



**North Carolina
Archaeological Society**

Newsletter

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<http://www.rla.unc.edu/ncas>

Tiny Rockshelters and Precontact Period Ritual in Mountainous Western North Carolina

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Two small sites in northwestern North Carolina provide examples of probable sacred, rather than residential, functions of some rockshelters. The Wiseman's View site (31BK14) is located in Burke County, within the Linville Gorge Wilderness area of Pisgah National Forest (Figure 1). At 1,036 m AMSL, it is a small (1.5 m high by 2.5 m wide by 1.5 m deep) recess on a vertical, east-facing, feldspathic arenite bluff 3 m below Wiseman's View Overlook, a vantage of purported sightings of the legendary Brown Mountain Lights (<https://www.ncpedia.org/brown-mountain-lights>). Accessing the site from the overlook currently requires some courage and agility. The "floor" is composed of exposed angular boulders, where most of the fragments from a sand-tempered, cord-marked vessel were found (Dickens and Jones n.d.). No other artifacts were observed, and no photograph was taken of the sherds in situ. The vessel appears to have been a large Connestee series jar dating to the early part of the Middle Woodland period (ca. AD 300) (Figure 2). It also appears to have broken in situ either from weathering processes, such as freezing, or intentional termination whereby the pot was ritually "killed." A recent archaeological survey of the overlook area above yielded no evidence of prehistoric use (Whyte 2007).

There are several reasons to suggest this tiny recess, that contained part of a single vessel, was a shrine or offering site rather than a place of habitation, human burial, or raw material caching. First, there are many more spacious and accessible shelters in the same bluff face that would have provided better living space. Second, the recess lacked typical evidence of human habitation (i.e., soil, carbonized wood, burned rocks, lithic artifacts). If a corpse was placed along with the vessel on the surface inside the recess, it had decomposed or was completely removed by scavengers. If the vessel had been cached for future use we would expect to find a nearby habitation site, most likely on the flat ground immediately above, from where the storage niche could be accessed. Perhaps the most convincing evidence in support of Wiseman's View as a shrine site is that from the recess opening two very prominent mountain peaks present themselves to view: Hawksbill Mountain to the northeast (60 degrees) and Table Rock to the southeast (125 degrees). Hawksbill Mountain is precisely aligned with the summer solstice sunrise as viewed from the Wiseman's View site as seen in Figure 3 (page 3, upper left). The rising sun on the winter solstice appears immediately north but not precisely on the peak of Table Rock, as seen in Figure 3 (page 3, upper right).



Figure 1. The Wiseman's View site.

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Considering these remarkable solar alignments and accumulating evidence of the significance of solar events in southern Appalachian Middle Woodland cosmology (Kimball and Wolf 2017; Wright 2014), the evidence from Wiseman's View (one ceramic vessel in a small recess) is more consistent with that of an offering site than a cache or habitation site. The vessel and its possible contents may have been placed there as an offering to the sun.



Figure 2. Connestee cord-marked pottery from the Wiseman's View site.

Although there have been many historical claims of sightings of the Brown Mountain Lights in the sky above Brown Mountain and between Hawksbill and Table Rock mountains as viewed from Wiseman's View Overlook, science has not authenticated these claims nor do Native American legends reference them (contra Roberts 1967). Therefore, I do not believe they influenced the use of Wiseman's View recess.

The Maurice Ward site (31WT372), located in western Watauga County, is a southwest-facing cavity in a granodioritic outcropping at an elevation of 840 m AMSL (Figure 4). Currently, and in late prehistory, the opening is about 75 cm high by 50 cm wide on a 30% slope angling down to the left toward a creek. The cavity narrows inward and down with a 10% slope to a point approximately 4 m from the opening. On the surface at the entrance, the

landowner, the late Maurice Ward, found 147 pottery sherds. No other artifacts were found. The pottery from this site accounts for most of two vessels. Both are jar forms with punctuated collared rims and date to about AD 1300 (Figure 5). These vessels appear to have broken in situ either from weathering processes or from intentional termination rituals. Like the vessel at the Wiseman's View site, they may have been placed as offerings at the opening of the cavity.

It is possible that human remains are buried below the surface at the Maurice Ward site, however there is no evidence that the site or its steeply-sloped immediate vicinity provided a setting for human habitation. Small geological cavities, like the Maurice Ward site, are innumerable in the region, yet few are known to contain artifacts. Like Wiseman's View, the uniqueness of this site suggests it was connected to an astral event or some other special event (such as a spiritual experience or burial locale) or perhaps it served as a boundary marker or guardian place.

At sunset on the spring equinox the entire length of the cavity is sunlit and the sun, viewed from the opening, was positioned in a notch between mountains to the southwest. The convenient alignment, however, may be a coincidence. The Maurice Ward site also happens to open onto the gorge that serves as the southwestern entrance to Beaver Dam Valley, which contains numerous contemporaneous residential sites, so this geological feature may have played a symbolic role in the placement of nearby villages (see Brady 1997).

In sum, the Wiseman's View and Maurice Ward sites are both tiny bedrock cavities that produced very little archaeological materials, with the exception of one or two Woodland period ceramic vessels that may have been placed at the opening or within each cavity to serve as ritual offerings or spiritual symbols. This behavior may have been connected with subsistence productivity, beliefs concerning the origins of humans or game animals (see Mooney 1900), or beliefs about the places where spirits dwell (Claassen and Compton 2012).

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Figure 3. Summer solstice (left) and winter solstice (right) sunrises as seen from Wiseman’s View. Photographs taken at sunrise on June 21, 2013, and December 21, 2013, respectively.



Figure 4. The Maurice Ward site.



Figure 5. Pottery from the Maurice Ward site.

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NCAS Annual Meeting Held at the Newbold White House

Contributed by Jim Daniel (NCAS Board Member)

On October 6, 2018, the NCAS annual meeting and tour took us to the Newbold White House near Hertford, North Carolina. Situated along Perquimans River on acreage patented in the mid-to-late seventeenth century, the Newbold White House is a rare, early-eighteenth century brick structure. The building's Flemish bond brickwork is essentially intact, despite the intervening centuries. Much of the interior woodwork has been carefully restored or reconstructed based on evidence gleaned from shadows, remnant details, and similar contemporary structures. The current furnishings combine reproductions and original period pieces based on the estate inventory of its builder, Abraham Sanders. Our guest speaker and past site manager, Steve Allen, along with professional volunteer staff served as our tour guides, informing us about the site's history and restoration. We were also given a look into the sociological importance of the Religious Society of Friends, more familiarly known as Quakers, during the earliest days of European settlement in the Carolina Colony. The NCAS meeting was well attended with many participants expressing their new found appreciation for the Newbold White House and the great job by their staff and volunteers in hosting and supporting our visit.



The Newbold White House, with its accompanying vineyard, garden, and a small creek for boats to bring goods from the nearby river (Photo credit: David Cranford).



Vice-President Shane Peterson (left) and newly elected Board member John Kryzmanich (center) learn about the Newbold White House's history.

NCAS Helps at Town Creek Indian Mound's Archaeology Day

Contributed by Jim Daniel (NCAS Board Member)



NCAS joined the staff at Town Creek Indian Mound State Historic Site for their International Archaeology Day celebration on October 20, 2018. Several hundred visitors attended the festivities, including many children who got their hands dirty learning how to make clay pinch pots and fiber cordage along with the popular cookie excavation. Tom Beaman (Past President) and Jim Daniel (Board Member) represented NCAS. Tom displayed our updated line of merchandise, including t-shirts and hats, while Jim debuted a *Peanuts* inspired "Archaeological Help 5¢" desk. We handed out site registration forms, gave NCAS membership forms to others, and suggested archaeological opportunities for those interested in further experiences. All in all, it was a good day for NCAS.

North Carolina Celebrates a Successful Archaeology Month

Contributed by David Cranford (Office of State Archaeology)

By official Gubernatorial Proclamation, October was dedicated North Carolina Archaeology Month. This year's theme was "Dynamic Landscapes and Changing Environments: 14,000 Years of Human History in North Carolina." As coastlines have shifted, temperatures changed, and new species of plants and animals have been introduced, both ancient and modern North Carolinians have continued to adapt to and modify their environments. People have found new ways to live and leave their marks on the landscape. To highlight recent and ongoing archaeological research related to this important topic, the Office of State Archaeology (OSA) sponsored a series of events including three lunchtime talks, a student research symposium, an evening keynote lecture, and a public archaeology day. All of these events were free and open to the public, and many were live-streamed. If you missed any of the lunchtime lectures or our keynote lecture, you can find them on the Department of Natural and Cultural Resources YouTube channel here: <https://tinyurl.com/ycmwx6ns>.

Archaeology Month was capped off with a hugely successful Public Archaeology Day that took place on Bicentennial Mall in downtown Raleigh. The event included numerous kids' activities, a flint knapping demonstration, and an Archaeology Squirrel. Thank you to all those who attended, participated, and volunteered at this year's North Carolina Archaeology Month events!



OSA's Archaeology Day mascot.



Mary Beth Fitts (OSA) talks with young visitors about how archaeologists study ancient plant remains.



Emily McDowell (OSA) greets newcomers to the event, and show them some interesting artifacts.

NCAS Election Results

Congratulations to Danny Bell and John Krizmanich, who were elected to the NCAS Board of Directors, and to Linda Carnes-McNaughton, who was re-elected as NCAS Secretary. Danny is an enrolled and active member of the Lumbee and Coharie Indian tribes, with a 30+ year history working to support Indian issues at the the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill and North Carolina Commission of Indian Affairs. John Krizmanich is an avocational archaeologist with a life-long passion for history and its preservation. NCAS welcomes them both.

NCAS Newsletter is Going Digital

Beginning with the Winter 2019 issue (Vol. 29, No. 1), members will receive the NCAS Newsletter digitally via email. Printed newsletters will no longer be mailed to members, unless members select this option when they renew their membership. For more information, see the membership renewal form included with this mailing.

2019 Membership Dues

The end of the year is almost here. Renew your membership today to stay current with the Society's latest news. Please submit your dues payment to: NCAS c/o Mary Beth Fitts, Office of State Archaeology, 4619 Mail Service Center, Raleigh, NC 27699-4619. Or, you can renew your membership online via PayPal at <http://www.rla.unc.edu/ncas/Join/PayPal.html>.

Your current (paid) membership year is indicated in the top right corner of the mailing label. Membership types include: Student (\$10) • Regular (\$15) • Family (\$20) • Sustaining (\$25) • Institution (\$25) • Life (\$250).

NCAS Officers

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NCAS Newsletter

Publication Schedule

Members should submit articles and news items to Heather Lapham (hlapham@unc.edu) for inclusion in the Newsletter. Submission deadlines are as follows:

Winter Issue – January 31 **Summer Issue – July 31**
Spring Issue – April 30 **Fall Issue – October 31**

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