

A Place Called Whippany

The history and contemporary times of Hanover Township, by: Leonardo A. Fariello

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Namesake of Whippany

The musical name of Whippany was given to us by the Native Americans who first inhabited this land. It is derived from the aboriginal word “Whippanong,” taken from the Lenape dialect of the Algonquian American language.

The name was used by the Native Americans to identify the meadowlands surrounding the river that flows through the area. It has been interpreted to mean “place of the arrow wood,” reference to a plant that the Lenape Americans used to craft shafts for the arrows for their bows. Some have imagined that the Lenape “arrow wood” is the native black willow tree, but the author of *A Place Called Whippany* suggests that the “arrow wood” refers to the straight, tall cattail stalks that grow so abundantly in the meadowlands along the river. The pre-colonial sight of millions of cattails as far as the eye could see from Black Meadows to Troy Meadows and through Lee Meadows would have been a noteworthy landmark. The Lenape would have characterized the area by dominant land features or plant species, in this case, the “place of cattails.”



Images of cattails —Modera / shutterstock

Perhaps the translation of the word “wood” is a bit confusing but back in primitive times, wood was not used to craft arrows and certainly not made from the crooked and flimsy branches of willow trees. The stalks of cattails and cane of reeds were the ready-made arrow shafts used by the Lenape.

The musical name of Whippanong was adopted by the colonists, first as a settlement along the river and eventually to identify a vast, unsettled territory in north central New Jersey.

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