
NORTH CAROLINA ARCHAEOLOGICAL SOCIETY

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NEWSLETTER

Historic Preservation at the Local Level, an Archaeologist's Perspective

In July 1990, I read an article in the local newspaper regarding the establishment of a commission to inventory historic and archaeological sites in Orange County. I immediately wrote the chairman of the board of county commissioners volunteering to serve on the commission once it was established. The following February the "Orange County Historic Preservation Commission" was officially sanctioned, and in May 1991, six Orange County citizens, including myself, were appointed to serve on the new commission. A seventh member was added this year.

The members are a diverse group. Our backgrounds range from historic preservation and restoration to farming and insurance; from construction to landscape architecture; and of course, archaeology. Our common bond is a commitment to preserve the history and historical resources of Orange County and North Carolina. This commitment is also our mission. The resources we are charged to protect include buildings, landscapes, and archaeological sites, as well as other kinds of "sites" as long as they "embody important elements" of the county's "cultural, social, economic, political, archaeological or architectural history."

Before the commission could begin the business of preservation, we had to first find out what needed preserving by implementing an inventory of historical resources in the county. This inventory began in 1991 with an architectural survey of Chapel Hill Township, funded jointly by the county and a survey and planning grant from the N.C. Division of Archives and History. At my urging, the Orange County Planning Department--the administrative unit that advises the commission--also agreed to hire an archaeology graduate student to see if there might be buried archaeological remains associated with some of

the buildings identified during the course of the architectural survey.

In 1992, another survey and planning grant was obtained, with matching funds from the county, to expand the architectural survey to include the remaining townships. This year additional funds were granted by the Division of Archives and History and the county to conduct a survey of archaeological sites and to prepare a manuscript reporting the results of the architectural surveys. Once the site inventories are completed, we will begin to evaluate and identify those historical resources that are significant, relative to National Register criteria, and establish local historical landmarks and districts. These are the things that we will strive to protect through county zoning ordinances, tax incentives, and public education.

So far, so good, but getting to this point has not been easy--at least from my standpoint as an archaeologist. Initially, most of the members of the commission considered historical resources to represent one thing--old buildings. And of course, I argued that standing structures and architectural styles are actually a small part of our cultural heritage, representing only a couple hundred years out of the more than ten thousand years Orange County has been the scene of human activity. I also argued that the old buildings themselves may not be as important historically as what lies buried, out of sight, in the yards and fields that surround them.

Although I am not known around Chapel Hill for my political correctness, nevertheless, I have found that my positions on the commission have often sounded more like tenets from the manifesto of multiculturalism than excerpts from the creed of the Daughters of the American Revolution. I have stressed that our cultural and historical heritage is not just

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embodied in the architectural remains of Euro-Americans, but that it can also be found in the remains left behind by Native Americans, African-Americans, and the poor and illiterate, as well as the rich and the famous. More often than not, this part of our heritage is not preserved in standing buildings, but rather is buried in trash pits, foundation remains, and other faint traces visible only in the archaeological record. And in many ways, this fragile record of the past is the most endangered and needy of our preservation efforts.

There are four criteria for determining historical significance under guidelines of the National Register of Historic Places. Criterion (c) is most often used to determine if a built structure is important or not. It considers factors such as distinctiveness of style, integrity of construction, and other architectural or artistic features within a broad historical perspective. Criteria (a) and (b) are sometimes used if a property was associated with important historical events or the lives of individuals significant in our history. Criterion (d), which states that a site may be significant if it has yielded or is likely to yield information important in history or prehistory, is rarely used to evaluate standing structures and is usually applied to the evaluation of archaeological sites.

Based on my experience, "style" and "artistic considerations" dominate the evaluation process. Don't get me wrong! I'm not against preserving old houses and buildings because of their architectural or artistic uniqueness, or because they represent outstanding examples of particular stylistic trends. However, I feel that too often these kinds of historical resources are considered to the exclusion of others.

Yes, I know there are one-room log houses and three-room bungalows also included on the National Register. Still, their inclusion is based, for the most part, on stylistic grounds rather than on anything substantive they might contribute to our understanding of the past. Art, not science, is more often the justification for preservation.

My participation on the Orange County Historic Preservation Commission has taught me several things. First of all, do not take for granted the fact that everyone shares your appreciation of archaeology and its importance in understanding the past. I'm afraid that, in a lot of peoples' minds, we are still viewed as eccentric relic collectors, or at best, ivory tower antiquarians. I have also learned that understanding and appreciating the past can be very different things. One can appreciate the charm of a one-room log cabin, but care less about the social and economic forces that made it a highly adaptable frontier structure. Unfortunately, I have learned that North Carolina history to many began with the establishment of the Roanoke Colony in 1585.

My purpose in writing this piece is not so much to criticize these attitudes, but to make all of you with an interest in the past aware of them. I would also urge you to be active in your local historic preservation commissions. Attend their meetings and preach the gospel of archaeology. Let them know that an inventory of historical resources should be much more than a list and description of buildings over 50 years old.

H. Trawick Ward
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'Prehistory Symposium' Is Back

The publication entitled the *Prehistory of North Carolina: An Archaeological Symposium*, edited by Mark A. Mathis and Jeffrey J. Crow (second printing), is now available for \$10.00 (\$1.00 postage/handling for the first book and \$.25 each additional book). Send payment to Dee Nelms, Office of State Archaeology, 109 East Jones Street, Raleigh, NC 27601-2807.

S A L E

All t-shirts are on sale for \$6.00: the FNCA logo is available in black and navy w/ white lettering, white w/ navy lettering, and ecru w/ black lettering (large, medium and small); the ASNC logo is available in grey w/ black lettering (medium).

Hats with the FNCA logo are on sale for \$5.00.

To order, send payment (postage/handling included in price) to Dee Nelms, North Carolina Archaeological Society, 109 East Jones Street, Raleigh, NC 27601-2807.

If you have any questions, contact Dee at the above address or at 919-733-7342.

BROAD REACH UPDATE

Since nearly 100 Society members assisted in the work at the Broad Reach site (31Cr218) in 1991 and 1992, I thought it would be good to provide a short status report on the project. For the unfamiliar, Broad Reach is a large prehistoric shell midden and village site located on Bogue Sound in Carteret County, not far from Swansboro.

Altogether, we removed the plowzone from about 3.4 hectares (8.5 acres) of the site, exposing a minimum of 692 features. Unfortunately, we only had time to investigate 127 (18%) of the recorded features. These included shell-filled pits, hearths, burials, smudge pits, cobble caches and various and sundry refuse-filled pits. Some of the "features" probably were natural (e.g. trees, animal burrows), but most are the result of prehistoric activities. There is a good chance that many other features were overlooked because of the lack of surface staining or visible artifacts, since the sandy soils tend to leach very quickly when exposed to the sun and winds.

In addition to the pit features, we identified all or portions of at least five structures. One of the structures was a rectangular *longhouse* measuring over 16m long and 4.9m wide (53'x16'). An interior partition was clearly defined within the house, making a room measuring 13m (42') long. We could not determine the full length of the house. A smaller rectangular structure (5.75m x 4m) was found adjacent to the longhouse. The other three structures were round or oval in shape. At least eleven lines of postmolds were identified across the site, some of which may have been house walls, others fences or windbreaks.

Analysis of the artifacts is moving at a snail's pace, so little can be said about it at this time. During

the 1991 season we collected over 8000 potsherds (and probably about that many in 1992). Most are shell-tempered and associated with the Late Woodland period (dating to after AD 700), although a good number are tempered with clay or grog, a characteristic of the Middle Woodland period Hanover ceramic type. A few sherds appear to be associated with Early Woodland occupations.

We have acquired nine radiocarbon dates so far. The earliest -- AD 365 +/- 100 -- came from a feature containing two Hanover type ceramic vessels. This is particularly exciting since it is only the second date acquired from the coastal area with a clear association with the Hanover pottery type. The rest of the dates, ranging from AD 886 to AD 1441, fit well within the Late Woodland time frame. Five of the dates cluster between AD 1328 and AD 1441, suggesting that this may have been a period of particularly intense use of the site. One of the latest dates -- AD 1437 -- came from a pit containing charred corn cobs. So far, this is the only evidence of corn from the site, and may reflect the relative insignificance of corn agriculture in the inhabitant's subsistence system.

Marina construction continues at Broad Reach. Although most of the site remains undisturbed, the future of the site is uncertain. What is certain, unfortunately, is that we will not return to the site as we did in 1991 and 1992. While we could spend many more years shovel-shaving for house patterns and waterscreening feature fill, we collected enough material to keep the lab busy for years to come (over 100 boxes), and enough information to fill volumes. As the analyses proceed, however, I will continue to pass along some of the more interesting discoveries.

Mark A. Mathis

SOUTHEASTERN ARCHAEOLOGICAL CONFERENCE

Don't forget, the Southeastern Archaeological Conference will be held in Raleigh from November 4-6, at the Radisson Plaza Hotel. Registration is \$35.00. There may be a bus trip to Hardaway, Morrow Mountain and/or Town Creek on Saturday the 6th. If interested in the meetings or trip contact Dee Nelms or Mark Mathis at (919) 733-7342.

EDITOR'S NOTE

Members are invited to submit information or items of interest for inclusion in the NCAS Newsletter. This could include information about NCAS Chapter events, personal or professional research, and questions or comments about the archaeology of North Carolina. Information should be sent to Dee Nelms at the OSA.

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