

## **Native sites should be acknowledged as Native by restoring Native names.**

As members and attenders of the Religious Society of Friends, we hold dear the principles of integrity, equality and stewardship. The recent publicity of wrongful deaths of African American men and women at the hands of police and the hundreds of murdered and missing indigenous women whose deaths go uninvestigated are strong reminders of inherent white racial bias against ‘people of color’ within our public institutions. These Euro-American biased systems of privilege harm us all.

There are countless wrongs that have resulted from hundreds of years of systemic white racism that can never be fully righted. When we have an opportunity to correct any of those wrongs, we believe it is our obligation to do so. With this minute, we acknowledge the racially biased enculturation we have received and internalized through our common use of language, specifically in this instance, as it relates to many place names in our state of Tennessee. In the words of Desmond Tutu, “Language is very powerful. Language does not just describe reality. Language creates the reality it describes.” We are therefore concerned with the inherent racial meanings implicit in our use of language. For example, when we refer to places that were considered sacred by indigenous people as “archaeological” sites and the remains there as “resources,” we separate ourselves from our common humanity. Additionally, when we identify these sacred places by the names of the Euro-Americans who later claimed them, we convert sacred space into geographical feature, furthering disregard and disrespect for the original people of this land, and depriving ourselves of the real history.

We are grateful for the land area presently referred to as middle Tennessee where the Nashville Friends Meeting meets and many of us live. It was inhabited, managed and defended by Native Americans of different groups, languages and political alliances for millenia. We regret that the tribes and their cultural legacy are now gone from here and that the richness of their vast history is mostly unknown to us. By linguistic,<sup>1</sup> archaeological excavation<sup>2</sup> and extrapolation<sup>3</sup> of underground villages sites, mounds and burials, we know that the Yuchi and Muskogee people were the last Native tribes to inhabit this area known

---

<sup>1</sup> Ives Goddard, map, *Native languages and language families of North America*, compilation, University of Nebraska 1999, from *Handbook of North American Indians: Languages*, vol. 17; based on the published chronicles of the Hernando de Soto 1540 and subsequent expeditions through east and west Tennessee, abstracted at [wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Langs\\_N.Amer.png](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Langs_N.Amer.png); and

Ives Goddard, *The Indigenous Languages of the Southeast*. *Anthropological Linguistics* 47. 1-60, 2005.

<sup>2</sup> Kevin E. Smith, *Re-envisioning the Noel Stone-Grave Cemetery (40DV3), Davidson County, Tennessee*. (Middle Tennessee State University). 2019 [tennesseearchaeologycouncil.wordpress.com](http://tennesseearchaeologycouncil.wordpress.com)

<sup>3</sup> Madeline Kneberg, *The Tennessee Area*, in *Archaeology of the Eastern United States*, James B. Griffin, ed., 1952 University of Chicago Press; and Thomas M N Lewis & Madeline Kneberg, *The First Tennesseans: An Interpretation of Tennessee Prehistory*, 1955 Department of Anthropology, University of Tennessee, Knoxville.

as Middle Tennessee. We also know that many places in this area were sacred to them. Indeed, over 400 Native American sites have been identified in Nashville/Davidson County,<sup>4</sup> including the nearby 'Noel cemetery (40Dv3)<sup>5</sup> (Native burial ground of over 4000 burials, now 'removed') of Mississippian era (1100-1500 ce); 'French Lick'; 'Brick Church ceremonial mound and village site' (Mississippian); 'Barnes Site,' of the Archaic, Woodland & Mississippian eras; the 'Fewkes Mound Archaeological Site' (Mississippian) (see map [Nashville Native sites](#)).

Most of the local sites that were sacred or otherwise important to Native Americans are currently unacknowledged and/or unnamed or have been renamed to reflect the names of Euro-American land owners. Such disregard for Native American history and for sacred places in Tennessee is a failure to tell the whole truth of this land's history. Naming important Native American sites for white landowners, after the original Native Americans had been removed by death, war, misappropriation of land and racial cleansing, was a social wrong committed in the 19th century.<sup>6</sup> It can and should be corrected. Renaming in the original language is both right and timely, as demonstrated nation-wide by the recent removal of derogatory ethnic names, nicknames and slurs previously used in sports, military installations, and other cultural institutions.<sup>7</sup>

We believe that it is right and just to honor and respect the Yuchi and Muskogee people who once named all the areas around us, and that it is important to act on restoring Native American names to local places that are of significance to Native American history and culture. In keeping with our testimonies of integrity, equality and stewardship, we believe that we should work together to correct these wrongs and restore Native names to Native places.



---

<sup>4</sup> Most 'archaeological' sites are deemed minor or insignificant, and often 'removed' from construction sites. Some are significant and not available for public information. See a partial listing at [wikipedia.org/wiki/List\\_of\\_archaeological\\_sites\\_in\\_Tennessee#Davidson\\_County](http://wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_archaeological_sites_in_Tennessee#Davidson_County).

<sup>5</sup> *New Insights from Old Records of the Noel Cemetery (40DV3), Davidson County, Tennessee: Thruston's "Ancient Metropolis of the Stone Grave Race"*, Kevin E Smith, (Middle Tennessee State University), Michael C Moore (Tennessee Division of Archaeology), and Stephen T. Rogers (Tennessee Historical Commission) 2010.

<sup>6</sup> "Williamson's Glass Mounds considered for historic places list" 2015 [tennessean.com/story/news/local/williamson/2015/01/22/williamsons-glass-mounds-considered-historic-places-list/22199227/](http://tennessean.com/story/news/local/williamson/2015/01/22/williamsons-glass-mounds-considered-historic-places-list/22199227/); [wikipedia.org/wiki/Samuel\\_F\\_Glass\\_House](http://wikipedia.org/wiki/Samuel_F_Glass_House)

<sup>7</sup> See, for example, [wikipedia.org/wiki/Bde\\_Maka\\_Ska#Calhoun%E2%80%93Bde\\_Maka\\_Ska\\_naming\\_dispute](http://wikipedia.org/wiki/Bde_Maka_Ska#Calhoun%E2%80%93Bde_Maka_Ska_naming_dispute); "Rum River Name-Change Movement" [www.towahkon.org/](http://www.towahkon.org/); "Change the name of Squaw Lake, Minnesota" [change.org/p/tim-walz-change-the-name-of-squaw-lake-minnesota](http://change.org/p/tim-walz-change-the-name-of-squaw-lake-minnesota); "Squaw Island to be renamed 'Deyowenoguhdoh'" 2015 [buffalonews.com/news/local/squaw-island-to-be-renamed-deyowenoguhdoh/article\\_d4ccb9f2-6667-5ae6-ab36-f897da9d6a1f.html](http://buffalonews.com/news/local/squaw-island-to-be-renamed-deyowenoguhdoh/article_d4ccb9f2-6667-5ae6-ab36-f897da9d6a1f.html)

Actionable steps:

1. Formally acknowledge the Native origins of land belonging to the Nashville Friends Meeting House, and the original treaties that made it so.<sup>8</sup>
2. Inform culturally affiliated tribes (Yuchi, Muscogee, Chickasaw, Choctaw, Shawnee) of our concerns in general and our list of local sites specifically.
3. Seek guidance, collaboration and recommendations from culturally affiliated tribes (Yuchi, Muscogee, Chickasaw, Choctaw, Shawnee).
4. Seek guidance from the Cultural Preservation Committee of the Five Civilized Tribes of Oklahoma and the Yuchi.
5. Invite collaboration from other congregations and organizations in this area.
6. Inform current landowners of our concerns, offer/propose an indigenous (Yuchi, Muscogee) naming alternative. Request that landowners change the names of the Native site to a recommended Native name.



Nashville Friends Meeting  
*approved 11 october 2020*

---

<sup>8</sup> In the 1775 Treaty of Sycamore Shoals the Cherokee ceded all hunting grounds north of the Cumberland River to the Transylvania Land Company, later confirmed by the USA 1777 treaty. The 1785 Treaty of Hopewell confirmed USA recognition of land south of the Cumberland River as Cherokee. The 1805 Treaty, signed by Cherokee leaders Fox/Inali, Pathkiller, Glass and Doublehead, ceded Cherokee claims north of the Duck River. But the Cherokee never settled in the Davidson County area, and were able to claim these areas as 'hunting grounds' only in the absence of other prior tribes whose absence itself was caused by Euro-American pandemic and intertribal war. See, for example, 'Cherokee Land Cessions' [tngenweb.org/cessions/cherokee.html](https://tngenweb.org/cessions/cherokee.html).