The Last of the Mohicans

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This article is about the novel. For the film, see <u>The Last of the Mohicans (1992 film)</u>. For other uses, see <u>The Last of the Mohicans (disambiguation)</u>.

The Last of the Mohicans



Illustration from 1896 edition, by J.T. Merrill

Author(s) <u>James Fenimore Cooper</u> Country United States of America

Language English

Series <u>Leatherstocking</u>
Genre(s) <u>Historical novel</u>

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Preceded by The Pioneers (1823) **Followed by The Prairie** (1827)

The Last of the Mohicans: A Narrative of 1757 is a historical novel by James Fenimore Cooper, first published in February 1826. It is the second book of the <u>Leatherstocking Tales</u> pentalogy and the best known. <u>The Pathfinder</u>, published 14 years later in 1840, is its sequel. [1]

The story takes place in 1757, during the <u>French and Indian War</u> (the <u>Seven Years' War</u>), when France and Great Britain battled for control of the North American colonies. During this war, the French called on allied <u>Native American</u> tribes to fight against the more numerous British colonists.

Cooper named a principal character <u>Uncas</u> after a well-known <u>Mohegan sachem</u> (a head chief) who had been an ally of the English in 17th-century <u>Connecticut</u>. Cooper seemed to confuse or merge the names of the two tribes—<u>Mohegan</u> and <u>Mahican</u>. Cooper's well-known book helped confuse popular understanding of the tribes to the present day. After the death of John Uncas in 1842, the last surviving male descendant of Uncas, the *Newark Daily Advertiser* wrote, "Last of the Mohegans Gone," lamenting the extinction of the tribe. ^[2] The writer did not realize the Mohegan people still existed. They continue to survive today and are a federally recognized tribe based in <u>Connecticut</u>. The Mahican were based in the <u>Hudson River Valley</u> and continue to survive today as a federally recognized Indian tribe as the <u>Stockbridge-Munsee Community</u> in <u>Wisconsin</u>.

The novel was one of the most popular in English in its time, although critics identified narrative flaws. Its length and formal prose style have limited its appeal to later readers, yet *The Last of the Mohicans* remains widely read in <u>American literature</u> courses.

The character <u>Chingachgook</u> speaks a line that holds the title, saying, "[W]hen Uncas follows in my footsteps, there will no longer be any of the blood of the <u>sagamores</u>, for my boy is the last of the Mohicans." The title is also referred to near the end of the book, when <u>Tamenund</u> says, "I have lived to see the last warrior of the wise race of the Mohicans." [4]

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[edit] Historical background

The story takes place during the <u>Seven Years' War</u>. This conflict, which lasted from 1756 to 1763, involved all of the major European powers of the period, and has been described as the "first World War". It resulted in some 900,000 to 1,400,000 deaths and significant changes in the balance of power and territories of several of the participants. Also known as the <u>French and Indian War</u>, the North American theater of this conflict occurred between British settlers and colonial forces, and royal French forces together with the various <u>Native American</u> forces allied with them. The war was fought primarily along the frontiers between the <u>British colonies</u> from <u>Virginia</u> to <u>Nova Scotia</u>.

In the Spring of 1757, Lieutenant Colonel <u>George Monro</u> became garrison commander of <u>Fort William Henry</u>, located on <u>Lake George (New York)</u> in the <u>Province of New York</u>. In early August, Major General <u>Louis-Joseph de Montcalm</u> and 7,000 troops <u>besieged the fort</u>. On 2 August General Webb, who commanded the area from his base at <u>Fort Edward</u>, sent 200 regulars and 800 Massachusetts militia to reinforce the garrison at William Henry. In the novel, this is the relief column with which Monro's daughters travel.

Monro sent messengers south to Fort Edward on the 3rd, but Webb refused to send any of his estimated 1,600 men north, because they were all that stood between the French and <u>Albany</u>. He wrote to Monro on 4 August that he should negotiate the best terms possible; this communication was intercepted and delivered to Montcalm. In Cooper's version, the missive was carried by Hawkeye when he, and it, fell into French hands.

On 7 August Montcalm sent to the fort under a truce flag to deliver Webb's dispatch. By then the fort's walls had been breached, many of its guns were useless, and the garrison had taken significant casualties. After another day of bombardment by the French, Monro raised the white flag and agreed to withdraw under parole.

When the withdrawal began, some of Montcalm's Indian allies, angered at the lost opportunity for loot, attacked the British column. Cooper's account of the attack and aftermath is lurid and somewhat inaccurate. A detailed reconstruction of the action and its aftermath indicates that the final tally of British missing and dead ranges from 69 to 184, [6] although over 500 British were taken captive.

[edit] Plot

The action takes place around Glens Falls in upstate New York. Cora and Alice Munro, daughters of Lieutenant Colonel Munro, are traveling with a column of reinforcements from Fort Edward to Fort William Henry. In the party are David Gamut the singing teacher, and Major Duncan Heyward, the group's military leader.

The Huron scout, Magua, offers to take the Munro party by a shorter route than that which the column must take. Unknown to them, Magua—who they believe to have been expelled from his tribe in disgrace—has been reinstated as chief and is a supporter of the French cause. Magua intends to lead the party into an ambush, but is foiled when they meet Natty Bumppo, also referred to in this novel as Hawkeye, and the two Mohicans, Chingachgook and his son Uncas, on the road.

Magua flees and escapes the battle. Later, he returns with more Hurons and captures Cora, Alice and the two men. After a short chase, Hawkeye rescues them and Magua escapes once

more. Heyward and Hawkeye lead the Munro women to Fort William Henry, which is by now surrounded by the French.

Munro sends Hawkeye to Fort Edward to request reinforcements but, bearing General Webb's reply, he is captured by the French, who deliver him to Fort William Henry without the letter. Heyward attempts to parley with the French, but learns nothing. He then returns to Colonel Munro and announces his love for Alice. Munro reveals Cora's heritage—the Colonel's first wife was of mixed race—then gives his permission for Heyward to pay court to Alice.

The French general, Montcalm, invites Munro to a parley. He shows him Webb's letter: the English general has refused to send further reinforcements. Realising that his cause is lost, Munro reluctantly agrees to Montcalm's terms. The British soldiers, together with their wounded, and women and children, are allowed to leave the fort and withdraw. Outside the fort, the column is set upon by 2000 French allied Indian warriors. In the chaos of the massacre, Magua finds Cora and Alice, and leads them away towards the Huron village. David Gamut follows at a distance.

Three days later, Hawkeye and the Mohicans, Heyward and Colonel Munro follow Magua's trail. Outside the Huron village, they come across David Gamut, teaching beavers to sing psalms. The Huron have not killed him as they will not harm a madman. Gamut tells them that Alice is in the village, Cora is in another village belonging to the Lenni Lenape (Delaware) tribe, and Magua has gone moose hunting. Heyward disguises himself as a French medicine man and enters the village with Gamut, intending to rescue Alice. Hawkeye and Uncas set out to rescue Cora. Chingachgook remains with Colonel Munro, who has become somewhat deranged as a result of events.

Heyward's disguise is successful, but before he can find Alice, Uncas is led into the village, having been captured by the Hurons. Magua returns, and demands that Uncas be put to death, but does not recognise Heyward in his guise as a medicine man. Hawkeye steals a bearskin from a village shaman and uses it to disguise himself while he follows Heyward. They rescue Alice, and tell the Hurons that she is sick and must be removed from the village. David Gamut switches places with Uncas, allowing Uncas to escape. The group flees to the Delaware village.

The Hurons discover Gamut and realize that Uncas has escaped. Magua tells them everything about Hawkeye's and Heyward's deception, enraging the other Hurons, who vow revenge against Hawkeye and his companions and quickly reaffirm Magua as their chief.

Magua then makes his way to the Delaware village, and demands his prisoners. At the council of chiefs, the venerable sage Tamenund is called on to make the final judgement. He asks which of the prisoners is La Longue Carabine, and Heyward claims that it is he, so a shooting match is organised at which Hawkeye outshoots the Major.

Uncas offends the Huron, who tear off his clothing. They discover he has tattoos marking him as a great chief. Realising this, Tamenund accedes to all that Uncas asks, except that he says he cannot free Cora as it was Magua who brought her to the village. Magua reluctantly agrees to Uncas's demands but announces his intention to keep Cora as his wife, and leaves the village. According to custom, Tamenund has agreed to give Magua a three-hour head start. David Gamut finds his way to the Delaware village, and tells the group that he saw Magua and Cora return to the Huron village.

A battle breaks out between the Hurons and the Delaware, who are in three parties: one led by Hawkeye and Heyward, one by Uncas, and one by Chingachgook and Munro. Magua escapes with Cora and two of his warriors, and they seek to flee by a mountain path which has a precipitous drop on one side, but Cora stops on a rocky ledge and refuses to go further. Uncas attacks the Huron, but both he and Cora are killed in the fight. Hawkeye arrives too late, and shoots Magua.

The novel concludes with a lengthy account of the funerals of Uncas and Cora. The Lenni Lenape sing that Uncas and Cora will marry in the afterlife. Hawkeye does not believe this, but he renews his friendship with Chingachgook. Tamenund foresees that "The pale-faces are masters of the earth, and the time of the red-men has not yet come again...."

[edit] Style and themes

This section requires expansion.

A notable feature of the novel is that Cooper uses more than one name for many of the characters and groups of people. For example, Nathaniel Bumppo refers to himself as Natty. The Mohicans call him Hawkeye, and the French and their Huron allies use the term La Longue Carabine (Long Rifle) for both Bumppo and his rifle, Kildeer. The Iroquois are referred to as the Maquas and the Mingos, the Delaware are also known as the Leni-Lenape.

Another feature is Cooper's detailed and extended descriptions of places—some of which he was familiar with—characters, and events.

[edit] Characters

- <u>Magua</u> (ma-gwah) the villain of the piece; a Huron chief driven from his tribe for drunkenness and later whipped by the British Army (also for drunkenness), for which he blames Colonel Munro. Also known as "Sly Fox."
- <u>Chingachgook</u> (chin-GATCH-gook) last chief of the Mohican tribe; escort to the traveling Munro sisters, father to Uncas. Unami Delaware word meaning "Big Snake." [7]
- <u>Uncas</u> the son of Chingachgook and the titular "Last of the Mohicans" (meaning the last pure-blooded Mohican born). [8]
- Natty Bumppo/ Hawkeye Oeil de Faucon; a frontiersman who, by chance meeting in the forest, becomes an escort to the Munro sisters. Also known to the Indians and the French as "La Longue Carabine" on account of his long rifle and shooting skills.
- Cora Munro dark-haired daughter of Colonel Munro. Her mother, whom Munro met and married in the West Indies was a <u>mulatto</u>, [9] half-white half-African-Caribbean. In the novel, Cora is termed a <u>quadroon</u> at one point. [10]
- Alice Munro Cora's younger, blonde half-sister, the daughter of Alice Graham, who was the love of Munro's life when he was young, but whom he was able to marry only much later in life.
- <u>Colonel Munro</u> the sisters' father, a British army colonel in command of <u>Fort William Henry</u>.
- Duncan Heyward a British army major from Virginia who falls in love with Alice Munro. [11][12]

- David Gamut a psalmodist (teacher of psalm singing) also known as "the singing master" due to the fact that he sang for every event.
- General <u>Daniel Webb</u> Colonel Munro's commanding officer, originally stationed at Albany, who later takes command at <u>Fort Edward</u> [disambiguation needed] (from where he cannot or will not come to Colonel Munro's aid when Fort William Henry is besieged by the French).
- General <u>Marquis de Montcalm</u> the French commander-in-chief, referred to by the Hurons and other Indian allies of the French as "The great white father of the Canadas".
- <u>Tamenund</u> An ancient, wise, and revered Delaware Indian sage who has outlived three generations of warriors. He is the "Sachem" of the Delaware.

[edit] Development

According to <u>Susan Fenimore Cooper</u>, the author's eldest daughter, Cooper first conceived the idea for the book on a visit in 1825 to the Adirondacks, accompanying a party of English gentlemen. The party passed through the <u>Catskills</u>, an area with which Cooper was already familiar, and about which he had written in his first novel featuring Natty: <u>The Pioneers</u>. They then passed on to Lake George and Glen's Falls. The travellers were very impressed with the caves behind the falls, and one member of the party suggested that "here was the very scene for a romance." Susan Cooper says that the person making this suggestion was <u>Edward Smith-Stanley</u>, 14th <u>Earl of Derby</u>, later leader of the <u>Conservative party</u> and three times Prime Minister of the United Kingdom. Cooper promised Stanley "that a book should actually be written, in which these caves should have a place; the, idea of a romance essentially Indian in character then first suggesting itself to his mind." [14]

Cooper began work on the novel immediately, while staying for the summer with his family in a cottage belonging to a friend, situated on the Long Island shore of the Sound, opposite Blackwell's Island, not far from Hallett's Cove (the area is now part of <u>Astoria</u>). He wrote quickly and completed it in the space of three or four months, although he suffered a serious illness thought to have been brought on by sunstroke, shortly after starting the book. [14] At one point during this illness, unable to put pen to paper himself, he dictated the outline of the fight between Magua and Chingachgook, which forms a major component of the 12th chapter, to his wife, who thought that he was delirious. [13]

In the novel, Lake George is referred to by Hawkeye as the "Horican". Cooper felt that Lake George was too plain, while the French name—Le Lac du St. Sacrament—was "too complicated". Horican he found on an old map of the area, a French name for a native tribe who had once lived in the area. [15]

Cooper grew up in the frontier town founded by his father, but Susan Cooper notes that as a young man he had few opportunities to meet and talk with native Americans: "occasionally some small party of the Oneidas, or other representatives of the Five Nations, had crossed his path in the valley of the Susquehanna, or on the shores of Lake Ontario, where he served when a midshipman in the navy." He read what sources were available at the time—

Heckewelder, Charlevoix, William Penn, Smith, Elliot, Colden, Lang, Lewis and Clarke, and Mackenzie. At the time he was writing, deputations to Washington from the Western tribes, were quite frequent, and he made a point of visiting these parties as they passed through Albany and New York, even following them all the way to Washington on several occasions,

to observe them for longer. He also talked to the officers and interpreters who accompanied them. [13]

[edit] Critical reception



The <u>neutrality</u> of this article is <u>disputed</u>. Please see the discussion on the <u>talk page</u>.

Please do not remove this message until the <u>dispute is resolved</u>. (*January 2012*)

The novel was first published in 1826 by Messrs. Carey & Lea, of Philadelphia. According to Susan Fenimore Cooper, its success was "greater than that of any previous book from the same pen" and "in Europe the book produced quite a startling effect." [13]

Cooper's novels were popular, and sold in quantities, but reviewers were often critical, or even dismissive. For example, the London Magazine (May 1826) called the novel "clearly by much the worst of Mr Cooper's performances." [16]

Mark Twain famously derides James Fenimore Cooper in *Fenimore Cooper's Literary Offenses*, an essay published in *The New England Quarterly* (September 1946). Twain's primary complaint is what he considers a lack of variety in Cooper's style, along with excessive verbiage. In the essay, Twain re-writes a small section of *The Last of the Mohicans* and claims that Cooper, "the generous spendthrift", used 100 extra and unnecessary words in the original version. He became an extremely outspoken critic not only of other authors, but also of other critics, suggesting that before praising Cooper's work, Professors Loundsbury, Brander Matthes, and Wilkie Collins "ought to have read some of it."

Re-reading the book himself for the purpose of a reissue in his later years, Cooper himself noted some inconsistencies of plot and characterisation, particularly the character of Munro, but observed that in general "the book must needs have some interest for the reader, since it could amuse even the writer, who had in a great measure forgotten the details of his own work." [13]

[edit] Legacy

The Last of the Mohicans has been James Fenimore Cooper's most popular work, and it has remained one of the most widely read novels throughout the world, and it has impacted the way many view both the American Indians and the frontier period of American history. The romanticized image of the strong, fearless, and ever resourceful frontiersman (i.e., Natty Bumppo), as well as the stoic, wise, and noble "red man" (i.e., Chingachgook) were notions derived from Cooper's characterizations more than from anywhere else. And the phrase "the last of the Mohicans" has now been used oftentimes proverbially to refer to the sole survivor of a noble race or type.

[edit] Adaptations

[edit] Films

A number of films have been based on the lengthy book, with numerous cuts, compressions, and distortions occurring in the story. The American adaptations include a 1912 version

starring James Cruze, The Last of the Mohicans (1920), starring Wallace Beery; The Last of the Mohicans (1932), starring Harry Carey; The Last of the Mohicans (1936) starring Randolph Scott and Bruce Cabot; Last of the Mohicans (1963) starring Jack Taylor. Jose Marco, Luis Induni and Daniel Martin; and *The Last of the Mohicans* (1992), starring Daniel Day-Lewis. The 1920 film has been deemed "culturally significant" by the Library of Congress and selected for preservation in the United States National Film Registry. The 1992 version, directed by Michael Mann, was (according to Mann) based more on the 1936 film version than on Cooper's book. Many of the scenes from the 1992 movie did not follow the book; in particular, some characters who survive the events of the novel die in the film, and vice versa. For example, Colonel Munro, killed in the film by Magua during the evacuation of Fort William Henry, lives on in the novel and helps search for his daughters. Chingachgook kills Magua in the film, whereas in the novel, Hawkeye kills him. The usual deletions from cinematic versions of *The Last of the Mohicans* are the extensive sections about the Indians themselves, thus confounding Cooper's purpose. Further, romantic relationships, non-existent or minimal in the novel, are generated between the principal characters, and the roles of some characters are reversed or altered, as are the events.

In <u>Germany</u>, <u>Der Letzte der Mohikaner</u>, with <u>Béla Lugosi</u> as <u>Chingachgook</u>, was the second part of the two-part <u>Lederstrumpf</u> film released in 1920. Based on the same series of the novels, <u>Chingachgook die Grosse Schlange</u> (<u>Chingachgook the Great Serpent</u>), starring <u>Gojko Mitic</u> as Chingachgook, appeared in <u>East Germany</u> in 1967, and became popular throughout the <u>Eastern Bloc</u>.

[edit] Stage Drama

Since 2010, *Last of the Mohicans Outdoor Drama, Inc. has presented a full length dramatic version of *The Last of the Mohicans* adapted for the stage by author Michael Dufault and produced by Steven O'Connor at various locations in the Lake George, New York region.

[edit] Radio

The Last of the Mohican was adapted for radio in two one-hour episodes directed by Michael Fox and broadcast on <u>BBC Radio 4</u> in 1995 (subsequently on <u>BBC Radio 7</u>), with Michael Fiest, Philip Franks, Helen McCrory and Naomi Radcliffe.

[edit] TV

There was a Canadian-produced TV series, <u>Hawkeye and the Last of the Mohicans</u> in 1957 with <u>Lon Chaney</u>, <u>Jr</u>.

The <u>British Broadcasting Corporation</u> made an eight chapter TV <u>serial of the book</u> in 1971, with <u>Kenneth Ives</u> as Hawkeye, <u>John Abineri</u> as Chingachgook and <u>Philip Madoc</u> as Magua.

<u>Steve Forrest</u> starred as Hawkeye with <u>Ned Romero</u> as Chingachgook and <u>Don Shanks</u> as Uncas in a 1977 film for television.

The Last of the Mohicans was parodied in a 2011 episode of <u>South Park</u> entitled "The Last of the Meheecans."

[edit] Animation

In 2004, an animated TV series version (originally named *L'ultimo dei Mohicani*) was produced by <u>MondoTV</u> and <u>RaiFiction</u> in association with <u>The Animation Band</u> and Studio Sek, consisting of 26 episodes.

[edit] Comics

<u>Marvel Comics</u> has published two versions of the story: in 1976 a one-issue version as part of their <u>Marvel Classics Comics</u> series (issue #13); and in 2007 a six-issue mini-series to start off the new <u>Marvel Illustrated</u> series.

[edit] Opera

In 1977, <u>Lake George Opera</u> presented an opera version *The Last of the Mohicans* by composer <u>Alva Henderson</u>. [20]

[edit] Parody

In 2011, The Last of the Mohicans was parodied as <u>The Last of the Meheecans</u> in the popular animated series <u>South Park</u>. In this episode, the character of <u>Butters</u>, who has become lost in the woods after playing Border Patrol with the other boys, finds himself to be the 'last of the Meheecans' (meaning Mexicans on his team).

[edit] See also



- Great Britain in the Seven Years War
- France in the Seven Years War

[edit] Notes

- 1. <u>^</u> Cf. the <u>Leatherstocking Tales</u> for a chart showing both the chronological order and the order of publication of the five novels.
- 2. <u>^</u> Oberg, pg. 7
- 3. ^ Last of the Mohicans (2003 B&N Classics edition), Chapter III, pg. 26
- 4. Last of the Mohicans (1968 paperback edition), Chapter 33, pg. 600
- 5. A Bowen, HV (1998). War and British Society 1688–1815. Cambridge, United Kingdom: Cambridge University Press. p. 7. ISBN 0-521-57645-8.
- 6. <u>^ Steele, Ian K (1990)</u>. *Betrayals: Fort William Henry & the 'Massacre*. New York: Oxford University Press. p. 144. <u>ISBN 9780195058932</u>.
- 7. <u>http://external.oneonta.edu/cooper/articles/suny/1979suny-starna.html</u>
- 8. <u>^</u> "Uncas will be the last pure-blooded Mohican because there are no pure-blooded Mohican women for him to marry." <u>University of Houston study guide</u>
- 9. \textstyle \text{Urdang, p. 875}
- 10. ^ Urdang, p. 1079

- 11. ^ "My request, as you know, sir, went so far as to presume to the honor of being your son" ... "And to marry whom, then, did you wish my consent, Major Heyward?" demanded the old soldier, "You have another and not less lovely child." "Alice!" exclaimed the father, in an astonishment equal to that with which Duncan had just repeated the name of her sister. "Such was the direction of my wishes, sir" {from Chapter XVI in James Fenimore Cooper, Works of J. Fenimore Cooper, 10 vols., (New York: P.F. Collier, Pub., 1892) 2:95}.
- 12. <u>^</u> Walker, Warren S.. <u>"Plots and Characters in the Fiction of James Fenimore Cooper"</u>. Originally published in Warren S. Walker, Plots and Characters in the Fiction of James Fenimore Cooper (Hamden, CT: Archon Books, 1978), pp. 86–92.. James Fenimore Cooper Society. Retrieved 6 September 2010.
- 13. ^ a b c d e f Cooper, Susan Fenimore (1861). <u>Pages and Pictures from the Writings of</u>

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- 14. ^ <u>a</u> <u>b</u> Cooper, Susan Fenimore (1876–1884). <u>Household Edition of the Works of J.</u> <u>Fenimore Cooper</u>. Houghton, Mifflin and Co.. p. xi-xliv. Retrieved 11 September 2010.
- 15. ^ Cooper, James Fenimore (1850). *The Last of the Mohicans*. pp. Introduction p8.
- 16. <u>^ Fenimore Cooper—the critical reception</u>. Routledge. 1973. pp. 83. Retrieved 19 September 2010.
- 17. <u>^</u> Cooper, James (2009). Paul Gutjahr. ed. *The Last of the Mohicans*. Peterborough: Broadview Press. p. 447. <u>ISBN 9781551118666</u>.
- 18. ^ Mohican Press—James Fenimore Cooper
- 19. <u>^</u> ELIZABETH KNOWLES. "Mohican." The Oxford Dictionary of Phrase and Fable. 2006. Retrieved December 29, 2011 from Encyclopedia.com: http://www.encyclopedia.com/doc/1O214-Mohican.html
- 20. <u>^ Welcome to Lake George Opera of Saratoga, New York</u>

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[edit] External links



- <u>The James Fenimore Cooper Society</u> extensive collection of material about Cooper, in particular many scholarly articles on him and his work
- The Last of the Mohicans at Project Gutenberg
- The Last of the Mohicans at Open Library
- Fort William Henry Museum
- Fort William Henry: The Siege & Massacre
- Last of the Mohicans Outdoor Drama

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- The Bravo
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