robert Grumet suggests, **“Daniel Nimham was a man caught between two worlds. He grew up at a time when missionaries and farmers began moving to the Highlands in increasing numbers. A bright and articulate youth, he learned to speak English by listening to his new neighbors. When he was cast later in life into a lion's den of war and intrigue, his multicultural skills ultimately took him to the halls of government in New York and London in pursuit of land and justice for his people. He became notorious among supporters and enemies alike as the energetic and assertive defender of his people's land rights... Betrayed and abandoned by Crown officials appointed to look after his interests, he subsequently took common cause with colonists struggling to free themselves from royal authority.”**⁵

Nimham’s Fight for His People and Their Homeland

In 1687, two Dutch traders, Jan Roelof Sybrandt and Lambert Dorland purchased a license from New York Governor Benjamin Fletcher for 15,000 acres along the eastern Hudson River shore of today’s

¹ Laurence M. Hauptman, “The Road to Kingsbridge: Daniel Nimham and the Stockbridge Indian Company in the American Revolution,” *American Indian Magazine*, Vol. 18, No. 3 (Fall 2017).

² Thomas F. Maxon, *Mount Nimham: The Ridge of Patriots, Historical Timeline* (New York: Thomas Maxon, 2009), 22.

³ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Madam_Brett_Homestead

⁴ Thomas F. Maxon, *Mount Nimham: The Ridge of Patriots, Historical Timeline* (New York: Thomas Maxon, 2009), 20.

⁵ Robert S. Grumet, *The Nimhams of the Colonial Hudson Valley, 1667- 1783*, *Hudson Valley Regional Review* (September 1992), 9.2: 80-99

Putnam County, with the stipulation that an Indian deed be acquired by June 2, 1688 and letters patent by July 1, 1688.⁶ The property was described as a strip of land along the Hudson shore in the Highland, “beginning at the north side of a hill called Anthony’s Nose at a marked Red Seader Tree, and along said River Northerly to the Land belonging to Stephanus Van Cortlandt and the Heirs of Francis Rhombout and G. Verplanck, and Eastwards in the Woods as far along the said Lands of Stephanus Cortland and Co. aforesaid to a marked tree...”⁷

Because the Eastern boundary was never clearly defined, the Governor at the time did not grant a patent, waiting for a more detailed survey.⁸ Further, although required by the Governor to obtain an Indian deed for the parcel by 1688, Sybrant and Dorland did not manage to acquire a deed for the 15,000 acre tract until 1691.⁹

Nonetheless, on June 16, 1697 Adolph Philipse, the son of land baron, slave trader, mill owner, and owner of almost one third of Westchester County, Fredrick Philipse, bought the property from Sybrant and Dorland.¹⁰ Amazingly, the next day Adolph received a royal patent from Governor Fletcher extending the eastern boundary approximately an additional 190,000 acres to the CT border!¹¹ Adolph’s cozy relationship with the governor more than likely facilitated the transaction. Taking advantage of the hazy description of the eastern boundary, one story even suggests that Philipse cut down the tree marking the eastern border, rode all day and remarked a tree near the CT border.¹² Although Adolph Philipse managed to acquire a patent for the enlarged property, no deed was ever recorded as he likely realized it would have been considered invalid due to the fuzzy Eastern boundary and because no additional compensation had been provided to the Wappinger for this massive eastward expansion.¹³ The recording of deeds was—and still is—an important step in the legal process of authenticating land transactions.¹⁴

In 1750 Adolph Philipse died, leaving the 200,000 acre plus holding to his nephew Fredrick Philipse II. Fredrick only lived a year before passing away and bequeathing the land evenly to his three children: Philip, Susannah, and Mary. The Philipse sisters, Susannah and Mary, married Beverly Robinson and Roger Morris respectively. Effectively marrying into wealth, Robinson and Morris each laid claim to approximately 60,000 acres of land, or roughly two thirds, of contested Wappinger land, encompassing over three quarters of today’s Putnam County .¹⁵

⁶ Bernis Nelson, local real estate attorney at law/researcher, email correspondence, January 2019.

⁷ Oscar Handlin and Irving Mark, “Chief Daniel Nimham v. Roger Morris, Beverly Robinson, and Philip Philipse - An Indian Land Case in Colonial New York, 1765-1767”, *Ethnohistory*, Vol. 11, No. 3 (Summer 1964), Published by Duke University Press: 198.

⁸ Henry Noble MacCracken, *Old Dutchess Forever! The Story of An American County* (New York: Hastings House), 52.

⁹ Bernis Nelson, local real estate attorney at law/researcher, email correspondence, January 2019.

¹⁰ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Frederick_Philipse

¹¹ Henry Noble MacCracken, *Old Dutchess Forever! The Story of An American County* (New York: Hastings House), 52.

¹² Thomas J. Humphrey, *Land and Liberty, Hudson Valley Riots In The Age of Revolution (Illinois: Northern Illinois University Press)*, 15

¹³ Thomas F. Maxon, *Mount Nimham: The Ridge of Patriots, Historical Timeline* (New York: Thomas Maxon, 2009), 19.

¹⁴ Thomas F. Maxon, *Mount Nimham: The Ridge of Patriots, Historical Timeline* (New York: Thomas Maxon, 2009), 29.

¹⁵ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Philipse_Patent

In 1756, taking advantage of the fact that the Wappinger men were off fighting for the British in the French and Indian War, Robinson and Morris began an aggressive campaign notifying tenants on Wappinger land that they had to sign new leases or vacate. Some of the tenants had leases with the Wappinger going back 30 years or more.¹⁶

When the Wappinger returned from fighting for the Crown in the French and Indian War they were dismayed to discover that not only had their hunting grounds been disturbed, but that their land had also been claimed by Robinson, Morris and Philipse. Their consternation led Chief Nimham, representing the tribe, to file a claim against the landlords in 1762.¹⁷

In 1763 tenants on Wappinger land who were forced to sign new leases with Robinson, Morris, and Philips, petitioned the King for assistance, complaining that the men had “Discouraged people from Building Houses and planting orchards” in addition to evicting tenants who had “good and warrantable title by Lease Deed.”¹⁸ Robinson in particular was targeted for his especially aggressive approach and his refusal to acknowledge the life-long leases already present. A clash was in the making between the tenants’ belief in their right to the land because of land occupancy, labor, and existing Wappinger lease agreements, and the landlords view of ownership by title.¹⁹

The 1765 Land Hearing for the Wappinger

The increasing tensions motivated the New York Common Council in 1765 to finally grant a hearing to the Wappinger and aggrieved tenants. With the assistance of attorney and Wappinger tenant Samuel Munroe, Nimham presented his case to the Council detailing how Adolph Philipse had never purchased the land beyond the 15,000 acre holdings from Dorland and Sybrandt and that no Indian deed existed to legitimize the drastic 190,000 acre expansion of Philipse holdings by Governor Fletcher. As the case wrapped up, it was looking favorable for Nimham. However, in an 11th hour surprise, Beverly Robinson reached into his coat pocket and produced a deed dated August 13, 1702 which included language covering the whole 205,000 acre parcel and extended the Eastern border all the way to CT.²⁰ Nimham and Munroe were allowed to briefly inspect the document and just as Munroe “was about to point out some mark of Fraud attending it... one of the Gentlemen of Council took the Same from him, and turning himself to the Petitioners told them that they had best go Home about their Business...”²¹. The deed having never been seen before, nor recorded or registered with New York State, was either entirely fake or had been “surreptitiously obtained” from the named Indians, likely under duress or by

¹⁶ Thomas J. Humphrey, *Land and Liberty, Hudson Valley Riots In The Age of Revolution (Illinois: Northern Illinois University Press)*, 66.

¹⁷ Thomas F. Maxon, *Mount Nimham: The Ridge of Patriots, Historical Timeline* (New York: Thomas Maxon, 2009), 27.

¹⁸ Thomas J. Humphrey, *Land and Liberty, Hudson Valley Riots In The Age of Revolution (Illinois: Northern Illinois University Press)*, 66.

¹⁹ Thomas J. Humphrey, *Land and Liberty, Hudson Valley Riots In The Age of Revolution (Illinois: Northern Illinois University Press)*, 10.

²⁰ Oscar Handlin and Irving Mark, “Chief Daniel Nimham v. Roger Morris, Beverly Robinson, and Philip Philipse - An Indian Land Case in Colonial New York, 1765-1767”, *Ethnohistory*, Vol. 11, No. 3 (Summer 1964), Published by Duke University Press: 199.

²¹ Oscar Handlin and Irving Mark, “Chief Daniel Nimham v. Roger Morris, Beverly Robinson, and Philip Philipse - An Indian Land Case in Colonial New York, 1765-1767”, *Ethnohistory*, Vol. 11, No. 3 (Summer 1964), Published by Duke University Press: 204.

means of bribery.²² Although some of the Indian names on the document were indeed authentic, according to an observer present at the hearing, Nimham stated that “he never knew, nor heard of their making any Conveyance of said lands, nor of their having any authority to dispose the same.”²³

Despite the questionable nature of Robinson’s 1702 “Indian Deed,” an investigation by New York Attorney General John Kempe, favorable to the landlords, was enough to persuade the Council to rule against Nimham and the Wappinger.²⁴ Befuddled by Indian descriptions of land that confused him, Kempe concluded that the land claimed by Nimham seemed not to agree with the description of the area in question. His interpretation led the New York Common Council in 1765 to reject the Wappinger’s petition. Adding insult to injury, two days later, New York colonial authorities arrested the Wappinger’s attorney, Samuel Munroe on seemingly bogus charges of “Champerty and Maintenance.”*²⁵

The Hudson Valley Land Riots of 1766

Taking advantage of the favorable Council ruling, Robinson and Sheriff James Livingston wasted no time in evicting tenants unwilling to sign one to three year leases and pay rents in cash (traditionally rents were paid in agricultural products).²⁶ Resistant tenants were harshly dealt with, some even being burned out of their homes. A Connecticut lawyer, who anonymously wrote a firsthand account of the situation made this observation:**

“The said Mr. Robinson without any manner of legal warrant, or authority for so doing, thereupon having collected a body of upwards of 200 soldiers, consisting partly of regular troops and partly of militia of the said province, all well armed, and supplied with ammunition, and other warlike apparatus besides wagons and wagoneers; in a warlike posture march’d up against the poor, defenceless people, under a pretence of subduing the rebels, giving out, that they had acted in open rebellion to the Crown of Great Britain, that were a pack of Rebels! Damned Rebels! And Traitors! And upon a Sabbath day, long to be remembered, arrived among the inhabitants aforesaid, and in a hostile manner, drove them out before them, burnt and destroyed some of their houses pillaged and plundered others, stove their cyder barrels, turned their provisions out into the open streets, ript open their feather beds, laid open their meadows and fields of grain, and either took, or destroyed the greater part of the effects of this poor, but loyal people.”²⁷

²² Henry Noble MacCracken, *Old Dutchess Forever! The Story of An American County* (New York: Hastings House), 283.

²³ Oscar Handlin and Irving Mark, “Chief Daniel Nimham v. Roger Morris, Beverly Robinson, and Philip Philipse - An Indian Land Case in Colonial New York, 1765-1767”, *Ethnohistory*, Vol. 11, No. 3 (Summer 1964), Published by Duke University Press: 205.

²⁴ Thomas J. Humphrey, *Land and Liberty, Hudson Valley Riots In The Age of Revolution* (Illinois: Northern Illinois University Press), 66.

²⁵ Ibid, 206.

²⁶ Thomas J. Humphrey, *Land and Liberty, Hudson Valley Riots In The Age of Revolution* (Illinois: Northern Illinois University Press), 67.

²⁷ Oscar Handlin and Irving Mark, “Chief Daniel Nimham v. Roger Morris, Beverly Robinson, and Philip Philipse - An Indian Land Case in Colonial New York, 1765-1767”, *Ethnohistory*, Vol. 11, No. 3 (Summer 1964), Published by Duke University Press: 209.

*Champerty is essentially “ambulance chasing” – agreeing to take on a suit with the intention of sharing in the financial gain of the suit

Robinson's rough dealings with noncompliant tenants soon led to violent clashes between Robinson's mercenaries (joined by tenants willing to sign revised leases), and tenants resistant to those forces. The new Robinson leases were far less desirable than those the tenants had with the Wappinger. In a shrewd attempt to garner widespread tenant support and counter the harsh terms of Robinson's and Morris's leases, Nimham, representing the Wappinger, began offering leases to tenants with terms as generous as "2 peppercorns per annum to be paid on the feast of Saint Michael the Archangel for 999 years."²⁸ These attractive agreements became known as "Indian deeds" and did indeed garner popular tenant support.²⁹

Although tenants were happy to sign leases with the Wappinger, these agreements were not recognized by Robinson, Morris and Philipse, who continued to evict tenants who failed to sign new leases with them. In the fall of 1765 while meeting at a tavern in Patterson, NY, frustrated tenants nominated Irish emigrant William Prendergast of Pawling, NY to lead their revolt against the landlords.³⁰ Inspired to action after finding out that he was paying more in rent for his 120 acre farm than Roger Morris was paying to the Crown for his 60,000 acre estate, Prendergast became a fiery, outspoken champion of the average yeoman.³¹

The situation soon turned ugly as mobs of land rioters began to evict, sometimes forcefully, new tenants that had signed revised leases with either Robinson, Morris, or Philips. In the spring of 1766 Prendergast led an angry group of approximately 200 men to New York City to free rioters that authorities had imprisoned.³² Prendergast and the mob threatened to burn down New York City if the men were not released.³³ Governor Moore acquiesced to the rioter's demands to deescalate the situation, but because of landlord pressure, soon reneged on his word and proceeded to put a bounty on Prendergast's head and the rest of the rioters.³⁴ Prendergast was captured a few months later in July and on Aug. 6, 1766, was sentenced to: "...be hanged by the neck, and then shall be cut down alive, and his entrails and privy members shall be cut from his body, and shall be burned in his sight, and his head shall be cut off, and his body shall be divided in four parts, and shall be disposed of at the King's pleasure."³⁵

In a dramatic last ditch attempt to save her husband, Prendergast's wife, a Quaker named Mehitabel Wing, rode non-stop over 70 miles to personally petition the Governor to save her husband.³⁶ Her tear-

**Handlin and Mark state in the Introduction to their 1964 paper that the narrative they present is taken from an anonymous firsthand source that evidence indicates was a young, lawyer from CT sympathetic to the Wappinger (believed by Dutchess Historian, Henry Noble MacCracken, to be Asa Spalding, the attorney who represented the Wappinger in 1767). Handlin and Mark's version is based on a Library of Congress transcript of the original manuscript located in the British Museum.

²⁸ Henry Noble MacCracken, *Old Dutchess Forever! The Story of An American County* (New York: Hastings House), 209

²⁹ Thomas F. Maxon, *Mount Nimham: The Ridge of Patriots, Historical Timeline* (New York: Thomas Maxon, 2009), 27.

³⁰ <https://www.pawlingrecord.org/single-post/2018/08/18/The-Heroine-of-Quaker-Hill>

³¹ <https://prendergast-rent-war.blogspot.com/2015/05/from-peaceful-farmer-to-rebel-leader.html>

³² Thomas J. Humphrey, *Land and Liberty, Hudson Valley Riots In The Age of Revolution (Illinois: Northern Illinois University Press)*, 69.

³³ <https://www.pawlingrecord.org/single-post/2018/08/18/The-Heroine-of-Quaker-Hill>

³⁴ <https://www.prendergastlibrary.org/local-history/mehitable-wing-prendergast/>

³⁵ <https://www.pawlingrecord.org/single-post/2018/09/14/The-Heroine-of-Quaker-Hill>

³⁶ <https://www.prendergastlibrary.org/local-history/mehitable-wing-prendergast/>

fueled, dramatic appeal worked as the Governor issued a stay of execution for Prendergast, awaiting word from the King as to his ultimate fate. Sometime in late January or early February of 1767 word arrived from the King declaring, "His Majesty has been graciously pleased to grant him [Prendergast] this pardon, relying that this instance of His Royal clemency will have a better effect in recalling these mistaken people to their duty than the most rigorous punishment."³⁷ Although Prendergast was now free, stripped of any ability to lead the insurgents, the rioters were ultimately put down for good in two skirmishes involving British regulars that occurred in Patterson, and near Quaker Hill, NY, not far from Prendergast's home. Although two British soldiers were wounded in the Patterson battle, the rioters nonetheless were successfully dispersed and the movement quashed.

The Wappinger Response and a Second 1767 Land Hearing

The Wappinger, although allied with the insurgent tenants, interestingly steered clear of the violent uprisings. Likely aware that violent measures would backfire, the Natives chose to navigate their quarrel through the proper channels of the courts and legal system. Demoralized, but not defeated, in 1766, as the anti-rent riots in the Hudson Valley reached their climax, Chief Nimham, along with six other Wappinger (four men and three women in total), largely funded by their sympathetic tenants, sailed to England to take their case directly to the King. Although "graciously received and maintained at the Government's expense," because they had arrived without the invitation of the King and had no letter of introduction from New York authorities, the Natives were met by the Lords of Trade instead of the King himself.³⁸ Nonetheless, the Secretary of State and the Lords of Trade viewed the Wappinger and their cause in a favorable light. On behalf of the King, Secretary Shelburne instructed Governor Moore to **"take under your most serious consideration the case of these distressed people and turn your thoughts to every possible measure that may obtain for them a just and lasting satisfaction and that you will take on yourself as far as justice and the reason of the thing shall demand the office of their advocate and protector."**³⁹

With this promising resolution Nimham and the rest of the group set sail to return home in late September, likely right around the time Prendergast had received his death sentence. On their return sometime in the fall of 1766, Nimham refiled his claim against the landlords' land grab. A trial was scheduled for March of 1767. Nimham struggled to find an attorney as all local attorneys had been put on retainer by Morris and Robinson.⁴⁰ Finally, just a week before the trial, Nimham was able to hire a bright young lawyer, a Yale graduate from Connecticut named Asa Spalding.

Considering the circumstances Spalding argued an impressive case for the Wappinger, bringing forth "clouds of witnesses," some of which gave quite damning evidence against the landlords. A Daniel Townshend stated how when he first moved on to the land in 1738 he had to reach an agreement with the Wappinger. Tenant farmer James Philips, "found a wigwam on his land" and was forced to make an

³⁷ <https://www.pawlingrecord.org/single-post/2018/10/26/The-Heroine-of-Quaker-Hill-Part-V-%E2%80%93-Happily-Ever-After>

³⁸Oscar Handlin and Irving Mark, "Chief Daniel Nimham v. Roger Morris, Beverly Robinson, and Philip Philipse - An Indian Land Case in Colonial New York, 1765-1767", *Ethnohistory*, Vol. 11, No. 3 (Summer 1964), Published by Duke University Press: 210.

³⁹Henry Noble MacCracken, *Old Dutchess Forever! The Story of An American County* (New York: Hastings House), 293.

⁴⁰ Oscar Handlin and Irving Mark, "Chief Daniel Nimham v. Roger Morris, Beverly Robinson, and Philip Philipse - An Indian Land Case in Colonial New York, 1765-1767", *Ethnohistory*, Vol. 11, No. 3 (Summer 1964), Published by Duke University Press: 211.

agreement with the Wappinger. Further, he “lived peaceably, and quietly under them for the space of about seventeen years; and that in all his life he never saw Mr. Adolph Philipse, to his knowledge.” An old, well-respected, attorney and local resident, James Brown testified that years earlier Adolph Philipse himself had stated that “the land was never owned by him.” A local judge, Judge Terbos, who even had learned to speak the language of the Wappinger, affirmed that Adolph Philipse had wanted to meet with the tribe to discuss land purchase but never did:

“...Mr. Philipse told the said Sachem that he and his Tribe must all come together and then he would agree with them for said Land and pay them for the Same: but the said Judge Terbos further adds, that he never knew, nor heard of any meeting for that Purpose, nor that they nor any of them, ever made or Executed any Deed of said Land to said Mr Adolph Philipse nor to any other Person; but ever knew and understood that said Tribe of Indians always Claimed and do Still Claim the sole Right to said Lands.”⁴¹

Tenant farmer Peter Anjuvine went on to vouch for the good character of the tribe, declaring them “remarkably Honest, Loyal, and Faithful.”⁴² Building on that, Spalding had this to say, “By some of these and some other Evidences, methinks it, also clearly appeared to have been the invariable Custom of these Indians, never to make an absolute Sale of the same piece of Land twice; but always (by Tradition) were Careful to keep up the Knowledge, and acknowledgement of such Lands as they, or their ancestors had sold, and very Curious in their nice Distinctions between alienated, and Unalienated Lands.”⁴³

Continuing on in his reflection of the trial, Spalding definitively stated, **“Several others testified that they had heard the said Adolph Philipse say (and some of them; but a little before his Death had heard him say) that although he had a Patent of said Land; yet he never had purchased the Same of the Natives, nor never could prevail upon them to sell the same.”⁴⁴** The situation prevailed even with Adolph’s heir, nephew Fredrick Philipse, “who survived his said Uncle but a few years, was often heard to lament his said Uncle’s Negligence, in that he had omitted to purchase the said Lands of the said Tribe of Indians;”⁴⁵

In addition to the parade of credible witnesses, in his closing arguments Spalding gave a rousing vindication of the Wappingers’ claim to the land, punching holes through the landlord’s sketchy and scant defense that hinged upon the questionable 1702 deed to the property: **“Was this Instrument ever acknowledged before lawful authority? No. Was it ever Inrolled or Recorded? No... And are not all these Requisite in order to render a Deed of Sale Valid and Effectual in Law? Yes, verily methinks they are.”⁴⁶**

Despite proving beyond a shadow of a doubt that the land had been improperly claimed by Philipse, Morris, and Robinson, and pointing out all of the legal statutes that their claim failed to meet, perhaps it was no surprise in whose favor the Council ruled. The landlord’s attorney summed up best why despite

⁴¹ Ibid, 218.

⁴² Henry Noble MacCracken, *Old Dutchess Forever! The Story of An American County* (New York: Hastings House),

⁴³ Oscar Handlin and Irving Mark, “Chief Daniel Nimham v. Roger Morris, Beverly Robinson, and Philip Philipse - An Indian Land Case in Colonial New York, 1765-1767”, *Ethnohistory*, Vol. 11, No. 3 (Summer 1964), Published by Duke University Press: 217.

⁴⁴ Ibid, 220.

⁴⁵ Ibid, 221.

⁴⁶ Ibid, 232.

the convincing case made by Spalding the Council ruled as it did, **“observing upon the Dangerous Consequences of admitting such Kind of Complaints... This (said he) will be of Dangerous Tendencey; Twill open a Door to the greatest Mischiefs, inasmuch as a great part of the Lands in this Province are supposed to lie under much the Same Situation; and upon the whole intimated, that it would therefore, by no means do, to give Heed to the present Complaint.”**

A ruling in favor of the Wappinger would open a can of worms, one that might unravel a whole network of questionable land claims throughout the region based largely on short dealings with the Native Americans and underhanded tactics. The trial ended in a strangely ironic twist with the head of the Council asking Mr. Spalding if the Council had not given the Wappinger a fair trial. Receiving no official ruling, Spalding, Nimham and the Wappinger returned home. Not long after, Nimham saw the Council’s verdict published in the local press and in at least one New York City newspaper on March 11, 1767:

“Upon the whole Matter, his Excellency the Governor and the Council, are unanimously of the Opinion, and do declare, that the Indians now living of the Wappinger Tribe, have no Right, Title, or Claim to the Lands granted as aforesaid by Letters Patent to the said Adolph Philipse...”⁴⁷

Despite the guidance of Secretary Shelburne and the Lords of Trade, the verdict was in; a summary and conclusive dismissal of the Wappinger and their claim. Adding insult to injury, Beverly Robinson was declared to be “a man of Character, of Prudence, and of undoubted Loyalty.”⁴⁸ Nimham was forced to move the rest of his tribe to Stockbridge, MA and relinquish all claims to the Wappinger ancestral homeland. Pockets of resistant occupation may have remained in remote, rugged deep backwoods areas like Mount Nimham (Putnam County), but the bulk of the tribe (numbering less than two hundred fifty at this point) now had to retreat to Stockbridge, joining the Mohican community there.⁴⁹

The American Revolution: One Last Chance for Justice

In April of 1775, a final opportunity for justice for Nimham and the Wappinger appeared with the arrival of the Revolutionary War. Having been betrayed by the Crown’s corrupt bureaucratic network, the Wappinger had one last chance to win back their lands and freedom. As early as the spring of 1775 Nimham traveled to Boston to declare his loyalty to the Patriot cause.⁵⁰ Joined by his son Abraham, both joined the Stockbridge Militia Company, a Native American military unit comprised of Munsee, Mohican and Wappinger largely from the Stockbridge area. As early as 1774, Native Americans from Stockbridge had met at the Red Lion Inn (later made famous in Norman Rockwell’s 1967 *Home for Christmas* painting of the Stockbridge Main Street at Christmas) pledging their loyalty to the American cause:

“Wherever your armies go, there we will go; you shall always find us by your side; and if providence calls us to sacrifice our Lives in the field of battle, we will fall where you fall, and lay our bones by

⁴⁷ Henry Noble MacCracken, *Old Dutchess Forever! The Story of An American County* (New York: Hastings House), 298

⁴⁸ Henry Noble MacCracken, *Old Dutchess Forever! The Story of An American County* (New York: Hastings House, 1957), 299

⁴⁹ Thomas F. Maxon, *Mount Nimham: The Ridge of Patriots, Historical Timeline* (New York: Thomas Maxon, 2009), 32.

⁵⁰ Laurence M. Hauptman, “The Road to Kingsbridge: Daniel Nimham and the Stockbridge Indian Company in the American Revolution,” *American Indian Magazine*, Vol. 18, No. 3 (Fall 2017).

yours. Nor shall peace ever be made between our nation and the Red-Coats until our brothers -the white people- lead the way.”⁵¹

The unit served with distinction in two iterations: first in the siege of Boston and the capture of Fort Ticonderoga in 1775, and second, as a reformed company in 1777 making significant contributions in the battles of Saratoga and Monmouth. The unit even earned the praise and respect of George Washington, who personally asked the company to assist Major General Sullivan in his expedition against the Iroquois.⁵² Daniel Nimham’s son Abraham became a Captain in the unit.

In a dramatic and unfortunate twist of fate, however, the unit’s success was to be short lived. On Aug. 31, 1778, while on a scouting expedition in what is today Van Cortlandt Park in the Bronx, Daniel Nimham and the Stockbridge were ambushed by not one but two of the British army’s most notorious units, the Queens Rangers and Tarleton’s Dragoons. Led by the infamous Captain Simcoe and the much feared Banastre Tarleton, respectively, the mounted Loyalist units surrounded and proceeded to cut down the Stockbridge Company with sabers. The Stockbridge put up a fierce defense which impressed the seasoned British officers. Simcoe commented that “the Indians fought most gallantly”, even “pulling more than one of the cavalry from their horses.”⁵³ Tarleton was pulled off his horse and could have been easily killed if the Native American that had him in his clutches had a bayonet.

In the ferocious struggle that ensued, the overwhelming British force outnumbering the natives five to one, however, proved to be too much.⁵⁴ Estimates suggest that the Stockbridge lost anywhere between 17 to 40 men, including Chief Nimham and his son. After wounding Captain Simcoe, Nimham was killed by Simcoe’s orderly, Private Edward Wight. However, before succumbing, Nimham had wounded Captain Simcoe and was reported by Simcoe to have said, that “he himself was old, and would die there.”⁵⁵

The results were devastating for the Stockbridge. The four Indians still left in military service a month later went home to their families.⁵⁶ In a cruel development, the survivors of the Company and the families of those killed were denied lands promised to soldiers who had fought on the American side.⁵⁷ Further, by 1784, those left in Stockbridge (mainly widows) had largely lost their land to land speculators and settlers using unscrupulous means.⁵⁸

Taking up an Oneida offer to help, by the mid-1780s, most of the Stockbridge Natives moved north to join the Oneida, near Oneida Lake, forming New Stockbridge. Building a school, church, and a sawmill, the community flourished for a number of years. However, the success of the community was to be

⁵¹ Katharine Mixer Abbott, *Old Paths and Legends of the New England Border: Connecticut, Deerfield, Berkshire* (New York: The Knickerbocker Press, 1907) 228- 230. (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Stockbridge_Militia)

⁵²Bryan Rindfleisch, “The Stockbridge-Mohican Community, 1775- 1783”, *Journal of the American Revolution* (Feb. 3, 2016), <https://allthingsliberty.com/2016/02/the-stockbridge-mohican-community-1775-1783/> .

⁵³ John Graves Simcoe, *Simcoe’s Military Journal*, 86

⁵⁴ Robert S. Grumet, *The Nimhams of the Colonial Hudson Valley, 1667- 1783*, *Hudson Valley Regional Review* (September 1992), 9.2: 91

⁵⁵ John Graves Simcoe, *Simcoe’s Military Journal*, 86

⁵⁶Laurence M. Hauptman, “The Road to Kingsbridge: Daniel Nimham and the Stockbridge Indian Company in the American Revolution,” *American Indian Magazine*, Vol. 18, No. 3 (Fall 2017).

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ “Origin and Early History,” Stockbridge-Munsee Community, Band of Mohican Indians website, accessed 9/4/2020, <https://www.mohican.com/?url=origin-early-history>

short-lived. Starting in 1818, pressured by land companies pushing New York to remove all Indians from its borders, many Oneida and Stockbridge left New York for good, heading first to Michigan and then Wisconsin.⁵⁹

In 1832 the final straw broke when Congress enacted President Andrew Jackson's Indian Removal Act by which all Indians from the East would be moved to lands west of the Mississippi River. According to Stockbridge-Munsee Community, Band of Mohicans tribal history, "A group of Stockbridge Mohicans, fearing the inevitable, moved to Kansas and Oklahoma in 1839. Many died while making this journey. Some reached Kansas and Oklahoma and married into other tribes. Most simply gave up and returned to Wisconsin, which had gained statehood in 1848. During this period a group of Munsee joined the people at Stockbridge, Wisconsin, and were accepted into the community. Known at first as the Stockbridge and Munsee, eventually this community was simply called the 'Stockbridge-Munsee.'"⁶⁰

Showcasing the resilience of Daniel Nimham and the Stockbridge, today, the Stockbridge Munsee Mohican Indian Nation thrives, running a casino, a golf course and resort, and a convenience store franchise in Shawano County, Wisconsin. Further, ancestors of stalwart Wappinger holdouts still remain in the Northeast, highlighting that the Nimham legacy lives on.⁶¹

Although cheated out of land, liberty, and justice, the saga of Chief Daniel Nimham and his people is now being brought to light and commemorated. If not for the coronavirus, the Daniel Nimham Intertribal Pow Wow would have been celebrating its 20th season. In addition to recent monuments in the County and a Veteran's medal featuring Nimham, in East Fishkill, a new sculpture is in the works by noted sculptor Michael Keropian, as the story of Daniel Nimham and his people continues.⁶²

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ Michael Keropian, Artist and Nimham researcher, personal communication, Jan. 2019

⁶² Michael Keropian, Artist and Nimham researcher, personal communication, Jan. 2019