EAST RIVER PARK, EAST SIDE COASTAL RESILIENCY PROJECT (ESCR) & CORLEARS HOOK MASSACRE, LEANAPEHOKING REPORT

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Key information: The Corlears Hook Massacre was approximately 40 Wiechquaesgeck individuals on February 25-26, 1643 (Brodahead 1853-7; Grumet 1981, 2013; Kraft 1986; Pietersz de Vries in Jameson, J.F. 1909). The Wiechquaesgeck “inhabited portions of northern Manhattan, all of Bronx Country, most of southern Westchester County below Ossining, and the westernmost sections of Fairfield county, Connecticut, from Norwalk to the New York border… The Wiechquaesgeck were a large collection of Munsee Delaware-speaking groups…” (Grumet 1981: 60).

The massacre was a catalytic event in shaping Kieft’s (Indian) War 1643–45 which is generally seen to have been started with this massacre at Corlears Hook and a simultaneous massacre at Pavonia, NJ (Lawson and Lawson 2019, Panchyk 2011). Some historians date it from 1640–45 citing other skirmishes and disputes which lead to the February 1643 massacre. Trelease adds in the period between 1643–1645 alone the Dutch were engaged in conflicts with eleven bands of Indigenous groups from the region and states that, “Governor Kieft's approach in the 1640's was to cow the Indians into submission, and, failing that, to exterminate them” (Trelease 1962: 140).

Location of Massacre

An essential resource for looking at the precolonial and early colonial geography of Manhattan is The Welikia Project map. This map is constructed from historical maps, “soil surveys, tree rings, descriptions of plant life and animal life, historical accounts, [and] … field surveys from today”. The base map which was used to georeference the 1609 coastline, topography and ecology is the 1782 British Headquarters map which is an extremely detailed topographic map with natural features “such as salt marshes, streams, hills, and woods”, created by the British military when they controlled New York city during the American Revolution.

See www.oasisnyc.net/map.asp For an overlay of the Welikia / Mannahatta 1609 map with current NYC geography.

For more information see:
https://welikia.org/about/how-it-all-began/
https://welikia.org/science/recreating-mannahatta/

Corlears Hook location is documented as being approximately in the same area as Corlears Hook Park, with the shoreline area shifting due to landfill and the expansion of landmass in southern Manhattan. Corlear’s Plantation is a larger area bounded by the current Grand St. and Montgomery St. (see Figure 4).

The Welikia / Mannahatta 1609 map shows that the current “Corlears Hook Park” west of the FDR was part of the original landmass of Manhattan (See Figure 1,2,3). The Welikia map also shows a strip of the East River Park is part of the original landmass of Manhattan, while other sections appear to be landfill. Another section of the area seems to be lost to coastal erosion or dredging. Many of the historical maps are consistent with showing “Corlears Hook Park” as naturally occurring while the area of the East River Park is regularly documented as landfill. The Welikia / Mannahatta map contradicts the Phase I A Archaeological Documentary Study, which
claims to have “shown that the entire APE was once under the water of the East River, and was
landfilled at various times between the 1810s and about 1850, with city streets created to
separate and define newly formed blocks” (Historical Perspectives, Inc. 2006, 40).

A small contradictory note is made on page 9 of the Refinement of Archaeological Area of
Potential Effect East Side Coastal Resiliency Project which states “The large majority of this
sub-segment was originally under water of the East River. The exception was one small strip that
was part of Corlears Hook, corresponding roughly to the location of the northeastern part of the
FDR Drive between Jackson Street and the pedestrian bridge”.

Corlears Hook Park might be an area of archaeological significance and it is currently inside the
East Side Coastal Resiliency Project primary (400 -foot) APE. A small portion of the park is in
Project Area One where a new pedestrian footbridge is to be constructed. (See Figure 3)

Key questions for locating historical Corlear’s Hook:

1) Where are the exact sites that the soil boring logs samples were taken which are referenced in
the Phase IA?
2) Are these soil boring findings consistent with the Welikia Project?

Core samples were taken in 1962, 1984, and 2015, the latest of which is “the least detailed in
terms of recording subsurface conditions” (Historical Perspectives, Inc. 2006, 11). The soil
boring logs cited consistently show the East River Park as constructed on landfill. In contrast, the
Welikia Project map shows that areas of the East River Park should be original landmass and
could be where the massacre took place. Finding where the sites of the soil boring were taken
will help determine if the Welikia Project map is accurate and if the coastline it describes is
accurate. (See: Figures 1a, 1b, and 2)

Nechtanc Village

The Phase IA report for the East Side Coastal Resiliency Project Montgomery Street to
Rivington Street Manhattan, New York County states: “According to Bolton’s 1922 map of
Native American trails, the village was located atop a large hill, later known as Jones’ Hill, in the
vicinity of the intersection of Jefferson, Henry, Clinton, and Madison Streets (Bolton 1922)
Following this the report states: “Brutal wars with the Dutch took place in the early 1640s, and
forced many Native Americans to flee their homelands. Ultimately, Nechtanc was not a safe
haven for them, and in 1643, the Dutch staged a nighttime attack on several Native American
villages, including Nechtanc, at which time many Native Americans were killed in their sleep”
(Grumet 1981).

The above passage is in reference to the February 1643 massacre but here information seems to
be conflated. Was Nechtanc still an active village site at the time of the massacre? This seems to
be what the report is stating. Who were the primary residents of Nechtanc? Those murdered were
a group of Wiechquaesgeck seeking refuge. The location of Jefferson, Henry, Clinton, and
Madison Streets is thought to be the approximate location of Nechtanc, not the massacre site. I
am unsure if Nechtanc was an active settlement at the time of the massacre. This important because we might assume that the Wiechquaesgeck were staying in Nechtanc if it was an active village. The village seems to be located further from Corlears Hook where construction is going to take place. Grumet’s research seems to suggest the village was in the vicinity and active in the recent past but there are other sources not cited in the report (see below). We must separate Nechtanc the village (also called RECHTAUCE or RECHTANCK) from the event of the massacre in February 1643. We can look at Nechtanc and the massacre as two different locations that are in close proximity. If information about the massacre and indigenous history of the area is sought to be incorporated into the public discourse around the creation of the new East River Park, Nechtanc should be considered separately to the massacre as nearby village site in southern Manhattan.

A note on the above passage - This passage is quoted verbatim in serval other Phase 1A Studies which conducted by different consultant companies. I have seen the same passage published by AKRF, Inc for the Phase 1A Archaeological Documentary Study for the Grand Street Housing, Block 341 Lots 1, 58, and 70, New York in 2019.

Below are seven other reports using the same or similar accounts of Nechtanc and the massacre at Corlears Hook.

- **Stage 1A Archaeological Study for Proposed Improvements to Coenties Slip for the Office-Trading Facility at 55 Water Street, Manhattan, New York, New York. 01DCP020M**
  2000, Historical Perspectives, Inc.

- **East River Waterfront Access Project: Phase 1A Archaeological Documentary Study of Peck Slip between Pearl and South Streets; Water Street between Beekman and Dover Streets; and Front Street between Peck Slip and Dover Street.**
  2007, AFRF, Inc.

- **East River Waterfront Access Project: Phase IA Archaeological Documentary Study of Montgomery Street between Madison and South Streets, New York, New York**
  2009, AKRF, Inc.

- **East River Waterfront Access Project: Phase IA Archaeological Documentary Study of Catherine Slip between Madison and South Streets; New York, NY**
  2009, AKRF, Inc.

- **Phase IA Archaeological Documentary Study: Pike and Allen Streets: Center Median Reconstruction Between Delancey and South Streets, New York, New York**
  2010, Allee King Rosen & Fleming, Inc.

- **New York City Borough-Based Jails Manhattan Site: 80 Centre Street, 125 White Street, and the Street bed of Hogan Place between Centre and Baxter Streets**
  2018, AKRF, Inc.
The habit of reusing this passage seems to have begun in 1977 with the Cultural Resource Reconnaissance East River Reach New York Harbor Collection & Removal of Drift Project. This report cites Bolton 1922 and the more recent Phase 1A studies regularly include Grumet’s 1981 publication. This leaves me skeptical that any significant investigative research has been recently conducted, as so many Phase 1A reports use the same sources and sound similar over a forty year period. The APE of these other reports are not close to Nechtanc or the massacre site, but they have noted the existence of the Indigenous history of the location. The current East Side Resiliency Project APE is in the direct vicinity of the reported area of the massacre site and deserves more attention as sources have been continuously recycled over many years.

Varying accounts of Nechtanc

Cantwell and Wall (2001) in Unearthing Gotham give the impression that Nechtanc was still an active village site during Keift’s aggressions which lead to the massacre: “The Munsee families moved into refugee camps near other relatives, one at Nechtanc (the modern Corlear’s Hook) to the northeast of the Dutch fort and the other just across the Hudson at Pavonia in what is now Jersey City” (Cantwell and Wall 2001:126).

Grumet (1981) states Nechtanc was a Wiechquaesgeck refugee village: “the Wiechquaesgeck became the victims of Dutch vengeance. Their refugee villages at Nechtanc and Pavonia, now Jersey City, were attached and the inhabitants massacred during the night of 25-26 February 1643” (Grumet 1981: 61).

Grumet more recently (2013) frames Nechtanc as a camp: “Nechtank, an overnight camp catering to Indians visiting nearby New Amsterdam operated by a local sachem named Numerus. It became one of two places where Lower Hudson River Indians (the other was Pavonia, in present-day Jersey City) taking refuge under Dutch protection from a Mohawk or Mahican raid were murderously assaulted by detachments ordered out by Governor Kieft on the night of February 25–26, 1643. At least 120 people, mostly women, children, and elders, were killed in the attacks, which led to the bloodiest phase of Governor Kieft’s War”.

Winkler (1998) states, “these Indians moved south and encamped at Pavonia with Indians of the Hackensack tribe while the rest crossed the river to join some Indians encamped at Corlaer’s plantation astride the East River” (Winkler, 1998). This article does not mention the village of Nechtanc, but an encampment.

Through my research I have seen many of secondary sources conflate Corlear’s plantation and Corlears Hook as if they are the same place. From the deed of sale it states: “purchase of a certain parcel of land, situated on the East river and called Corlaers Hoeck, with his plantation and hook lying on the island of Manhattans, called in the Indian tongue Nechtтанck, adjoining the said plantation” (see: https://nahc-mapping.org/mappingNY/encyclopedia/document/contract-sale-jacobus-van-curler-wilhelm-
beeckman-corlaers-hoeck-manhattan-island). By stating “his plantation and hook” I am under the impression that they are adjacent but should not be considered the same location.

David Pietersz de Vries is a primary source with an account of the massacre in letters written between 1593-1655. He states:

“When it was day the soldiers returned to the fort, having massacred or murdered eighty Indians, and considering they had done a deed of Roman valor, in murdering so many in their sleep”(232). (This is reference to those killed in Pavonia)

“…After this exploit, the soldiers were rewarded for their services, and Director Kieft thanked them by taking them by the hand and congratulating them. At another place, on the same night, on Corler's Hook near Corler's plantation, forty Indians were in the same manner attacked in their sleep, and massacred there in the same manner”(Pietersz de Vries in Jameson, J. F. 1909, 230-239)

An additional source gives a description of the general area of lower Manhattan with present day streets for reference. Nechtanc is described in the account as the general area of Corlears Hook:

“About midway between Broadway and Chatham street, was originally a large pond, denominated by the Dutch, kolck or marsh, which they also designated as the Fresh Water, and a stream or rivulet from it running eastward, and crossing Chatham street, between Pearl and Roosevelt Streets… Beyond this fresh water river and swamp meadow on the East River, what is now called Corlaer’s Hoeck, was called by the Indians, Nechtant, and since likewise denominated Crown Point. The lands lying at this place were originally purchased by Jacobus Ban Corlaer… and this property was purchased by William Beekman in 1652” (Holgate, J. B., 1851: 68).

The Tour of Native New York project at Barnard references the massacre at Nechtant but they have the information slightly wrong. They state, “more than 120 Munsees were massacred”, when it was 40 at Corlears Hook and approximately 80 at Pavonia. They also state that it is “where the Manhattan Bridge meets Chinatown today” but from their map with an icon of the site it is clearly over the Corlears Hook location. I think “where the Manhattan Bridge meets Chinatown” is a generalization that makes it easier to image roughly where the site is. The Native New York project is also using information and imagery from the Welikia / Mannahatta project. The “Collect Pond” in the banner image of the Native New York website is actually the Fresh Water that is being described in the Holgate (1851) source above. The “Collect Pond” was used as a fresh water source for city during the early colonial period. A New York Times interview with Eric W. Sanderson the lead developer of the Welikia / Mannahatta project states, “The Collect Pond was the freshwater source for early New York. In the American period, commercial businesses started to settle along the shore of the pond and by the late 18th century it was becoming polluted” (see: https://www.nytimes.com/2020/05/13/arts/design/manhattan-virtual-tour-virus.html)
Maps:

Figure 1

Welikia / Mannahatta 1609 map with entire East River Park outlined
The 1609 coastline incorporates parts of modern Corlear’s Hook and Easter River Park
www.oasisnyc.net/map.asp
Figure 1b

Detail of Corlear’s Hook area with 1609 coastline and overlay of current streets and East River Park

Figure 2

Welikia / Mannahatta 1609 map with entire East River Park outlined
Red areas on the map detail locations that may have been inhabited
The Circle shows the area of Jefferson, Henry, Clinton, and Madison Streets cited in Bolton (1922) as the approximate location of Nechtanc

www.oasisnyc.net/map.asp

Figure 3

Windward, Heinrich 1880 “Map of the Corlear’s Hook Farm”
The Castello Plan (1660) overlay of lower Manhattan showing expansion of lower Manhattan
Figure 6

Fresh Water Pond with Welikia / Mannahatta 1609 map overlay
Area to West of the water source is likely to be NYSM Site #4059: “Shell Point” or “Werpoes,” Native American village site with shell midden

References


Holgate, J. B. (1983). *American genealogy: Being a history of some of the early settlers of North America and their descendants, from their first emigration to the present time ... [Genealogy Reprints]*


