Episode 6: Mekinges with Sara Schumacher

Transcript:

Easton: All right. Good afternoon, everyone, and welcome to yet another episode of This is Problematic, a Conner Prairie podcast. I'm Easton.

Hannah: And I'm Hannah. And today we're joined by our new Native American History and Life curator Sara Schumacher.

Sara: Hi!

Hannah: Hey, Sara, we're so excited to welcome you to the curatorial team here on the Prairie. And we're so grateful that you're going to sit down with us today to discuss the story of Mekinges.

Sara: I'm really excited to be here. It's a story that definitely needs to be told. And although she's been acknowledged already, you know, with previous episodes in this podcast and also on the grounds, I feel like her story could be more thoroughly told.

Easton: Definitely

Hannah: We couldn't agree more and we are going to go ahead today and give this podcast a rating of PG 13. There will be complex topics being explored throughout Mekinges' life story and we just want to give you that heads up.

Easton: Well, this episode is going to round out our three part series on reframing William Conner story. So we explored William Conner's own story with our dear friend David Highway, and he also came back and joined us on our dive through the undertold story of Free Black Noblesville farmer Pete Smith. And today we're focusing on Mekinges.

Hannah: So Mekinges was a member of the Lenape. She was most likely born here in Indiana in 1789. It is believed that she was the daughter of a leader of the community Chief Anderson. And her story has frequently been told through the lens of William Conner and his life almost as a bit of a footnote. There has been increasing work here at Conner Prairie in previous years to start to shift the lens onto Mekinges a little further. And we're going to keep pushing that lens today with Sara.

So I think today we want to make sure we give a little attention to Sara's new role. So part of shifting that lens has been bringing you on board. So do you then talk a little bit about your experience? What brings you here to the prairie and what you're excited to achieve?

Sara: Sure. I was hired on as the new curator for Native American Life and History after completing my master's degree in curatorship at Indiana University, Bloomington, and getting an undergrad degree in anthropology with a focus in archeology and a minor in Native American and Indigenous studies. I'm hired on to sort of be the first bit of getting more expertise regarding Indigenous life and history at Conner Prairie and discussing those stories. And we're starting off with Mekinges. Obviously, the Lenape were not the only people here, but there are direct ties between the Lenape and the Conner story. With beginning my work here, we're starting there and working outward.

A lot of Mekinges' story has been told in the frame of her relation to Conner and the documentation by him and his descendants. And some of those documentations may be less than accurate. We don't have a lot of oral history documented as of yet about Mekinges' story from the Lenape side. And I think that's certainly a an area where we can expand.

Hannah: Absolutely. I think we also should acknowledge that this discussion of Mekinges began back in our episode with Dr. Liza Black about cultural representation and misrepresentation. And so we would like to kind of highlight as well that this is a little bit of a follow on. So if you want to hear a little bit of that earlier discussion, you might want to go back because we will kind of follow up on some of the themes raised in that conversation.

Easton: So, Sara, I just wanted to ask what goals you thought were important as we're exploring Mekinges' story today, you know, how have we been reframing on our grounds? You've been out there, gone around seeing what we have here. How are you planning to continue that work? And what's the importance of engaging outside of communities as we try to widen the scope here?

Sara: Well, certainly the story that we've told on property so far has been focused on a particular family perspective, tying to Conner and then expanding into Prairietown and Civil War Journey and those areas where they expand bit by bit on stories that impact the general area around Indiana and this particular part of the state. That history starts at a certain point. There's a lot of history that precedes that. And just acknowledging that and giving it its fair due and making sure that everything that we say is factual is very important and making sure that the story is told in a way that is not biased by certain colonial perspectives.

Hannah: I really want to dig in then to your expertise as a scholar in this field and discuss how this work is done, the resources that we have at our disposal and any important foundational understandings about doing Native and Indigenous research prior to this telling of Mekinges. What do you think a person listening who's never done work in this field needs to know about how you do your job every day?

Sara: So an important part of Indigenous studies, especially in the state of Indiana, is that the majority of the sources start after removal. So any documentation you're going to get starts after certain death marches is probably the nicest way to phrase it, the most factual way to phrase it. There are many tribes who lived in more eastern areas and moved to Indiana as they were forced westward, and many resisted that movement, especially in Indiana. You see many waves of Indigenous identity and they call them national movements. A lot of times referred to in academia, but basically just being proud of who they are and who their identity is culturally and linguistically and fighting back against the ever encroaching European descent groups. At some point it's Dutch, French, British, American at one point.

And so all of the work that you're going to see academically is either archeology based. So you're going to get a lot of this is how we can prove they were here and inter-personal history based, which is like interviewing people, getting oral histories, writing them down, documenting the language, just mentioning the culture, photographs, sketches, those kinds of things. And a lot of times those projects are done without Indigenous voices present. So all of your information is coming from a certain perspective that does not involve the Indigenous part. And so it's important to acknowledge that the field itself of indigenous studies is moving at this moment and shifting towards including not just consultation but equal agency in representation in those discussions and those studies and regarding the importance of engaging with communities, just acknowledging the original inhabitants of this land, acknowledging the people who were here before us and their continued persistence and survival and resilience I think is really important because without them this place would not exist, you know, without their work with the land and slash-and-burn agriculture and different ways of managing the land while they were here, the land would not be in the same shape that it is now, and there wouldn't be a successful farming, there wouldn't be the same industries. Those skills and those certain economies that were exploited by colonizers would not exist if it wasn't for the indigenous people who are already here doing certain practices, maybe not in the same economic strategy way. It's not capitalism, it's reciprocity. But they have such a mark in every part of this world. And to just and to not be able to tell that story is shortchanging our visitors.

Easton: It's not exactly the pioneers in the untouched wilderness narrative that we're so used to hearing, is it?

Sara: No, not quite. There is, you know fur trapping was here long before the Americans. Well, United States of America, Americans, and you know the people occupying this land have gone… It goes back thousands of years and they changed the land in building mounds, the waterways and using those inspires the idea of the canals and so that canal based economic system that pops up in the early Indiana territory and those it's just that they have such an influence on these strategies and choices that a lot of the pioneers chose to do.

Hannah: I, I think one final area of this. I feel like we need to sit down with you. We're going to sit down with you a lot. I you feel like we need to sit down with you and talk about Native communities in Indiana and removal. And, I feel like we need to also discuss some of the different groups, because Conner Prairie has always focused so much on the Lenape and has definitely not explored some of these other communities that we should probably talk about. But for the purposes of today and for this discussion about Mekinges. I wanted to ask you one final question before we dive into herself and her story. What is important to understand about the Lenape community and culture before we discuss her as a person?

Sara: Well, at this time, historically, the Lenape are originally from East Coast area, and they have been forced to move and many have split apart into different groups. But, traditionally, they're matrilineal in terms of kinship. So your mother's clan within your tribe, would be how you determine what clan you belong to. And there are three main ones. And each clan has 12 sub clan groups within it. But the main important thing that is relevant to our discussion is the matrilocal portion of matrilineal descent. So this means that when you get married, your daughter gets married her husband and their children move in with the mother, and they are raised by the mother and the

sisters and, and the grandmother. In this case, the father has less of a fatherly role traditionally in a European sense. That's that role is filled by the grandmother's brother. So the uncle of sorts would be more involved in raising those children and also involved, especially in communicating gender roles for male children.

Easton: This is really great because I am in no way, shape or form a native historian. So this is all new grounds for me. But I'm really excited to learn. I have general questions to hit. So just…

Hannah: I'm not I'd like to point that out, too. I am also not a Native historian.

Easton: and I should be and there should be you know,

Hannah: Yeah, better education

Easton: I have nothing but time to learn here.

Sara: Yeah, but we're all learning.

Easton: Yeah. For real. I do just want to ask wide lens here. What did the Lenape community look like at the time that Mekinges was born? You know, what experience had the community had and the, you know, preceding years leading up to that point and what was the environment around her like?

Sara: So we don't have a lot of sources for 1789-ish Indiana. There's not a lot of what are considered accredited sources for that time period, especially regarding the Indigenous communities and the Lenape in particular. We know that the Lenape were forced westward and they went from New Jersey, New York, Pennsylvania, Delaware into further into Pennsylvania. They were forced out of Pittsburgh and they were forced out of Ohio in the Treaty of Greenville. There are some Lenape groups which just fought with the Northwest Confederacy and their battles ended in 1795. So that would have been about Mekinges' sixth year of life. So she would have been aware, especially her father being recognized as chief.

Her mother would have been an important female elder in the tribe and she would have had a lot of sway being a matrilineal group. The female elders, should they not like a male leader, could usurp that male leader and that would be like totally normal.

So there's a lot of work about the Lenape that have written down from sources that are mainly white men writing down stuff. So you get a lot of things that you can sort of consider a part of details that go with how a white man would frame indigenous people especially at that time in the 1780s. These are… the Lenape had just lost well 17, mid 1790s. The Lenape had just been part of a losing side of a war of sorts with the Northwest Confederacy and they lost to General Wayne and that was part of a pro Indigenous identity movement. And then again later on in the 1811-1812 time period, there was another wave of that, another pro indigenous movement rekindled by Tenskwatawa, also known as the Prophet and his brother Tecumsah. I do not speak Shawnee, so just that's my best pronunciation and if I get it wrong, please correct me.

So those, those movements would have been influential on how important her cultural identity would have been and how she would have raised her children, how she would have interacted in her marriage, and how she would have interacted with her husband in general. How she would have met him, what expectations were for her and her children, where they would have lived, what they would have learned, those kinds of things.

Hannah: Awesome.

Easton: Right.

Hannah: So I think a couple of the facts to hammer out here as they were about Mekinges' early life, what we quote unquote know. We know from the 1862 Lenape Census, she was born, as you said, 1789, we think most likely in what's now, Anderson. Sometimes referred to as Andersontown. Do you want to talk at all about how trustworthy these sources can be and how we know what we know?

Sara: Generally, you have to look at who's writing down the information and why. So if the information is regarding identity and roles, especially membership roles, first particular tribes having a certain birthdate or having a certain location of birth would be more or less beneficial for whoever is writing down the information as well as the individual it's being written about.

In terms of will not be There are some groups of Lenape in Indiana at this time. There are some groups of Moravian Lenape who would be in Indiana at this point. We don't know if she was born Moravian-Lenape it's likely that she wasn't because we don't see her in any church information for any of the Moravian communities. She wasn't written down as one of the assistants or anything of that nature. We do know that Connor was raised around the Moravian spear of sorts although it's indicated that after his marriage with Mekinges, they weren't necessarily in a Moravian community.

Hannah: And who were the Moravians like a very CliffsNotes version for someone who hasn't interacted with them before. Why are they important to this discussion? Other than that, Connor was partially raised within that community.

Sara: So according, I think it's the Moravian website that cites themselves as Prato Lutheran, which means they are Protestant They would have been focused on mission work, converting people to Christianity, particularly people of color. Primarily Indigenous people. But, you know, there's people of color all over the place, making a life for themselves in Indiana as Hoosiers have always done. And the Moravians had certain beliefs about alcohol consumption that was not traditionally allowed except for specific instances there. You know, singing and dancing was highly regulated. There are certain traditions that would have necessitated Christian Lenape people to be in certain buildings at certain times. And there are rules about when you can leave the community who can give you permission to do so and for what reason. Hunting had to be approved and if your main lifeway is making money off of fur trapping like a lot of people did in Indiana at that time. Getting permission from your pastor every time you leave your property to go hunt animals and trap the furs isn't necessarily the most efficient way to provide an income for your family.

Easton: So if we're assuming she wasn't raised in a traditional Moravian community like that, what would a typical Lenape childhood have looked like and how would she have, you know, been raised to see her role in her own community?

Sara: Well, given that her mother was an elder of the community and her father was a chief, according to the sources that we have, she would have led a very important life. Her name, the name that we are using, Mekinges literally translates to youngest daughter. And the reason we're using that name is because it's not her, given Lenape name. And so that can be used after death to refer to a person who is no longer here. As the youngest daughter, you know, daughters held a certain amount of importance, especially in the matrilineal community. She would have had a lot of older siblings who. Well, a lot, an amount of older siblings that we can't confirm nor deny in terms of estimations. But we know that she wasn't the only child. We do know that she would have had older sisters who when it came around to time to get married and raise her children, traditionally, she would have moved back in with her mother and her sisters and those people would help her raise her children.

Hannah: So as a child, would she have likely been a part of raising nieces and nephews?

Sara: Absolutely

Hannah: Given that she was the youngest?

Sara: Yeah. So she would have been raised along with nieces and nephews, cousins, and those people would be somewhat similar to siblings in that context, especially if you're in the same life stages.

Hannah: What would her daily life have been like? Would she have had chores? Would she have had education tasks that she would have been given on a daily basis?

Sara: Well, there's certainly traditional education that would happen, parental figure to a child, obviously, but also just, you know, getting along and being part of the community. So with a reciprocity based economic system, every member of the community contributes. And when someone isn't having as a successful yield, then the community gives back to them and takes care of them. And so that they can trust that when they don't have a great year, the community will step up for them as well. From what we know, she would have learned things to do with fur preparation, beading. We know that a lot of this is a very transitory period for Lenape culture in terms of you now have all of these European goods that are accessible that you can trade furs for, and you have plenty of those and you're very good at getting them so you can get what you need from the trading post. In terms of European goods, people would have bought brass kettles especially to be then torn apart and made into… I guess the word is tingles, but they're the little brass cones that go on jingle dresses. That would have been like something that she would have known how to do, and she probably would have been part of making them. And for a lot of Algonquin family speaking, Iroquois speaking peoples, part of dressing and making those outfits for people and making them as nice and detailed as possible. You pick out the patterns, you pick out the colors, and you make something that makes someone feel beautiful, feel wonderful about themselves, as a show of love. You know, you want to show everyone who sees that person that they are well loved and well taken care of and that they've got a community that they are cherished in.

Easton: Clothing is a love language. That's beautiful.

Sara: Yes, absolutely. Yeah. And especially during this time, wampum beads would have had particular importance. We see from some archeological sources that wampum beads were a particular source of contention among and especially the Lenape and certain governmental forces, particularly American governmental forces. And so they would bury wampum belts with the dead often as a show of defiance of like come and take them. You know, you want our you want our wampum belts, come and take them, the dead will get you. And so but that's from an archeological source from the 1960s. I don't know exactly how accurate that is. That would be something that I would love to discuss with representatives from the Lenape peoples and ask them, you know, is that accurate?

Because we can make we can draw conclusions from what we know but unfortunately most of our information sources are not verified by indigenous people and a lot of times the flow of information is interrupted by the infrastructure in place to separate oral history and oral tradition from what is considered accredited sources in academia. And so that provides a bit of a roadblock, and especially if you're doing archeological work in Indiana without an Indigenous consultant, there's well in anywhere really without an Indigenous consultant and you're working on Indigenous sites, you should really have a really strong knowledge basis to what you're working, who you're working with, what objects you're working with and what you intend to find and what you end up finding.

In terms of the role she was raised for. I can't exactly speak to the level of position she would have attained or did attain we don't know that much about her life prior to or after the marriage to Connor. We know that because her father was important in relations with representatives from white groups, that it's likely that her mother would have had equal importance and would have been an elder in a matrilineal elder in the community as well. That probably would have made her life different from people who don't have those connections. I can't speak to how different I would have been. I can speak to the fact that leadership in the Lenape comes from a chief who is elected to represent a certain group of people. And then there are many chiefs who come together and make decisions regarding the nation or the larger tribes.

Clan representatives would have been a thing. Clan elders would have been important and would have had political importance and power. There is no such thing as the Indian princess. That is a myth. It has very racist origins. And you can see it in a lot of stories that people tell about indigenous people. You can see it in how people talk about their lineage and it's a harmful stereotype. It's a harmful myth that comes from the mistaken misperception by colonizers that indigenous people shared the same systems of royalty and political power that Europeans did. It pops up a lot of animation stuff on the story of Pocahontas, particularly which I believe you guys touched on.

Easton: Yes, yes we do.

Sara: Yeah. It also falls into the like damsel in distress trope. It comes in contact a lot with that European standards of beauty discussions about the Christian Knight coming to save or the Christian Knight being a captive of the father of power and the princess rescuing him. She converts to Christianity and they live together in his native land. It's false that it's just simply not accurate and it's derogatory to be referring to real people in this stereotyped way. There are some named

princess does show up as like an award at powwows sometimes, but that's indigenous run, an indigenous set, you know, like that is them reclaiming that term for themselves. Especially in showing how much work they put into their own practices in terms of like ribbon skirts and jingle dresses. And beautiful beadwork and like getting awarded for participating in your own culture. And those award terms should be your own. And reclaiming that in that way is important to acknowledge, but also important not to step on that as a white person talking about indigenous history.

Music

Hannah: I think you've provided us the perfect segue way into the next section, which is going into the discussion of her marriage to William Conner. And we did talk about their story last time with Dr.Black relating it a little bit to that story of Pocahontas for a variety of reasons. One of which being similar ages of marriage between Mekinges most likely and Pocahontas to a white colonizer, but also the ways in which their relationships have been depicted. And that's where I think it connects to what you were just saying. These false romanticized visualizations of what these relationships were. And I think an example of this is, I believe it's the end of forever. I think that's what it's called. I can I can double check that. And as always, all of our references will be in the show notes. But it was a romantic fiction released, I believe it was 2003 early 2000s. And it was this romantic fiction this love story of William and the Congress. So. Right. So let's talk about how they actually met and what their relationship may have actually looked like and get away from all of these gross stereotypes. So how might they have met?

Sara: Well, Connor and his family have certain documents that reference their family history. According to them themselves. They were they knew many languages and worked as interpreters. So it's possible well that when Connor came in the late 1790s, we know he was here by 1800. We know he left Michigan by 1797, according to their own book. So those three years are kind of in the wind a little bit in terms of what we know he did, but he may have been working as an interpreter for Indigenous groups. He may have some knowledge of some languages. We know that there are many Indigenous groups in the area at the time. The Miami were a very powerful force in Indiana at the time and he may have worked with them and then worked his way further south into the state, closer to white settled areas that may have made trading easier. May have made his business a little bit easier to do.

According to her birth date she would have been 12. We know that on average, most women would not have gotten married until the ages of 20 to 22, and that average is going from a statistic from 1800 through 1890. And so that's over the course of 90 years. And on the earlier end it may have been a little younger than 20, but it's unlikely that 12 was a typical age for marriage.

Hannah: And if we look at this as speculative, your source is much more statistical and factual. But I think we can also look at the evidence that we have of, you know, his second wife Elizabeth, he's marrying her 18. She's 18 at that point. He's quite a bit older, but she is kind of, of that age that we would view today of being 18 and marrying age. I mean as we would view today and general marriages around this time, it's common to see 16, 17, 18, but it's pretty uncommon to see as young as 11 or 12.

Sara: Yeah, I do think Connor was roughly about 26. That's our best estimate for his age. And that's pretty common for the age of your first marriage as a man, especially in the Indiana territory, because this is prior to statehood and there are, there is not a marriage record recognized by the state of Indiana regarding the marriage between William Connor and Mekinges.

Hannah: But our time frame for that is relatively small, right, because we know he's definitely here the latest state I've heard. November 1801 but you're saying probably earlier than that. So he was definitely here between then and their first child is born in 1802. So if we're assuming they were married before their first child was born, that puts that time period of marriage in a relatively small

Sara: Window of time. Yeah, absolutely. That puts it within I think about two years, a little bit less so anywhere between age 11 and age 13. And that's, that's not a typical age to get married at this time. Not for the Lenape, not for the white pioneer community, not for any particular community in this area at that time. We can't speak to the details of their relationship. We do know that they had children very quickly after that two year period. They had six kids. And by the Treaty of Saint Mary, she would have been roughly about just under 30 years old. And that is that 18 year span is about what we have documented about Mekinges and most of the documentation that we have, most of our sources are from the Connor side of that. So we really aren't getting the Mekinges perspective on her marriage. We aren't getting her children's perspective of how they were raised. We don't know exactly where they were raised. I know that Connor Prairie has presented the story that Mekinges just moved in with him and they had their kids there. That's possible. But it would have gone against what is traditional in Lenape culture. They would have been matrilocal, moved in with her mother and raised the children with her siblings. And that would have been important to pass on those cultural relationships.

That's not to say that they weren't Lenape culturally. They probably spoke the language. They probably maintained some of their life ways, some of their traditions in terms of food and fur trapping and tasks that you really have to do for yourself at this time. I mean, a lot of you can't just go to the store and get something. You know, you have to either make it yourself or trade for it at that point and hope that they have it at the trade post. So it's likely that the children who were living with her and Connor, if they didn't live with her family, would have been raised as sort of not Lenape, not white. They may have been excluded from certain practices. They may not have been… they may have encountered a lot of difficult situations being split almost between two cultures and being asked to probably choose one or the other. And it's very clear that they chose their mother and they chose their community. And it's pretty clear that Connor later on that marriage isn't recognized. So he didn't necessarily choose to go with his family.

Hannah: I think we can dig a little bit more into that and in a minute. I think it is important to recognize that every source we have in the early era describing people visiting with Mekinges and William or talking about them from, you know, 1870s, 1880s, looking back, they refer to them as husband and wife. They refer to them as married. So even though there is not that record, they were they were, for all intents and purposes, as we would know, married, correct?

Sara: Right. They certainly weren't calling her his daughter and or his mother or anything like that. So if they're referring to her as his wife, we have to take them at their word because…

Hannah: and they're given land as a family from the government, as a family,

Sara: Exactly

Hannah: It's given to William, Mekinges and their children. And so they were being viewed legally…

Sara: As a family unit

Hannah: As a family unit

Sara: By whatever territorial government was being recognized at that time. And so we can we can go off of those classifications and those recognitions that they were married, that they were likely considered a family unit, and that it's likely that at the time that would have been an unusual marriage to witness.

Hannah: So why? Why was William marrying an indigenous woman? Would there have been a reason that Mekinges would have been marrying William? How would that have been viewed by the communities? Like what were the dynamics around this marriage?

Sara: Well, there is many accounts of white male fur traders marrying indigenous women and then joining their communities. Not only as. Yeah?

Ryan: Well, do we know anything about.. Well isn't chief Anderson? His dad was a free trader, right?

Sara: Maybe,

Ryan: Maybe Okay.

Sara: Maybe there's some issues of Chief Anderson's ancestry. We think his dad was Swedish. That's a possibility. I haven't been able to find anything that proves anything.

Ryan: I was wondering if that would be some context.

Sara: So. So his mother, we know, was Lenape. We know Chief Anderson's mom would have been in the Lenape. And so he would have been considered Lenape because his mother was right. We know that his father was likely possibly a Swedish Dutch man who was possibly a fur trader along a river of some sort. That's all I can I can find verify and like sources about ancestry, sources about the names are the spellings are different. The ages are different. There's some people who the name for Anderson's mother is a name that pops up a lot for a woman who lived till 1864. So that's certainly not her. So, you know, there's difficulties finding the people and being able to make sure that we're telling the story of the person. You know, you don't want to attribute someone else's life to a different person, and you certainly don't want to confuse the details between individuals.

We know that often a white male for traders, typically married indigenous woman. This could have been beneficial in terms of communication, learning the language being participatory in the culture. This would have been helpful in terms of connections with communities. So if you get injured or if you get sick and you can't fur trap that month or that season, then you're going to have a hard time surviving if you don't have a community to fall back on. So the role of matrilineal descent is really

important in these interactions. We can see just how vital having those connections would have been to the survival of early settlers in the area. It's unclear how often it happened. There's certainly a lot of stories about it, and so a lot of people will trace that in their own lineage, and some of those can be verified and some of those can be seen in terms of the names of children passed on in families.

A lot of times the first marriage was to an indigenous woman or in this case, an indigenous girl. And then the next marriage would happen to a white woman and so on. It would have been white women after that point, because once you have the connections to the community and then that community being forcibly removed, you are no longer dependent upon your connections to that community for your survival. And so part of it is the making connections with the community around you again in a different way.

And also part of it is, you know, getting back to the colonial mindset of civilization to talk about this story without acknowledging how much Colonialization plays into what we do know of Mekinges would be misrepresentative. Of her story. We know that the works written about her are written by people who colonized the land she called home. We know that the culture and the peoples that she belonged to and her children belong to were forcibly removed again and again and again. They were lied to. They were. There's the signatures on the treaties. In most cases, the signatures on the treaties are X's and so it's not actual names. They represent certain names. And there's that trust with interpreters that those X's actually represent those people. And that they know what they're signing. But in terms of trusting a white man interpreter to tell the truth when it could financially benefit him. Like, there's Williams brother John was an interpreter on one of the treaties that I was looking at earlier and he benefited from tracts of land that were covered by that treaty that he then owned once that treaty became legal. And these treaties weren't approved by Congress, that wasn't a thing until 1831. So all of these treaties are prior to overseeing by Congress. So after that point, I think things get a little bit more clear as to what's being communicated, who's doing the communicating. And are they responsible if they benefit financially about what they're communicating and how it's being communicated.

So there is a lot of under regulation of the industry in terms of acquiring land at this point. And you could just literally go out there and build a home and be like, this is mine. And the people who are already there are going to look at you like you're insane. And they did. And that's not to say that the indigenous leaders at the time didn't know what was happening. They there are some provisions in certain treaties like annuities that guaranteed certain people amounts of money for the inconvenience of being removed. And it's unclear how much of that money actually got to them, how much of that annuity was actually given and how much had to be paid back in taxes. And getting goods and learning the new land that you're living on because it's a different environment than the one you've been living on for 30 years. And especially that window of Lenape recognized, Lenape existence in Indiana is roughly about 30 years. There's some maybes earlier and maybe later in terms of people who stay, but it's roughly about 30 years that the Lenape people are for sure on the White River in Indiana. And so documenting that and getting clear sources for that is difficult. That would be like narrowing everything down to like a five year period or a one year period. In other cases, in terms of history.

I also I want to clarify that the hypothetical I was describing was very much white male benefit centric. There would have been benefits to marrying outside of your tribe in terms of you know,

more connections and connecting to the people coming in. And hopefully they'll stop making you leave. And also just, you know, there's love that's that thing that you can't document, you can't prove historically. I don't feel comfortable speaking as to whether or not William and Mekinges' marriage was based on love. That's not a narrative I'm willing to commit to in terms of all of that.

Hannah: I think the one the one piece of this, I don't know, maybe you would think this is a stretch. The one piece of this, I think in my head connects to love is the love that she had for her children and the lengths that she went to, to take care of them. I mean, as far as we know it, they all survived what you referred to as the death march. So shall we shall we talk about that that process? Shall we talk about the removal of Mekinges and the six children she had had with William and start to explore towards the end of her life? As we talked about in the William Connor episode he was an interpreter on the trip to St Mary's. That's the very same treaty that removed Mekinges and the kids from the White River from these lands. Do you want to start there?

Sara: Yeah. So we know that William Connors lands that he gets awarded to him. Mekinges and their children then become profitable once the Treaty of St Mary's is signed in 1818. And when the Lenape are removed, the land price value goes up and he sells off part of that land. He marries two months later to a white woman who is 18.

Hannah: Elizabeth Chapman.

Sara: Elizabeth. And from what we know, Mekinges' children live to adulthood. Having all of your kids lived to adulthood is difficult throughout most of the history of this area, particularly at a time when your culture and identity are under target. By an invading force of people. And also just pressure from different groups trying to convert you, trying to force you to make choices about how you raise your children and how you care for them. That would have been very difficult and that all six of her kids lived to adulthood and not only lived to adulthood, but lived lives past adulthood is really a testament to Mekinges' love for her family and the work that she put in. And we can't really speak to the role that William would have had in that if he was supportive or not. We don't know. From what we've read from the Connor accounts, It's not necessarily mentioned that he was particularly supportive of Mekinges and her family.

Hannah: So there are a couple of rumors and I'm going to underline and bold that word. Rumors I've heard through the time working here, one being that he may have gone along with her on the journey to begin with, have returned, chosen not to continue. So he may have considered leaving. That's a rumor that is often discussed. Another one is, and I am trying for the life of me to remember this source. I will attempt to find it and link it. But somewhere there is a source of him giving her some form of, I believe, the word they use is settlement of potentially of some ponies and some money. Yeah. Im just curious if you have any thoughts on that.

Sara: So I'm not exactly sure how the European concept of divorce translates to land culture. I can't speak to that necessarily, especially during this time period. That's not an area that I'm super familiar with. But we can see that in the lack of recognition by the government later on in the 1860s that her marriage to William Connor was no longer considered legal and so her children didn't have any rights to the land that they were awarded.

And we also know that William Connor had to be present for his marriage to Elizabeth. We don't know what happened in those two months. It's likely that it was less than two months he was gone considering you have to, you know, know a person before you marry them. That's generally a requirement at this time.

Hannah: And it was a good distance away that they got married. It wasn't right here.

Sara: Yeah, they had to. It was Connersville, right?

Hannah: Yeah. Down that way.

Sara: So they would have had to go if he's coming west If he had walked with Mekinges and their children, then he's walking back, supposedly walking back. Maybe he's using a horse and buggy. We don't really know. But if he's coming back, he's got to go all the way back to this area and then all the way back to Connersville. Which would have been even further east. And so that's going to take a lot of time depending on what place he leaves. I think that unless we find some documentation to prove that either narrative, I wouldn't interpret then, you know. I also think that that given that it's not Moravian centric in their relationship, that we can probably assume that his marriage with Mekinges was probably also not Moravian centric.

Hannah: And something that is referred to in various places as his lack of connection to a particular religion of any kind. He doesn't appear to have been connected, as far as I know, to a religious belief system beyond childhood. He may have been, but.

Sara: Right.

Hannah: It didn't seem to frame his worldview, particularly.

Music

Easton: So did she have to leave being married to a white man at that time? Like, what choices would she have had? Because she didn't have a choice over what was happening to her community. To her family. And what would her life have looked like if she and her children had remained in Indiana?

Sara: Well, depending on whether or not there was actually a divorce, happening, if there was a divorce between Mekinges and Connor, then she probably would not have had the choice to stay if they weren't officially divorced at that time. Or in the process of doing that in a way that would have been recognized by the community and she could have had the choice to stay. But that would mean losing that support system. If everyone in your community is leaving and you don't go with them and they don't know where they're going to end up necessarily, then you there's not a lot of chance of reconnecting with them, especially because it's many days walking and it's not like there are trains or a bus or, you know, that the distance it would have taken for her to have that connection. And we didn't have a letter system at that point. The mail wasn't an option, so for her to communicate with her family would have been extremely difficult. And to lose that in a time when your identity's under threat by not only the government that claims the land that you're on, the state that is now a state that does not claim you but names itself after you would have been a very

difficult choice and it would have been a question of am I part of this new white thing or am I part of the Lenape? And I think that her children would have had a similar choice. Her first child that she had very soon after the marriage with William that first kid they had together, that child would have been close to legal age. So they could have gotten married, they could have stayed they could have chosen to stay if they chose to be white. But what kind of choice are you asking of that person to make? Are they choosing to leave their family, their support system, their siblings, their parents? You know, are you betting on those?

Hannah: Well their father was Basically…

Sara: Yeah.

Hannah: Not recognizing them from then on.

Sara: Yeah.

Hannah: So they he wouldn't have even had his support of his father.

Sara: Yeah. You know, what environment are they choosing to stay in? And I think that especially if that land is under threat, I mean, the there have been many massacres in Ohio, in Indiana, in Pennsylvania, of Lenape people generally, they are Moravian went up and they were pacifists. So they believed in nonviolence. And so these people, they weren't armed. They didn't have any weapons. They weren't of a different culture necessarily. They were Christian. They were they were wearing white clothes. They built houses like white people, and they were being murdered and not only murdered, but they are being massacred in a public way. That you would definitely hear those stories several states over. That news would get to you quickly and then you're being targeted for something that they chose to give up. You know, they converted. They said that they're not Lenape. Well, some of them said they weren't Lenape. Some of them are Lenape Christian. Some of them still maintain that connection, that culture that identity, but they're still being targeted. They did things the white guys way and they're still being killed. So why stay in an area where you could be killed and there's no consequences for it?

Easton: Right.

Sara: You know, why raise a family there? Why keep your family there? Why find a wife there? Why find a husband?

Easton: Especially, it seems like it adds another layer of tragedy on an already tragic situation. And I'm really afraid of asking this question, but like we have, of course, evidence and accounts on what an awful experience leaving was like. What do you think her journey was like? Like how was her community prepared and in cases not given what they needed to survive and thrive out there?

Sara: So in most white sources, indigenous people being forced out of certain areas is called removal. The removal process varies from instance to instance. We know in the case of the Pottawatomie that it was a death march at bayonet and gunpoint. This and when they fell, they were shot. And so we know that that was a possibility. We don't know exactly how the Lenape were forced to leave. We know that they most of them did not go willingly. Some Lenape agreed with the

treaty. And we're like, okay, we're getting our annuity. We're going to go we're going to build our home. And that's going to be it. We're going to go there and that's it. We're done. We're not leaving again. And some people felt that, especially after the loss of Tecumseh and his brother, that that pro indigenous identity movement had lost some of its momentum. And so they may be trying to negotiate that identity with, you know, acknowledging that the leaders and the communities that they were rooting for to succeed have are dead and can no longer continue to fight for them. And fight for all the indigenous groups in Indiana. And so unfortunately, there is some feeling of just being like well, if we if we go now, we get our money from the deal, we get the hell out, we might be safe this time. And unfortunately, they weren't. We know that this happens again and again. And again the Lenape people persist. They are resilient. They continue to persist in many ways. Their languages continue to persist throughout future devastation, like the residential boarding schools some of which were in Indiana. There's continual pressure to force assimilation and cultural genocide. And yet the Lenape still here you know, they are still speaking their language. They're still practicing their cultures, cultural beliefs. They're still participating in their culture and their identity. And still negotiating what it means to be Lenape. And so what happened during removal? If Lenape people choose to speak about it, I think that it should be documented.

Easton: Absolutely.

Sara: And some may have spoken about it, but not with us particularly. And so we don't know exactly what happened during that movement. We do know that it was walking, that they were not given any form of transportation. If Mekinges was given ponies then she could have used them to get people there quicker. But it's unlikely that she would have had enough to help everybody go we know that there's anywhere between 800 to a couple thousand of Lenape people removed from this part of the White River.

Hannah: And we're talking about walking initially…

Sara: Months.

Hannah: To Kansas, then Missouri, no, Missouri, then Kansas, and then down to Oklahoma eventually.

Sara: And some were forced to go down to Texas as well.

Hannah: Yeah, her son ends up in Texas.

Sara: And so there's two groups that are split off at one point through the removal process and some of a group end up in Texas, some of them end up in Oklahoma. But this process lasted until the 1860s. I mean we're talking 40 years of forced movement and it's started with a three month march.

Hannah: Yeah.

Sara: That kind of disruption to life, to connection, to your environment, to connection to your community, to your people. I mean, if your group is being split in half, some people are going to lose communication and connection. And so that process is substantial in terms of how the Lenape are

today, in terms of their persistence and the ways they are choosing to continue to practice their culture. And how they, you know, keep it alive.

Hannah: Yeah

Ryan: When they're over on the East Coast, they're largely in the Upper Lenape or Unami or opposite… Munsee and then Unami and then there's four clans within. Is it just Unami or is it within both?

Sara: There's three clans within each. And then each clan has a has 12 sub clans.

Ryan: Okay.

Sara: And the fourth thing you're thinking of is the spirit with the half red half black face? The three Clans were the Wolf, Turkey and Turtle.

Ryan: Okay, so those are the three. Got it. And then they I'm assuming like in this example where this group because I know this isn't the first time they were removed and they've been separated multiple times. And so parts of them have already moved up to Wisconsin by this point or somewhere.

Sara: Some leaves go to Canada. Yeah.

Ryan: Yes. So are they being split off culturally clan wise or is a much more mishmash?

Sara: It's unclear the diffusion of groups. And this this diaspora of Lenape people I can't really say diaspora, but forced diaspora, it's unclear exactly how that divides among linguistic and clan lines. We do know that with the great dying preceding European contact, well, actually not preceding, but during early European contact, that the Lenape went from several million to hundreds of thousands, that they lost millions of people and so those 12 sub clans for each of the three clans went back to the original three clans. So it used to be your sub clan was most important then your clan then that you're Lenape. So different sub clans could have different treaties with different indigenous groups that were already there. They could have different trade agreements and that would be recognized as its own political polity with the with the great loss of many, many people from disease and from early contact with Europeans. It went from sub clan agreements to clan agreements. So you'd have one clan that your, your maternal clan, so your mother's clan that you would be part of that group and the language spoken was more geographical than clan associated.

So you'd have parts of each clan in each geographical place. And so you get Munsee up further north, and it would be more about geographic connection. And, you know, the Lenape are considered the grandfather of certain Algonquin languages. And so sorry my phone keeps buzzing. So there's a history tied to that identification from other indigenous groups. So they've been there for a really long time and they have an origins story where they team up with the northern Shawnee, which were probably in Maine-Canada at that point, where they force what they refer to as the mound builders, which is different from the Mound Builders myth out of Ohio and Indiana essentially. And they're controlled from their tip of the Great Lakes into the East Coast, has a huge swath of land and it's unclear how that control, how that control of land was slowly traced back, because we know that

wasn't their range of control when the removals started and when the agreements with the Dutch and the Swedes and the French and the British started.

Hannah: So I am very no here. You're perfect. So I'm very aware of time on this episode. We're going to try and kind of keep this the same length as the others be recorded. So people can listen. We don't want them to be, you know, hours and hours long we are going to have Sara back. We're going to have Sara back repeatedly. We're going to come back and read discuss the story from different angles, hopefully with different community members and scholars. But I just wanted you before we round up today, kind of finish us off with the end of Mekinges' life, what we speculate at and what your goals are for learning about her, her story more about her life, bringing in different perspectives, like what are the goals moving forward? What do you wish we knew all of that good stuff.

Sara: I would love to know anything and everything we could find about her because she obviously was such an important person, not only to her family, but to her community. And she is woefully underrepresented in terms of historical documents and in terms of what we know here. I would love to build our knowledge about her story in particular and other stories from the Lenape, from other communities in the area at the time. And personally, I would love to expand on our knowledge from the Lenape themselves It's really important that our sources be from all sides, but particularly the side that is historically and infrastructure really underrepresented in history. It's incredibly important to provide oral history because it is very academic. We've seen how reliable it can be in terms of actual documentation and it lines up with what we know on the ground fact wise. And so it's an incredible source for information that has been underutilized and not just our work here, but in academia and in state history in general.

Hannah: And what you're seeing or hearing sorry, what you're hearing here in this discussion also reflects discussions is going on about how we're telling the story on the ground. It's all part of one big project. So we're so glad you're here, Sara. We're so glad that you're doing this work with us. And we can't wait to hear through the coming months and years about the work that you're doing.

Sara: Yeah. I can't wait to learn so much more.

Easton: Go curatorial

Hannah: Right! Go team. Okay. Shall we go ahead and round this one out?

Easton: Thank you all so much for joining us today. As we took yet another dive through some problematic history you can find us on Apple Podcasts, Spotify, and anywhere else you get your podcasts.

Hannah: Thank you so much for listening.