



St. Luke's East Hampton Reflections from Fr. Ben



From the Rector

July 14 is a day that the church calendar sets aside to honor Samson Occom. Intriguingly, Samson Occom is memorialized on a plaque outside Guild Hall and is featured in historian Hugh King's Revolutionary War tour of East Hampton. So who was Samson

Occom?

Born in a wigwam on Mohegan land, Samson Occom (1723-1792) was the first ordained Christian Indian minister in the American colonies. He served as an effective educator to the Montaukett Indians of Long Island, was ordained a Presbyterian minister in 1759, and while serving at the Presbyterian Church in East Hampton, married a Montaukett woman. When he returned to Mohegan, he became an eloquent and popular spiritual leader, teacher, and writer of hymns.

Occom's popularity as an eloquent teacher and spiritual leader grew with Indians over a large part of New England. To accommodate this interest, he decided to form a New England Indian College. The church sent him to England to raise funds, where he collected £ 11,000 from wealthy patrons, including the Earl of Dartmouth and King George III. When he returned, however, he found his family destitute and his school had moved to Hanover, New Hampshire, where it became Dartmouth College.

This disappointment was followed by the Connecticut Colony's ruling that the Mohegans would not be compensated for land they sold to the colony. The colony then backed an unpopular candidate for Mohegan Sachemship. This led the Mohegans to decide that no Sachem was better than a colonial puppet. With the Tribe increasingly penniless and powerless, Occom accepted an invitation for his group to resettle with the upstate New York Oneida. He hoped their new home in Brothertown, New York, would free them from additional disappointment. His legacy for the Mohegan people who remained in Connecticut was a reputation for being Christianized, which helped them avoid later relocation. In April of 2022, Dartmouth College agreed to return Occom's papers to the Mohegan Tribe. These papers include some of the earliest examples of written Mohegan Language, an autobiography, letters, and journals. (history taken from: <https://www.mohegan.nsn.us/about/our-tribal-history/historical-figures/samson-occom>)