

Town of Greenburgh
**ASSISTANT
TOWN HISTORIANS**



— felicia barber + riley wentzler —



*A Thousand Words Which You Never
Knew: The Forgotten Story of the Seal
of Greenburgh.*

By: Riley Wentzler & Felicia Barber

Introduction

“A picture is worth a thousand words,” this often uttered phrase was the foundation of many civilizations throughout history from the Toltecs and the Aztecs to the Ancient Chinese and the Ancient Egyptians. Today however a country’s importance in the world is often measured by its literacy rate, and most jobs require either “good written communication” or “excellent written communication.” In common discourse, civilizations like: the Toltecs and the Aztecs which communicated using only pictorial symbols and not the written word, are often ridiculed as “primitive.” Thus studying pictorial symbols is often seen as an arcane art.

This judgment is flawed however, because today there is an entire branch of modern Communication Studies devoted to studying pictorial symbols known as semiotics. If studying pictorial symbols were really an arcane art, as is often assumed, then one would expect semiotics to have been started by someone committed to studying the past such as an archeologist or an anthropologist. It was not, it was started by a Harvard-educated chemist named Charles Sanders Peirce (Višňovský 2017). In his 1867-1868 work, *On a New List of Categories*, Peirce laid out three categories of sign: quality, relation and representation. Each of these categories of sign acquired their meaning in a different way. According to Peirce, qualities are defined as “symbols which directly determine only their grounds or imputed qualities” (Peirce, 1867, p. 295). In later work he referred to such symbols as icons.

Representations are “symbols which also independently determine their interpretants and thus the minds to which they appeal” (Peirce, 1867, p. 296). Relations are “symbols which also independently determine their objects by means of other term or terms” (Peirce, 1867, p. 295), what Peirce later refers to as an index (Peirce, 1867, p. 296).

To understand why a Harvard-educated chemist would devote his life to studying pictorial symbols, one need only pause to reflect on the strong positive emotions most Americans associate with this country’s flag or the equally strong negative emotions triggered in most Americans by the sight of a burning cross. Pictorial

symbols are important because they have great power both in terms of power exerted by the person using them and power over their intended audience or target.

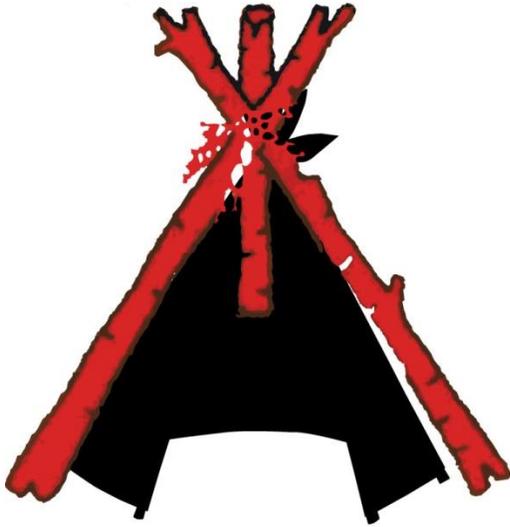
Since pictorial symbols are very important it is critical that we study the symbols which comprise the Greenburgh Town Seal. Other than the year 1778, which is the year the town was founded not many residents know why the other elements on the seal are there. The seal contains all of the following pictures: A black kettle, three crossed sticks which resemble a tepee, rope tying the kettle to the sticks, and a roaring fire directly below the kettle. When analyzing the Greenburgh Town Seal one must look at who was in Greenburgh at the time of its founding. In 1778, Greenburgh was comprised of just three groups of people. There is an inverse relationship between how many of each group were in Greenburgh in 1778 and how long each group had been here. These groups were as follows: Native Americans of The Weekquaeskeek Tribe, Dutch settlers and merchants and English settlers which were protected by the British Army. Native Americans of The Weekquaeskeek Tribe were the area's original inhabitants (sometimes spelled Weckquaesgeek, translation from Algonquin to English is very difficult), the next to arrive were the Dutch settlers. Hendrick Hudson came to the area in 1609 to establish a Dutch settlement and he eventually succeeded in this goal in 1629. In 1643, the Dutch ambushed most of the Weekquaeskeek Tribe while they were sleeping and be-headed them (<http://theava.com/archives/35410>). The second major Dutch settlement was started in 1653 by a carpenter turned merchant Vredyck Filipsen. The last to arrive were the English who came to the area along with the British Army in 1664, when the British Army invaded the territory in an attempt to push out the Dutch (Greenburgh Bicentennial Commission, 1998, p.1-3). In order to save his thriving business from being destroyed by the British Army, Vredyck Filipsen swore an oath of allegiance to the English Crown and converted his settlement from one based on Dutch customs to one based on English ones. He also changed his name to Fredrick Philipse (Greenburgh Bicentennial Commission, 1998, p 3-4). Having looked at Greenburgh's composition in 1778, this article will now analyze: the black kettle, the three crossed sticks and the roaring fire in turn.

The Black Kettle:



Native Americans of The Weekquaeskeek Tribe were Greenburgh's original inhabitants. They were part of the Great Mohegan Nation and therefore spoke the Algonquin Language (<https://www.nytimes.com/1991/04/28/realestate/if-you-re-thinking-of-living-in-hartsdale.html>). They were great hunters and fishermen who also knew how to grow beans and corn. Therefore they ate a balanced diet consisting of: bread, venison, oysters, sieva beans, and corn (Greenburgh Bicentennial Commission, 1998, p. 1). They used tree bark to make special water-tight kettles (Greenburgh Bicentennial Commission, 1998, p.1). In their native Algonquin language, the name "Weekquaeskeek" means "place of the bark kettle" (<https://www.nytimes.com/1991/04/28/realestate/if-you-re-thinking-of-living-in-hartsdale.html>). The black kettle on the Greenburgh Town Seal represents the water-tight kettles of the Weekquaeskeek People. Next, we turn to the three crossed sticks to which the kettle is tied.

The Three Crossed Sticks:



The black kettle is depicted hanging from three crossed sticks. If one looks carefully, one can see that each stick contains 6 little black lines, which depict a rough texture like the texture of tree bark. Therefore these three sticks are meant to depict the bark of a tree. The kettle made from tree bark is literally tied to its source. This once again, represents the Weekquaeskeek People because, just as the kettle is tied to its source, the life of the Weekquaeskeek People is tied to nature.

The Roaring Fire:



For all Native American Tribes, fires were kept outside the house for cooking, but for some tribes, such as the Sioux, the Powhatans, and the Diegueño, fire was also

the center of any religious ritual. Tribes who used fire in this manner, did so because they believed fire was spirit made manifest. The authors are unsure if the Weekquaeskeek People ascribed religious significance to fire. Any resident of Greenburgh who knows for sure, should contact us at:

assistanttownhistorians@greenburghny.com.



Previous Slices of History include:

“The Disappearing Railroad Blues” in Greenburgh: The Fate of the Putnam Railroad Line and the old Putnam Trail (11/6/18)

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A Different Kind of Rebel: Greenburgh’s Contributions to the Underground Railroad (10/27/18)

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About the Authors:

We are both Assistant Town Historians at Greenburgh Town Hall and we are engaged to be married and are currently looking for permanent employment.

Riley Wentzler:

I was born and raised in a small rural town in central Pennsylvania. In high school, I took every honors course available including four years of Spanish. I received A's in all of them. I graduated third in my class of 146 students. This brought me to Edinboro University of Pennsylvania. Once there, I continued my trend of academic excellence. I graduated summa cum laude in Political Science with a minor in Spanish and a Master's in Communication Studies, with a G.P.A of 3.94. Within Communication Studies, I specialized in semiotics. It was also there that I met my lovely fiancée, Felicia Barber. My Master's in Communication has promoted public speaking, teamwork, and customer service. My Political Science degree has developed my research skills using computer-based tools and provided me with experience using the Microsoft Office products. My minor in Spanish has facilitated my bilingual capabilities. During my internship at Greenburgh, I created the petition for the State Roads project using website tools. My diverse education and areas of interest have provided me with a wide range of skills. I look forward to finding a career opportunity in business or government. **If you want to learn more about semiotics or to suggest a topic for next week's article, you can contact me at assistanttownhistorians@greenburghny.com.**

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Felicia Barber:

I was born in New York City and raised in Hartsdale, New York. I graduated from Ardsley High School. I recently earned a Bachelor of Fine Arts degree in Graphic Design at Edinboro University of Pennsylvania. It was here that I met my fiancé, Riley Wentzler. As a result of my academic excellence, I won a scholarship every year. I learned and applied many graphic design skills to projects during my summer internships and at school. I am proficient in using Adobe graphic design applications including Photoshop, Illustrator and InDesign. For my

Identity/branding course at Edinboro, I created logos to appear on the tee-shirts of Physical Education majors. For a veteran's upcoming event, I used a typeface to focus the reader to the soldier in the poster. For the State Roads Legislative Campaign project, I created the embedded graphic-photo that accompanied the petition I am looking for a job to utilize my skills as a Graphic Designer in an agency, print shop, company or government.

To suggest a topic for next week's article, you can contact me at assistanttownhistorians@greenburghny.com If you want learn more about my artwork, or help me find employment, you can contact me at: feliciadbarber@gmail.com

Interview with the Authors:

<https://wcbs880.radio.com/articles/news/stories-main-street-couple-cerebral-palsy-brings-many-talents-town-greenburgh>

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