

## Chapter 8

# SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

The Ayers Town site was excavated in 2010–2011 in order to mitigate through archaeological data recovery the anticipated adverse impact upon the site by South Carolina Department of Transportation’s planned replacement of the SC Highway 5 bridges across the Catawba River. Although the bridge replacements would not directly impact the site, the project required the relocation of an existing high-pressure gas pipeline running along the north side of the highway and the proposed new pipeline corridor crossed the center of the site. Because of the site’s small size and the expectation that one or more archaeologically important or culturally sensitive features, such as graves, could be present, the scope of work called for complete exposure of the site in order to identify any such remains and, if needed, remove them from harm’s way.

Complete exposure of the site was achieved by the systematic, mechanized stripping of topsoil. This provided a rare opportunity to identify, map, and sample archaeological features comprising what is thought to represent almost the *entire* settlement at Ayers Town, with the exception of possible house-related features at the already-disturbed site edges. As a consequence, Ayers Town represents our most complete, excavated example of an historic Catawba settlement, and the site has yielded an extensive dataset for examining social, material, and economic aspects of Catawba lifeways during the late 1700s. Of the 191 features identified at the site, 167 were of cultural origin or contained artifact-bearing deposits of cultural origin. These include cellars and other sub-floor storage pits, refuse-filled soil-borrow pits, cob-filled smudging pits, postholes, and 31 graves; the remaining 24 features represent natural disturbances. The spatial arrangement of these features has permitted the identification of individual households and interpretations about overall community structure. The more than 20,000 artifacts and ecofacts recovered from these and other contexts have shed light on Catawba technology, subsistence, external economic relationships, and other material-based aspects of Catawba life. When compared and contrasted with earlier, later, and contemporary Catawba town sites such as Nassaw-Weyapee, New Town, and Old Town, the physical remains of Ayers Town allow insights into both the trajectory of culture change among Catawbas during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries and the diversity between individual towns that imply deeper social and political divisions within the Catawba Nation. While some of these questions are beyond the scope of this report, the data presented are integral to any broader comparative studies of the Catawba condition during this period.

Until the discovery of Ayers Town in 2008, the historic Catawba occupation along the west side of Catawba River was largely undocumented archaeologically, except for several late nineteenth-century and early twentieth-century house sites recorded on the present Catawba Reservation by personnel with the Catawba Cultural Preservation Project. All archaeological evidence attributed to the Catawba Nation during the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries had been found along the east side of the river between Lake Wylie dam and Twelvemile Creek, and all previous intensive archaeological investigations had been undertaken there. While

historical records, including both maps and travelers' accounts, reference Catawba settlement after 1800 in the vicinity of the present reservation, situated on the west bank of the river five kilometers (3 mi) north of the site, a late eighteenth-century settlement at the southern edge of the pre-1840 reservation and opposite the mouth of Twelvemile Creek was unanticipated. For this reason the site's discovery was significant, in that it provided important new information and insight into late eighteenth-century lifeways for a segment of the Catawba Nation that had not been previously identified and studied.

In particular, the excavations at site 38YK534 and a reassessment of the documentary record of the post-Revolutionary War era have permitted: (1) an identification of the Catawba community that occupied the site; (2) a determination of the specific inception date for the settlement and an approximate date when it was likely abandoned; (3) an assessment of the number and spatial arrangement of households comprising the settlement; and (4) a documentation of the material evidence attributable to that settlement. In particular, the artifact assemblage recovered from Ayers Town provides a basis for examining the varied household-based and community-based social, economic, and political strategies that Catawbas employed to ensure their survival during the early years of the new republic.

The most important historical document related to the site is the unpublished travel diary of Lady Henrietta Liston, who in 1797 visited the Catawba community there. In her diary, Liston described her visit to a Catawba town on the west side of the river in the general location of the site. Her recounting of the route she took from Robert Crawford's house in the Waxhaws to the Indian town, and the distance she traveled, confirm that her detailed observations are of a community whose location coincides with site 38YK534. Liston identified the leader of the town as the "Colonel", who was second in command to the overall Catawba leader, referred to as the "General". This principal leader lived in another town on the opposite side of the river and almost certainly was General New River. Only one Catawba is listed in other post-Revolutionary War-era documents as holding the rank of colonel among the Catawbas, and that individual was John Ayers (also spelled Eayrs, Eayers, or Ears) (Brown 1966:268–269; Watson 1995:93–94). For this reason, it was deemed appropriate to name the site Ayers Town.

Archaeological and documentary evidence combine to provide inception and likely abandonment dates for Ayers Town. Contemporary maps indicate that the Catawba Nation was largely settled in a single town on the east side of the river, above the mouth of Twelvemile Creek, during the early years of the American Revolution (Mouzon 1775). As American allies, Catawbas were forced to abandon both their town and the Catawba valley ahead of Cornwallis' troops in summer 1780, and they did not return until mid-1781. In his published diary, Lieutenant William Feltman of the Second Pennsylvania Line indicates that some Catawbas were settled in the vicinity of Ayers Town by mid-December, 1781 (Feltman 1853:31). Thus, Ayers Town was likely established sometime during the latter half of 1781. A subsequent deed, dated 1786, also references a Catawba town opposite the mouth of Twelvemile Creek (Schmidt 1985:76).

When Ayers Town was abandoned is a more difficult question to answer, and it is not known if the town was abandoned gradually or suddenly. A terminal date of occupation around 1800 is suggested by the overall assemblage composition of European-made ceramics, where creamware comprises almost half the assemblage and pearlware sherds comprise a minority ware. A mean ceramic date of 1787.9 was calculated using all datable European-made ceramics from Ayers Town, and a slightly later date of 1796.9 was calculated using only the predominant

wares — creamware and pearlware. This is in contrast to the slightly later site of New Town, where the assemblage of European-made ceramics is much larger and dominated by pearlware. Mean ceramic dates ranging from 1803.1 to 1807.5 were calculated for the five excavated cabin loci at that site. Other datable artifacts from Ayers Town, such as iron nails that are almost exclusively hand-wrought or machine-cut with wrought heads, also support a terminal date of about 1800. The fact that many of the later artifacts, such as pearlware sherds, came from only a few pit features suggests that town abandonment may not have occurred all at once. Some households may have remained a few years after most of the town's other occupants left. The presence of 31 graves, formally arranged in cemeteries, also suggests that the town site may have continued to serve a mortuary function well into the nineteenth century — a situation analogous to the continued use of New Town as a cemetery long after its formal abandonment (Speck 1939).

While we cannot say with certainty why the occupants of Ayers Town chose to abandon their settlement or where they went, it is possible that they established their new town just a few miles to the north near the present Catawba Reservation. An 1825 map of York District in Robert Mills' *Atlas of the State of South Carolina* shows the Catawba Nation established just below the mouth of Catawba Creek (now Haggins Branch) and opposite the old settlement of New Town. Such a short move would have permitted the continued use of Ayers Town as a cemetery and would be consistent with a similar settlement shift about the same time that is documented archaeologically along the east side of the river. There, excavations at the Old Town site suggest that it too was abandoned around 1800, and the Catawba occupation at New Town, located about a mile upriver, appears to have begun shortly before that time. These shifts in settlement would have consolidated the Catawba population in a relatively small area on opposite sides of the river that was more isolated and removed from encroaching white settlement along and within the reservation boundary. Unlike Lady Liston, who was able to travel by carriage to Ayers Town and then on to Charlotte, visitors to the Catawbas in the early nineteenth century, such as Calvin Jones (1815), had a more arduous journey off the better-traveled roads that traversed the reservation.

A combination of archaeological and ethnohistorical evidence also sheds light on the nature of houses, households, and community spatial organization at Ayers Town. Given the truncated character of the site due to surrounding impacts upon the landscape from soil erosion and earlier road construction activities, it is not possible to estimate the overall size of Ayers Town in terms of physical layout. The area excavated, covering 3,400 m<sup>2</sup>, appears to encompass the heart of the town; however, this settlement almost certainly contained additional outlying houses. An analysis of the spatial arrangement of cultural features identified at the site, presented in Chapter 5, posited a settlement plan comprised of 12 structure localities organized into five residential complexes, with a mortuary precinct containing three small cemeteries and another structure. These residential complexes are interpreted as the physical remains of individual households, and they, as well as the cemeteries, are oriented along both sides of a "vacant" corridor that runs from southeast to northwest through the site. This corridor, which did not contain any historic Catawba pit features, is interpreted as a probable location of a contemporary wagon road. Given the Catawbas' practice of settling along existing roads — documented archaeologically at New Town and depicted cartographically on maps showing Catawba Town just prior to the Revolutionary War — it is reasonable to assume that additional households would have been situated along this corridor beyond the limits of the excavation. In fact, a few contemporary artifacts (i.e., Catawba potsherds, wrought nails, and sheet brass) were found by UNC

archaeologists about 100 m northwest and more than 200 m south of the site while conducting reconnaissance surveys.

A few structures were defined by clusters or alignments of postholes. While some of these may represent domiciles, they most likely represent less permanent constructions such as sheds or arbors. Domestic houses largely are represented by clusters of cellars or storage pits that lack surrounding postholes, and these feature arrangements are interpreted as evidence as sub-floor storage facilities within log houses. In most instances, large, refuse-filled pits — provisionally identified as soil borrow pits dug to provide clay for construction purposes — are located nearby. Henrietta Liston observed that two kinds of houses were present at Ayers Town. All were constructed of cribbed logs, and while some had end chimneys and fireplaces, others which she regarded as more traditional had central hearths but apparently lacked chimneys. The presence of circular storage pits and sub-rectangular storage or cellar pits in separate household areas is taken as evidence for the differences in house types noted by Liston.

A comparison of archaeological evidence at Ayers Town and Old Town suggests possible differences in community layout. Whereas the houses at Ayers Town appear to have been tightly clustered along a wagon road, those identified at Old Town through both excavation and reconnaissance survey were more widely scattered along an ancient terrace flanking the river. And, it is not clear how or if they were aligned to existing roads. At both of the cabin loci that have been excavated at Old Town, cabins contemporary with Ayers Town were superimposed upon earlier house seats dating from the 1760s and 1770s. No evidence of wall or central support posts was found, and the sub-floor storage facilities from both periods of occupation at Old Town were deep, straight-sided, rectangular or sub-rectangular cellars. Houses at New Town also were widely scattered along upland ridges, and while most houses did not have sub-floor pits, one had a sub-floor cellar similar to those found at Old Town. In contrast, most of the sub-floor storage facilities found at Ayers Town were circular or small sub-rectangular pits with straight or expanded walls. Pits with these morphological characteristics were observed archaeologically at 1750s Nassaw, where they were placed around a central hearth within rectangular, post-in-ground structures. Similar pits also were found at Weyapee and Charraw Town, both of which are contemporary with Nassaw. Overall, these comparisons suggest that the people living at Ayers Town held more traditional views regarding house construction and village pattern than those living at Old Town and later New Town.

Ayers Town and Old Town are more similar in other aspects of material culture. Artifact collections from post-Revolutionary War contexts at both sites are dominated by plain, Catawba-made coarse earthenware fragments from mostly European-style vessels such as cups, plates, bowls, pans, and jars. Vessels from both sites have similar rim forms, and decorations, when present, consist mostly of the application of red pigment along the vessel lip. While it is tempting to view this pottery-making industry as largely directed toward an external market, the contexts in which most vessel fragments were found indicate that they were made for domestic use by Catawba families. This should not be surprising since those vessels made to be sold or traded would not occur archaeologically at Ayers Town or Old Town. The best evidence that potters from these contemporary Catawba towns were also engaged in the production and sale of their wares to surrounding farms and plantations lies in the presence of Catawba wares in those contexts and the fact that by this time period all Catawba potters produced wares familiar to Euroamericans in both form and function.

Other artifact classes, from Euroamerican-manufactured ceramics and cookware to horse tack and clothing fasteners, all indicate that Catawbas in the late eighteenth century had choices and needs as consumers that were generally similar to their Euroamerican neighbors. This also is evidenced by surviving contemporary store ledgers, which indicate the variety of other perishable or consumable goods used by Catawbas at Ayers Town and Old Town but which have not survived in the archaeological record. These range from dry goods, including a variety of textiles, clothing, and sundries, to gunpowder, flour, and salt. However, in some instances Catawbas used those manufactured goods in ways, different from their Euroamerican neighbors, which allowed them to assert their distinctive ethnicity and heritage, and these practices also are reflected in the artifacts recovered from Ayers Town. For example, red sealing wax was employed as a material for decorating pots rather than to seal letters; sheet brass and silver were used to fashion distinctive forms of jewelry; and glass beads were used create beadwork on clothing that almost certainly reflected traditional designs and ideas.

The Ayers Town site is one of a small number of archaeological sites in the York-Lancaster county area of South Carolina that document the history of the Catawba Indian Nation during the colonial and early post-colonial era. And, through archaeological investigation it has provided a rich body of information for interpreting the Catawba condition during the last two decades of the eighteenth century. Historic Catawba sites are extremely fragile and in recent years have become increasingly threatened by commercial and residential development, and the expansion of infrastructure necessary to support those developments. While a few important sites have been identified and investigated archaeologically, others already have been lost without adequate documentation, and many more almost certainly will soon be destroyed. The South Carolina Department of Transportation's Highway 5 bridges replacement project, while unavoidably impacting the Ayers Town site, has insured through the site-wide recovery of important archaeological data and the steps taken to protect the significant and sensitive archaeological remains that still exist there, that the site will continue to be a significant contributor to our understanding of Catawba history and heritage.