

# **The Archaeology of North Carolina: Three Archaeological Symposia**

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Charles R. Ewen

## TWENTY-FIVE YEARS AND COUNTING: CURRENT ARCHAEOLOGICAL RESEARCH IN THE NORTH CAROLINA COASTAL PLAIN

Charles R. Ewen

In 1983, the publication of *Prehistory of North Carolina: An Archaeological Symposium* summarized what archaeologists had discovered through their decades of excavations throughout the state. The volume, edited by Mark Mathis and Jeffrey Crow, combined the contributions of three archaeologists who were acknowledged leaders in their region. David Phelps prepared the chapter covering the coastal plain, Trawick Ward took the piedmont, and Burt Purrington the mountains. The result was the “blue bible” which became one of NC Historical Publications most enduring and best-selling volumes.

Two decades later the volume had been superseded by Ward and Davis’s *Time Before History* (1999), but the pace of archaeology in the state continued to accelerate as universities expanded their archaeology programs and CRM-oriented archaeology struggled to keep pace with development. To expand and further synthesize the archaeological work that had been done, John Mintz and Lea Abbott of the North Carolina Office of State Archaeology, initiated a series of symposia. A separate symposium would take place at a university in each of the three physiographic regions of the state. The first of these was hosted by the Department of Anthropology, East Carolina University, and the Southern Coastal Heritage Program and addressed many topics including: settlement patterns, coastal resource utilization, and ceramic and lithic studies that spanned both the prehistoric and historic periods.

In the previous compendium, Phelps (1983:1) stated that “the North Carolina Coastal Plain has been the least known archaeological region of the state, has received less professional attention, and supported fewer projects than other regions until very recently.” Has that assessment changed much in twenty-five years? There has certainly been a lot more archaeology done on the coastal plain. The coastal development boom at the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century resulted in many small and large scale, legally-mandated archaeological investigations (see Heather & Tracy Millis, Herbert, Lawrence, and Lautzenheiser et al. this volume). At the same time, David Phelps retired from East Carolina University but was replaced by a prehistoric and historical archaeologist that, with the aid of a legion of graduate students, have expanded the academic investigations of the coastal plain (see Daniel & Moore, and Ewen this volume).

As North Carolina entered the 21<sup>st</sup> century, there were still many questions relating to the settlement of its coastal plain that remain unanswered. A steady rise in the region’s commercial and residential development as well as the rising sea level and resulting coastal erosion lends a sense of urgency to discovering, studying, and protecting coastal North Carolina’s rich cultural heritage. The contributors to this volume have examined the state of research and, as the reader will see, have presented a better, though still woefully incomplete, understanding of life on the coastal plain.

However, this volume is more than merely an update to the coastal section of the 1983 Mathis & Crow volume. It adds studies of the historic period (see Ewen, Mintz et al., Lucchetti et al., Heath & Swindell, and Samford this volume) underwater archaeology (see Lawrence this volume), as well as the impact of cultural resource management (see Abbott et al., Herbert, Heather & Tracy Millis, Mintz et al., and Lautzenheiser et al. this volume), which have

transformed North Carolina archaeology in the past quarter century. The authors, themselves, are comprised of State archaeologists, private contractors as well as academicians. The result is a more comprehensive assessment of the state of archaeology on the coastal plain as we move into the new millennium.

This volume is also different in the way that it is being published. By publishing online in PDF format, the information becomes accessible to all in a way that is both timely and affordable (it's free!). The reader can download the entire volume or individual chapters. They can be printed and bound or simply read them online. The information can be accessed anywhere there is an internet connection on all manner of devices. This will enable archaeologists to readily extract data from the documents and incorporate them (with proper citation) into their own research.

Whether you are reading this book on a Kindle at Starbucks, a computer at work, or a smartphone in the field, one thing has not changed. All these data were still collected by hand, mostly with shovel and trowel. Archaeology today is not that much different than it was twenty-five years ago. We have a few more tools at our disposal, but the most powerful interpretive tool continues to be our brain. Enjoy picking the brains of the contributors to this volume.

## ARCHAEOLOGY IN THE NORTH CAROLINA MOUNTAINS

Thomas R. Whyte

The papers that follow under the Mountains Symposium Chapters heading are a sample of the seventeen originally presented at a symposium on North Carolina mountain archaeology held at Appalachian State University in October 2009. Those seventeen covered the gamut of space, method and theory, and time (11<sup>th</sup> millennium BC through 19<sup>th</sup> century AD), and they included presentations from academia, cultural resource management, state and federal agencies, and the Cherokee Nation. In these presentations it was revealed that we have learned a great deal more from the archaeological record since the onset of the Cherokee Project conceived by Joffre L. Coe in the 1960s. As Burton L. Purrington noted in his keynote address at the symposium, indeed, much has changed since 1983, when he wrote “Ancient Mountaineers: An Overview of the Prehistoric Archaeology of North Carolina’s Western Mountain Region” (in *North Carolina Archaeology* edited by Mark Mathis and Jeffrey Crow). Burt’s approach in that synthesis was to present existing evidence and current interpretations, but also to summarize with interesting questions remaining to be answered. The new archaeologists have risen to the challenge. The resulting changes in the practice of archaeology and a tremendous accumulation of new evidence were the impetus for the three symposia that provided the foundation for this volume, intended to serve as an update of the 1983 Mathis and Crow “Blue Book.” Growing research programs in archaeology at Western Carolina University, Warren Wilson College, and Appalachian State University, renewed vitality of the Cherokee Project of the Research Laboratories of Archaeology at UNC-Chapel Hill, the booming business of cultural resource management, and an ever changing ontological climate have all contributed new evidence and new ways of looking at old discoveries in the Mountains.

## INTRODUCTION TO THE CONFERENCE ON THE ARCHAEOLOGY OF PIEDMONT NORTH CAROLINA: OLD THINGS SEEN IN A NEW LIGHT

R. P. Stephen Davis, Jr.

On September 24–25, 2010, the third and final symposium on the archaeology of North Carolina was held at the University of North Carolina in Chapel Hill. The purpose of this symposium was to present the results of current and recent research, and to take stock of archaeology in piedmont North Carolina since the publication in 1983 of *The Prehistory of North Carolina: An Archaeological Symposium*, edited by Mark Mathis and Jeffrey Crow.

In lieu of a keynote address, an informal gathering was held Friday evening to remember our friend and colleague Trawick Ward, who passed away in June 2010. Trawick, who wrote the chapter on Piedmont archaeology for the Mathis and Crow volume, was to have been the keynote speaker, and no one could have been a better choice to reflect, with memorable humor, on what we have, and haven't, learned about the Piedmont's archaeological past over the last 27 years.

While 27 years isn't a long time, especially to an archaeologist, it is worth noting that of the six contributors to *The Prehistory of North Carolina* — David Phelps, Trawick Ward, Burt Purrington, Joffre Coe, Mark Mathis, and Jeff Crow — only Burt and Jeff Crow, co-editor and a non-archaeologist, are still with us. You could say that we are now fully within a new era of archaeological study in North Carolina.

In preparing my brief opening remarks to the conference, I re-read Trawick's chapter in the Mathis and Crow volume, as it had been more than a decade since I had last looked at it. The purpose of his chapter, titled "A Review of Archaeology in the North Carolina Piedmont: A Study of Change," was threefold: (1) to evaluate what we knew (in 1980) of the archaeology of piedmont North Carolina; (2) to assess the current state of research in the region; and (3) to identify issues important to future study. As I read, I was immediately struck by two things.

First, the issues Trawick considered and the criticism he offered clearly reflect an earlier era in Piedmont archaeology. Almost 30 years ago, an uneasy tension existed between CRM-based and what might be termed "academic" archaeology (with "academic" archaeology largely being a euphemism for Joffre Coe's archaeology program at the University of North Carolina). Prior to the early 1970s, almost all archaeology in North Carolina was undertaken either by universities or by state government. The numbers of yearly field projects were very low and budgets were extremely limited. In situations where more expansive projects were undertaken, such as the survey and salvage projects for Roanoke Rapids Reservoir, Lake Gaston, Lake Norman, Jordan Lake, and Falls of the Neuse Reservoir, the fieldwork was always woefully under-funded and financial support for subsequent analysis and reporting was non-existent. Despite these limitations, a workable culture-chronology had been worked out for much of the Piedmont. As for historical archaeology, most projects before 1970 were on state properties and most were conducted by historic sites archaeologist Stanley South.

All this changed with the passage of historic preservation and environmental legislation in the late 1960s and early 1970s. As cultural resource management came into its own during the 1970s, environmental engineering consulting companies, colleges, universities, and government agencies all hired archaeologists to take advantage of the financial resources that were increasingly available for undertaking and reviewing mandated compliance projects. This was

also a time when new investments were being made in public infrastructure — from wastewater treatment plants and sewer lines to the electrical power grid, municipal water reservoirs, and the nation’s highway system. In short, archaeologists increasingly were in demand and the money was flowing.

Coincidentally, Americanist archaeology in general was undergoing its own transformation during this period, as proponents of the “new” archaeology, with its focus on ecological issues, systems theory, statistical analysis, and the scientific method, challenged more traditional research emphases on archaeological culture definition and chronology building. In the North Carolina Piedmont, Joffre Coe and his students at UNC represented the traditional, or the status quo. It is no exaggeration that, in 1970, virtually everything known archaeologically about the North Carolina Piedmont was a direct result of archaeology conducted out of Chapel Hill. It is perhaps no surprise, then, that Coe would view with considerable suspicion the newly-arrived archaeologists at Wake Forest, Catawba College, UNC-G, and in both state government and private industry. North Carolina archaeology since the late 1930s had been a one-man show, and during the decade leading up to 1980, the archaeological community in North Carolina (and elsewhere) became much larger and intellectually more diverse. In many ways, Trawick’s chapter reflects this uneasy changing of the guard.

As I think most would agree, the old distinctions and dichotomies within archaeology, whether it be contract versus academic, or historic versus prehistoric or precontact archaeology, have become progressively blurred and today have little to do with the true nature of archaeology. We are all interested in what went on in the past, and why; and how we go about conducting our research, or how it is funded, is less important than what we actually learn.

The second thing that struck me about Trawick’s chapter was that many of the research problems he identified still remain. Perhaps the most important and relevant point he made is this: Regardless the question we are interesting in investigating, it is first necessary to acquire the appropriate archaeological data. While our theoretical frames of reference and the ways we structure our research questions may change, we will always need good data, because that is our tangible connection to the past. Without it to support our interpretations, we are just telling stories. In his concluding remarks, Trawick noted:

These comments are made not so much as substantive criticisms, but rather to point out that problems in understanding the cultural-systemic processes operative in the Piedmont do not revolve around whether questions are asked before or after the data are gathered or whether assumptions are called inductive statements or test implications. The problems are with the data base: the extent of what is preserved in a site and the integrity of its spatial context. Southeastern archaeological sites in general and Piedmont sites in particular, under the best conditions, contain only traces of a small fraction of material technology. If the chances for answering the more complex questions are to be maximized, efforts must be concentrated at sites that have maximum data for such questions. Simply rephrasing the questions will only continue to befuddle the issues. [Ward 1983:79–80]

My own take on the situation is that, over the past 30 years, archaeologists working in the Piedmont have heeded this advice, striving to identify and excavate those sites with the greatest potential to address the important questions at hand. And, as we heard in some of the presented papers, important archaeological information also remains to be “excavated” from existing archives and collections.

One final point I would like to make is this: We should never become complacent with what we think we know about the past. When we do, we deny ourselves the opportunity to learn

the unexpected. Each project we undertake should challenge us to question the status quo, not to be contrary or dismissive of the interpretations of previous researchers, but to see if our new data bring new insights. My own experiences, from the discovery of the Jenrette site where surface survey indicated there should be very little or nothing, to finding historic Catawba villages in places contrary to prevailing settlement models and conventional wisdom, have been sober reminders that there is always much more to learn about even some of our most basic assumptions.

Trawick's summary of Piedmont archaeology suggested that in 1980 we had a good basic understanding of the contact period, based on lengthy excavations at Upper Sauratown. During the subsequent two decades, Trawick and I, along with a group of remarkable graduate students, would demonstrate through the Siouan Project just how wrong that notion was. And in hindsight, we would be naïve if we thought that 20 years of excavations at a dozen sites was even barely sufficient to firmly grasp the many facets of this dynamic period of Indian history in the Piedmont.

Of the 11 papers presented in Chapel Hill, four are included in this volume under the heading Piedmont Symposium Chapters, and they cover the Piedmont Archaic, the Mississippian period, early Spanish explorations into the western Piedmont, and the archaeology of farmsteads and plantations in the historic era.

The following is a list of all the papers that were presented at the Piedmont Symposium:

A New Look at an Old Sequence: Time, Typology, and Intrusive Traditions in the Carolina Piedmont  
*I. Randolph Daniel, Jr.*

Deep Testing for Archaeological Sites of the North Carolina Piedmont  
*Keith C. Seramur, Dawn M. Bradley, Loretta Lautzenheiser, and Susan E. Bamann*

Schiele Museum Archaeology: Catawba Valley Red Hills and Brown Flood Plains  
*J. Alan May*

Current Town Creek Research: What Do We Know after the First Fifty Years?  
*Edmond A. Boudreaux*

The Burke Phase: Native Americans and Spanish Conquistadores in the Western North Carolina Piedmont  
*Christopher B. Rodning, David G. Moore, and Robin A. Beck, Jr.*  
An Update on the Dan River Phase  
*Jane M. Eastman*

What Happens after Lawson? Archaeology of the Catawba Nation in the 18th and early 19th Centuries  
*Brett H. Riggs*

Rediscovering Redwares from Piedmont North Carolina  
*Linda F. Carnes-McNaughton*

Archaeology of Historic Farmsteads and Residential Sites in the North Carolina Piedmont:  
1750–1825, Part I  
*Kenneth W. Robinson and Linda France Stine*

Archaeology of Historic Farmsteads and Residential Sites in the North Carolina Piedmont:  
1750–1825, Part II  
*Linda France Stine and Kenneth W. Robinson*

Transportation Archaeology in the North Carolina Piedmont: A 21st-Century Perspective  
*Shane C. Petersen*