

From Chapter 1 of
Springdale Remembered 1640-1949
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Springdale has had several names since 1640: a name of Indian derivation: HEQUETCH; a Biblical name: SHITTIM PLAINS; a name of owners of property: GREEDY RIDGE; descriptive names: BLACK SWAMP, YE SECOND RUN, BROAD BROOK; a name not yet categorized: SHINO; and finally the name that has lasted since 1868, bringing to mind its natural setting among spring-fed brooks and valley: SPRINGDALE.

The original settlers of Stamford established their homes around the meeting house in today's downtown Stamford, reserving the rest of the territory purchased from the Indians in 1640 as common land. The area included all of present-day Stamford, the western portion of New Canaan, all of Darien; and it reached up into what is now Bedford and Pound Ridge, New York.¹

Within a short time, the proprietors began to open up parcels of the common land for private ownership, using distinctive names to distinguish the various parts of town, including the name HEQUETCH to describe a hilly area in the northeast section of present-day Stamford. As the years went on, the area immediately northeast of Hequetch was called Canaan Parish (today's New Canaan) while the land to the northwest was designated as Mr. Davenport's Ridge, and the land on the east side of the Noroton River was known as Middlesex Parish (now Darien). The land to the west of Hequetch was identified as the New Field, and the flat land to the south was named Shittim Plains. The hills to the west of the plains were called Greedy Ridge and the waterways in the area of present-day Springdale were named the Noroton River, Black Swamp, Broad Brook, and Ye Second Run.²

HEQUETCH (Hecquitts, Hecwitts, Hacketts or any number of different spellings as the English settlers spelled phonetically) was the name used often in land deeds to describe the hill in the northeast section of present-day Springdale, extending just over the present New Canaan line on either side of Hope Street and Ponus Ridge, and east to the Noroton River. It would appear that the Indians gave that name to the area and the English settlers continued its use.

In the original deed of 1640 negotiated with Ponus, chief of the Toquamse, the Indians sold all of their land except a certain parcel retained for planting described in the deed as a piece of ground with "medows upland grss with the rivers and trees." There was no mention of descriptive names or boundaries. Within a few years the exact boundaries were disputed, so another agreement was written in 1655. Once again the Indians retained their planting ground, but it was still not given a name.³

On January 7, 1667, still another agreement was made between the settlers and the Indians represented by Taphance, the son of Ponus. It is a long agreement; the part of particular interest tells of giving up the ground originally kept for planting. At that time names were used: "all that was reserved at Shehange and Hequetch" (in reference to the land given up), marking the first time the word Hequetch is mentioned in the town records. The name is used often after that time in the land records, describing the property at the northernmost part of present-day Springdale. The next mention occurs in 1687, when the town granted land at "Heque. . .". Although the pages are very worn where the name is written, that much of the name is legible. When the Indians gave up their planting ground at Shehange and Hequetch, that land became part of the vast acreage held in common by the proprietors of Stamford. It was eventually distributed to individual owners.⁴

In 1707, a description of the boundary of one of the many land grants made to John Davenport reads:

It begins easterly from Sehen Heckwits Hill and is a cross highway as it is laid out running . . . first west and then turns northerly and then west again unto Newfield Path. (The cross highway referred to is today's Eden Road.)⁵

Hequetch continued to be mentioned in the town meeting records until 1870 when the town voted to buy some of the property from the owner of the time, apparently to straighten a difficult curve in "the highway at Hecquitts." The Stamford and New Canaan newspapers used the name into the early 1900s, and there are several persons still living who remember referring to the area as "Hacketts Hill."⁶

Hequetch is a beautiful piece of land encompassing a high hill of meadows and woods and rocky ledges. It also includes a small section of the Noroton River and the surrounding valley. The environment of Hequetch would appear to have been ideal for the Indians: the high hill with views out to Long Island Sound six miles to the south from which the approach of enemies could be sighted; the woodlands for fuel and for hunting; the rocky ledges along the riverbank for shelter; and the soapstone quarry nearby at the Noroton River. (Soapstone is a mineral used for making cooking utensils.) Last, but not least, the section contains many acres of fertile planting ground.

Exact definitions of the two words Shehange and Hequetch believed by some to be in the dialect of the Coastal Munsees have not been found, although a rough translation by a Canadian Indian fluent in the Munsee language gave "the edge of mountain" for Shehange and "something going underneath" for Hequetch. However, recent studies indicate that it is not possible to determine definitely that Munsee was the language spoken in this area. And the fact that the English spelling of the words was so imprecise makes it difficult ". . . to determine the meaning of these forms. Also what was recorded was probably not the complete name but an abbreviated version of the part of the name the recorders thought they heard." However, Dr. Ives Goddard, Curator of the Department of Anthropology at the Smithsonian Institution states that the word "sheeyaagungeek," meaning edge of a hill or mountain, "could be a Munsee place name . . . but there is obviously no way of demonstrating such a connection conclusively."⁷

1. E. B. Huntington, *History of Stamford, Connecticut* . . . page 144.

2. SLR Book A pages 483, 484, 497, 350, 522, 123, 500.

3. SLR Book B page 30. Original deeds on display at the Stamford Town Clerk's office, Stamford Town Hall.

4. SLR Book B page 32. STM page 313.

5. Photostats of Stamford Town Records at New Canaan Historical Society A 374.

6. SLR Book O page 697. Book 60 page 89. Recollections of David Philip Lind-sley, Mary Henderson, Violet Schantz McKeon.

7. Nick Shoumatoff, Indian expert and curator at Ward Pound Ridge (New York) Reservation, believes the Coastal Munsee Indians lived in Stamford. Letter dated June 20, 1980, addressed to the author from Dr. Ives Goddard. Letter dated March 13, 1980, addressed to the author from Munsee linguist Emily Johnson of Thamesville, Ontario.