"The Flower of Carolina": the piedmont

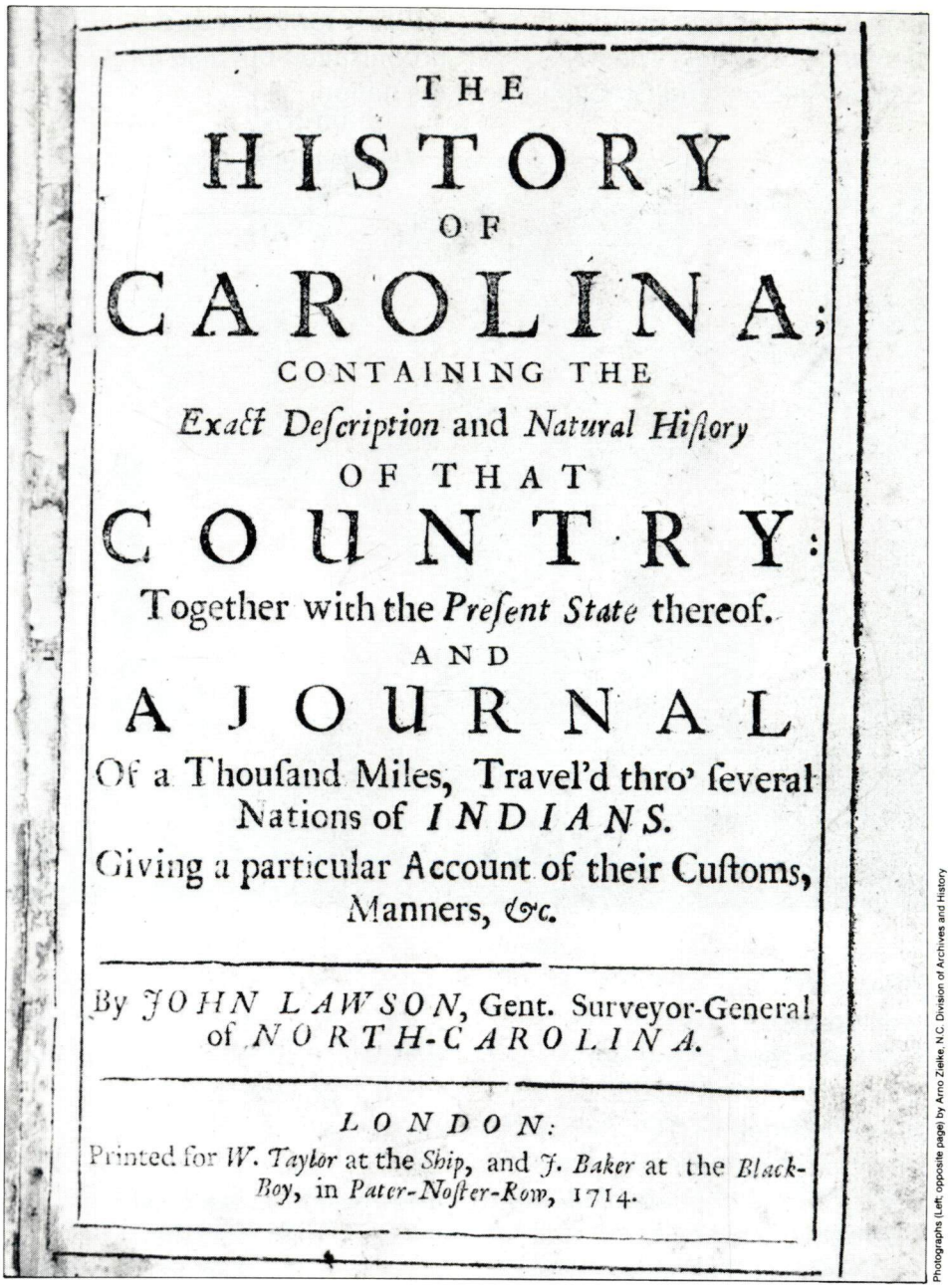
by R. P. Stephen Davis, Jr.

On December 28th, 1700, an adventurous young Englishman set out from Charles Town, South Carolina, to explore the Carolina backcountry. Led by native guides and accompanied by five other Englishmen, he would spend the next two months traveling almost six hundred miles through the South Carolina and North Carolina piedmont. His name was John Lawson.

Following the rivers and trails, Lawson visited over a dozen Indian villages, and he carefully recorded in his journal the peculiar and varied customs that he saw. The Indians in these villages belonged to tribes that spoke **dialects** of a language family now known as Eastern Siouan. A dialect is a form of speech spoken in a certain area or by a certain group of people. Before European settlement of America, these Eastern Siouans and their ancestors inhabited most of the piedmont, from central South Carolina to northern Virginia.

Traveling northwest through South Carolina, John Lawson's party passed through villages of the Santee, Congaree, Wateree, Waxhaw, Sugaree, and Catawba Indians. After leaving the Catawba settlements near present-day Charlotte, his party picked up the Indian Trading Path and headed northeast to the towns of the Saponi, Keyauwee, and Occaneechi.

Before reaching the Occaneechi Indians, Lawson met a party of Virginia traders



THE
HISTORY
OF
CAROLINA;
CONTAINING THE
Exact Deſcription and *Natural Hiſtory*
OF THAT
COUNTRY:
Together with the *Preſent State* thereof.
AND
A JOURNAL
Of a Thouſand Miles, Travel'd thro' ſeveral Nations of *INDIANS*.
Giving a particular Account of their Cuſtoms, Manners, *&c.*

By *JOHN LAWSON*, Gent. Surveyor-General of *NORTH-CAROLINA*.

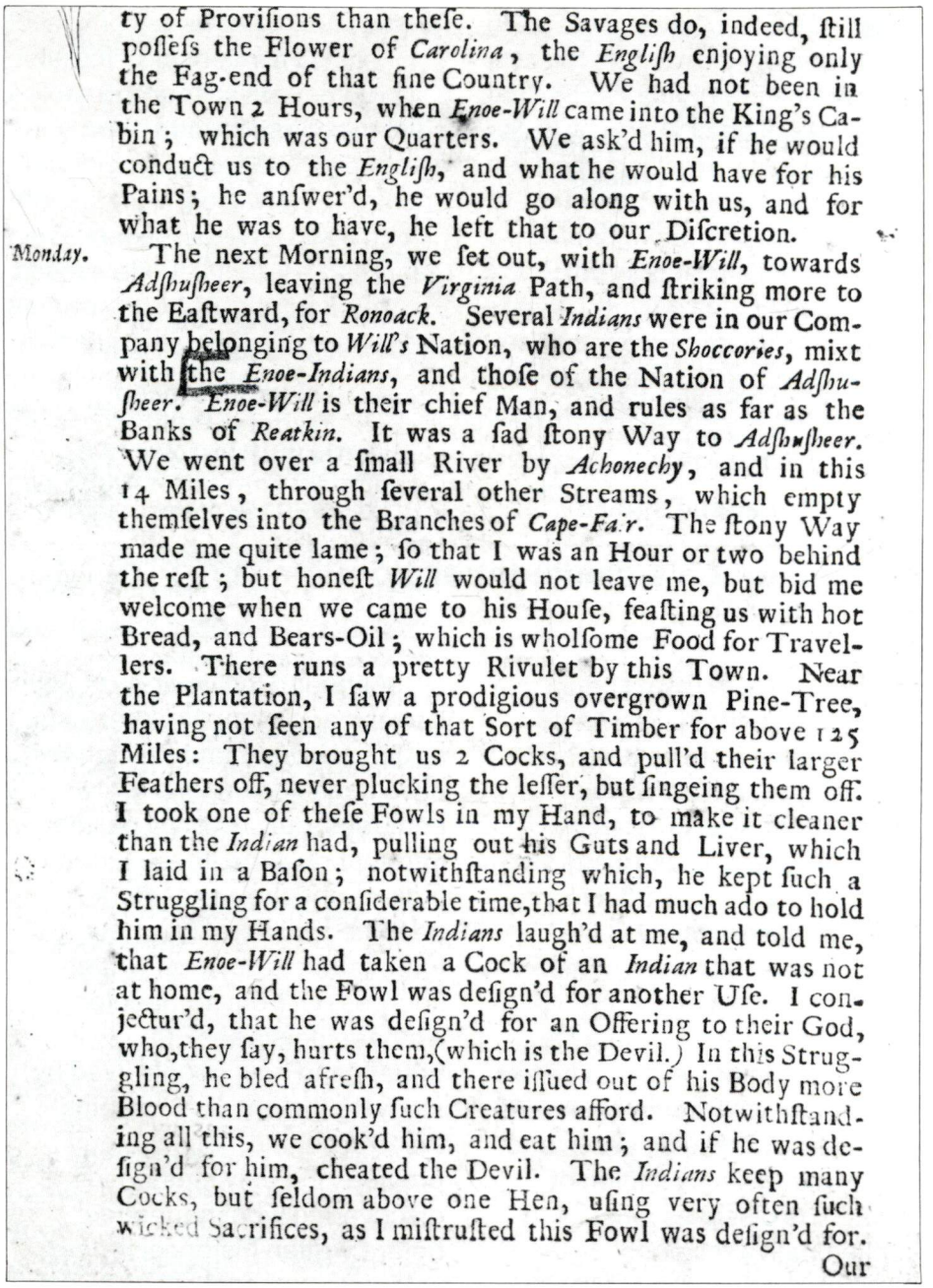
LONDON:
Printed for *W. Taylor* at the *Ship*, and *J. Baker* at the *Black-Boy*, in *Pater-Noſter-Row*, 1714.

Photographs (Left: opposite page) by Arno Zeike, N.C. Division of Archives and History

These are pages from John Lawson's A New Voyage to Carolina, *published in 1709. In his book Lawson described his exploration along the piedmont Indian trails from South Carolina into eastern North Carolina. Can you read his descriptions? What did he say? How do you think archaeologists use this information when searching for an old Indian village? How do they use Lawson's account when they find a village?*

Unless otherwise noted, photographs and artwork provided by the Research Laboratories of Anthropology, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

before European settlement



ty of Proviſions than theſe. The Savages do, indeed, ſtill poſſeſs the Flower of *Carolina*, the *Engliſh* enjoying only the Fag-end of that fine Country. We had not been in the Town 2 Hours, when *Enoe-Will* came into the King's Cabin; which was our Quarters. We ask'd him, if he would conduct us to the *Engliſh*, and what he would have for his Pains; he anſwer'd, he would go along with us, and for what he was to have, he left that to our Diſcretion.

Monday. The next Morning, we ſet out, with *Enoe-Will*, towards *Adſhuſheer*, leaving the *Virginia* Path, and ſtriking more to the Eaſtward, for *Ronoack*. Several *Indians* were in our Company belonging to *Will's* Nation, who are the *Shoccories*, mixt with the *Enoe-Indians*, and thoſe of the Nation of *Adſhuſheer*. *Enoe-Will* is their chief Man, and rules as far as the Banks of *Reatkin*. It was a ſad ſtony Way to *Adſhuſheer*. We went over a ſmall River by *Achonechy*, and in this 14 Miles, through ſeveral other Streams, which empty themſelves into the Branches of *Cape-Fear*. The ſtony Way made me quite lame; ſo that I was an Hour or two behind the reſt; but honeſt *Will* would not leave me, but bid me welcome when we came to his Houſe, feaſting us with hot Bread, and Bears-Oil; which is wholſome Food for Travellers. There runs a pretty Rivulet by this Town. Near the Plantation, I ſaw a prodigious overgrown Pine-Tree, having not ſeen any of that Sort of Timber for above 125 Miles: They brought us 2 Cocks, and pull'd their larger Feathers off, never plucking the leſſer, but ſingeing them off. I took one of theſe Fowls in my Hand, to make it cleaner than the *Indian* had, pulling out his Guts and Liver, which I laid in a Baſon; notwithſtanding which, he kept ſuch a Struggling for a conſiderable time, that I had much ado to hold him in my Hands. The *Indians* laugh'd at me, and told me, that *Enoe-Will* had taken a Cock of an *Indian* that was not at home, and the Fowl was deſign'd for another Uſe. I conjectur'd, that he was deſign'd for an Offering to their God, who, they ſay, hurts them, (which is the Devil.) In this Struggling, he bled afreſh, and there iſſued out of his Body more Blood than commonly ſuch Creatures afford. Notwithſtanding all this, we cook'd him, and eat him; and if he was deſign'd for him, cheated the Devil. The *Indians* keep many Cocks, but ſeldom above one Hen, uſing very often ſuch wicked Sacrifices, as I miſtruſted this Fowl was deſign'd for.

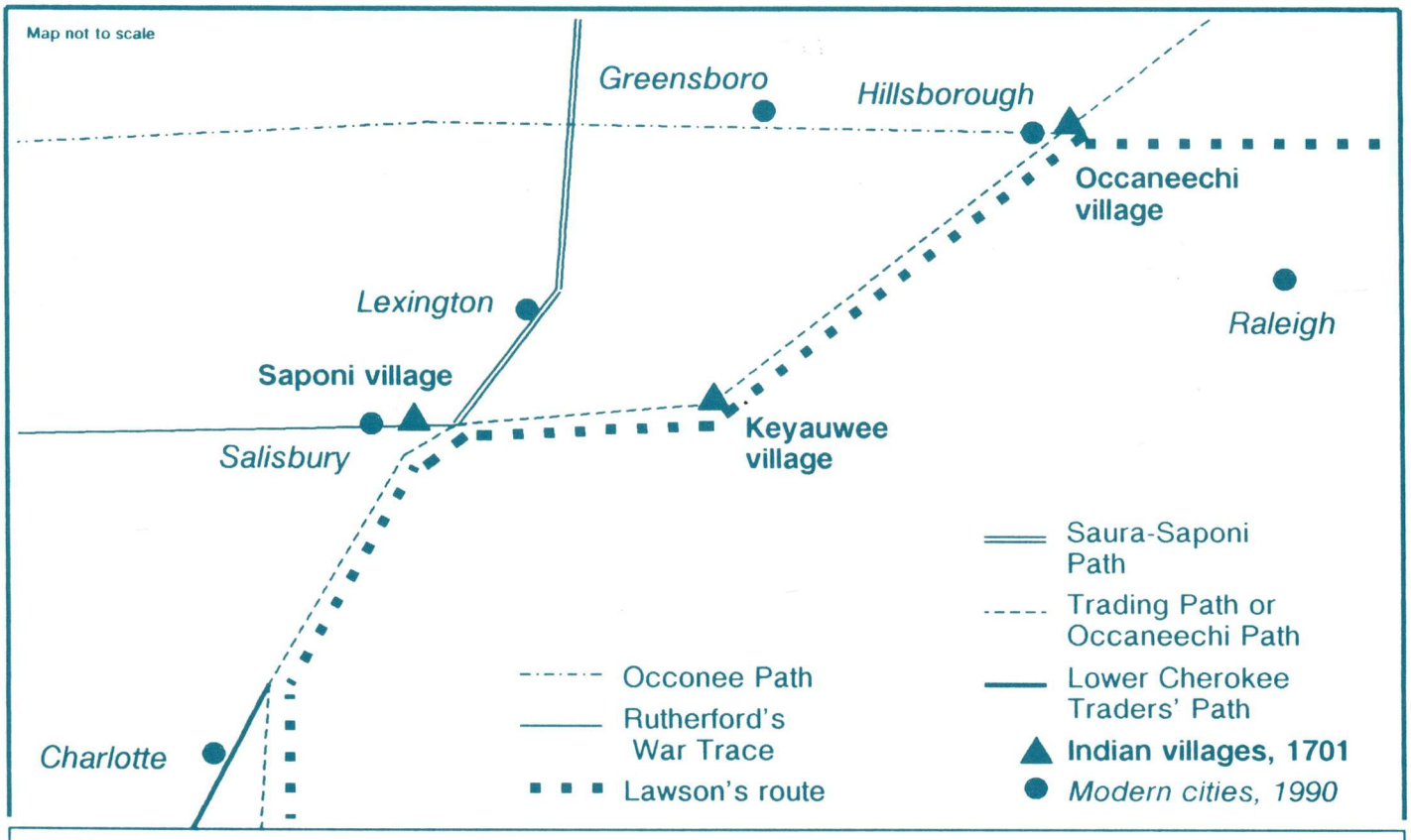
Our

leading packhorses loaded with trade goods. For almost thirty years, a steady stream of traders had carried an assortment of manufactured goods—such as bolts of cloth, kettles, iron tools, guns, clay pipes, and trinkets—to be used to barter with the Indians for furs and deerskins. Although many of these goods were destined for the more populous Catawba and Cherokee Indians to the west, most smaller piedmont tribes also benefited from the trade. When he reached Occaneechi Town, Lawson was impressed with the prosperity of the Indians. He remarked, "Their Cabins were hung with a good sort of Tapestry, as fat Bear, and barbakued or dried Venison; no Indians having greater Plenty of Provisions than these. The Savages do, indeed, still possess the Flower of Carolina, the English enjoying only the Fag-end of that fine Country."[1]

Warned that hostile "Sinnager" raiding parties were in the area, Lawson left the Trading Path at Occaneechi Town and headed due east. He passed through the village of Adshusheer before leaving the piedmont for the eastern part of the state.

Lawson's account of his travels—published as *A New Voyage to Carolina* in 1709—is of great importance to students of North Carolina Indians because it provides a unique glimpse of what piedmont Indian life was like at the beginning of the 1700s. However, the Indian tribes that he encountered were very different from those that existed before the European invasion of North America in the mid-1500s and early 1600s. The Indians of Lawson's time already had suffered the effects of European diseases and alcohol. The introduction of new diseases and

[1] Lefler, Hugh T. (ed.), *A New Voyage to Carolina* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1967), 61, hereinafter cited as Lefler, *A New Voyage to Carolina*.



Trails and Indian villages during Lawson's piedmont exploration, 1701 Can you follow John Lawson's route through the piedmont?

alcohol had caused great social upheaveal for the Indians. Referring to the effects of smallpox and rum on them, Lawson noted that, "there is not the sixth Savage living within two hundred miles of all our Settlements, as there were fifty Years ago."[2] Diseases introduced from Europe and Africa were dangerous to the Indians because the Indian had no natural immunity to combat them. Many died from these diseases.

The periodic influx of **epidemic** diseases disrupted social and political systems. Epidemic means that the disease spreads quickly to a lot of people. These diseases included measles, influenza, bubonic plague, and typhus. Indian villages often had to relocate because of the disruption of life caused by these diseases. Sometimes entirely new communities were established. One village Lawson visited, Adshusheer, was created by survivors of the Shakori and Eno tribes. Usually tribes affected by these diseases simply "disappeared" or were completely absorbed by larger groups, such as the Catawba.

The Indians' religious beliefs and mental well-being also were damaged by these diseases and the resulting depopulation of tribes. The diseases must have shaken native religions, particularly when the traditional medicines used by their priests—or conjurers—failed against the new diseases. And the Indians probably noticed that many of the English who suffered through those same diseases survived.

Although the writings of John Lawson and other explorers, such as John Lederer and William Byrd, have been known for over two centuries, only recently has new information about these Siouan Indians and their ancestors become available. This new information is not from written sources but from archaeology. Archaeologists seek to understand how people lived by studying the physical remains they left behind. Archaeology provides the only method for discovering what happened before written history or where written documents either do not exist or are not clear.

Over the past seven years, archaeologists at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill have been studying the Siouan tribes

[2] Lefler, *A New Voyage to Carolina*, 232.

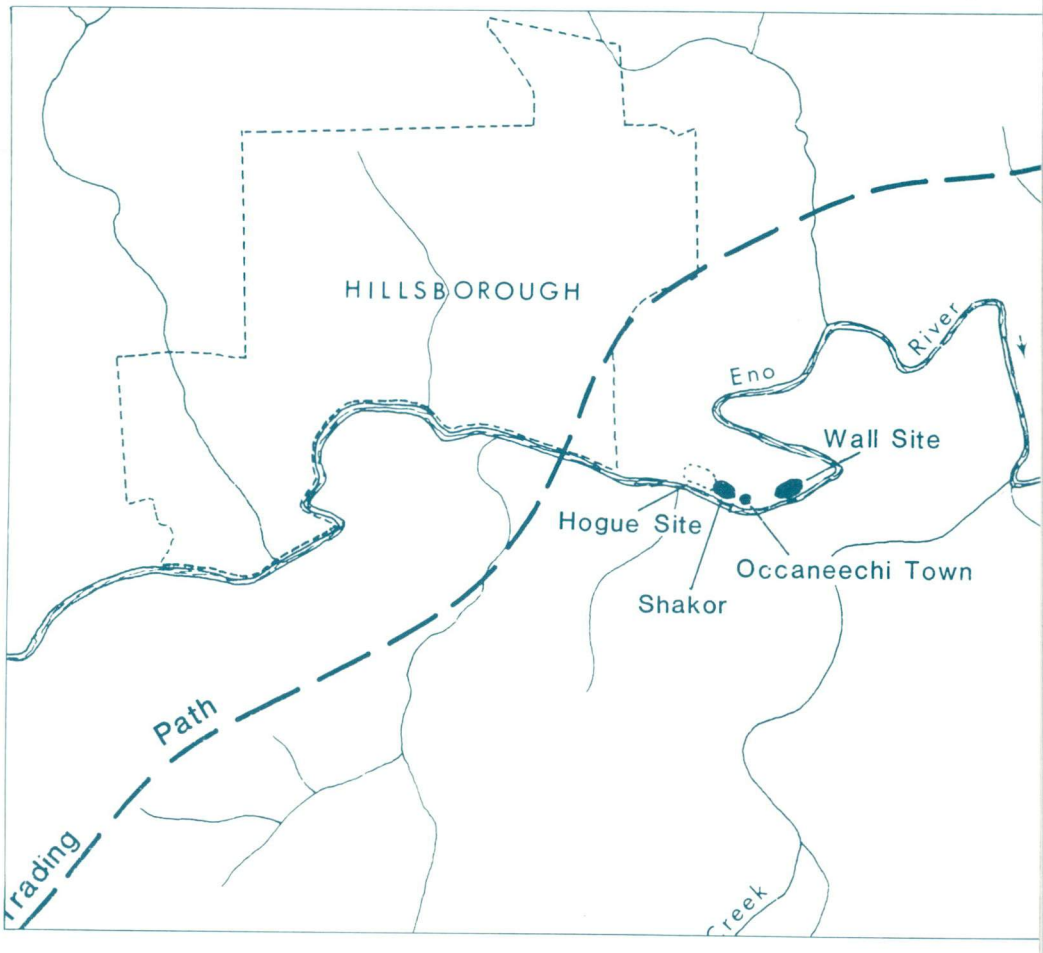
that lived along the Dan, Haw, and Eno rivers in North Carolina.[3] The purpose of this research has been to determine more precisely how these native peoples coped with and were affected by contact with Europeans. For instance, how was the Siouan way of life following the arrival of Europeans different from their way of life before Europeans arrived? Did trade bring about changes in the Siouan way of life? Did the Indians replace their tools with European-made items? How did trade and disease affect cultural differences among various Siouan tribes? How much did these Siouans adopt European ways of doing things?

Over a dozen **prehistoric**—A.D. 1000–1620—and **historic**—A.D. 1620–1710—Siouan village sites have been excavated in order to answer these and other questions. These villages were the homes of the Keyauwee, Occaneechi, Shakori, Sissipahaw, and Sara, and their ancestors. The evolution of Siouan Indian culture from A.D. 1000 to 1710 is especially well documented at four village sites in a bend of the Eno River near present-day Hillsborough.[4]

The earliest village, known as the Hogue site, was occupied from about A.D. 1000 to 1100, about 900 years ago. It had several houses scattered over a five-acre area along the river banks. Because the village was large and spread out, archaeologists do not know how many houses stood there or how they were arranged. These Indians apparently built their houses using a **wattle-and-daub technique**. This building technique involved placing vertical wooden posts into the ground, weaving sticks between these posts, and packing the wall with mud. The Indians probably thatched the roof with reeds and grasses. The village apparently was not enclosed by a **defensive palisade** or **stockade**. A defensive palisade or stockade is a barrier consisting of large, strong posts fixed upright in the ground.

Much of our knowledge about the Hogue site inhabitants comes from the excavation of a deep, round storage pit and a small cemetery. The pit contained discarded stone tools, pieces of broken pots, broken rock from hot cooking fires, and charred plant remains. The small cemetery contained at least eight to ten people who were placed in simple pits without any accompanying grave offerings. These remains give clues about their technology, what and how they ate, what their and physical characteristics were like, and how they buried their dead. These Indians grew crops, primarily corn, hunted deer and other animals, and gathered a variety of seeds, greens, and nuts.

In the early 1500s, another village was established nearby. The occupants of this village are thought to be ancestors of the Shakori Indians, another Siouan

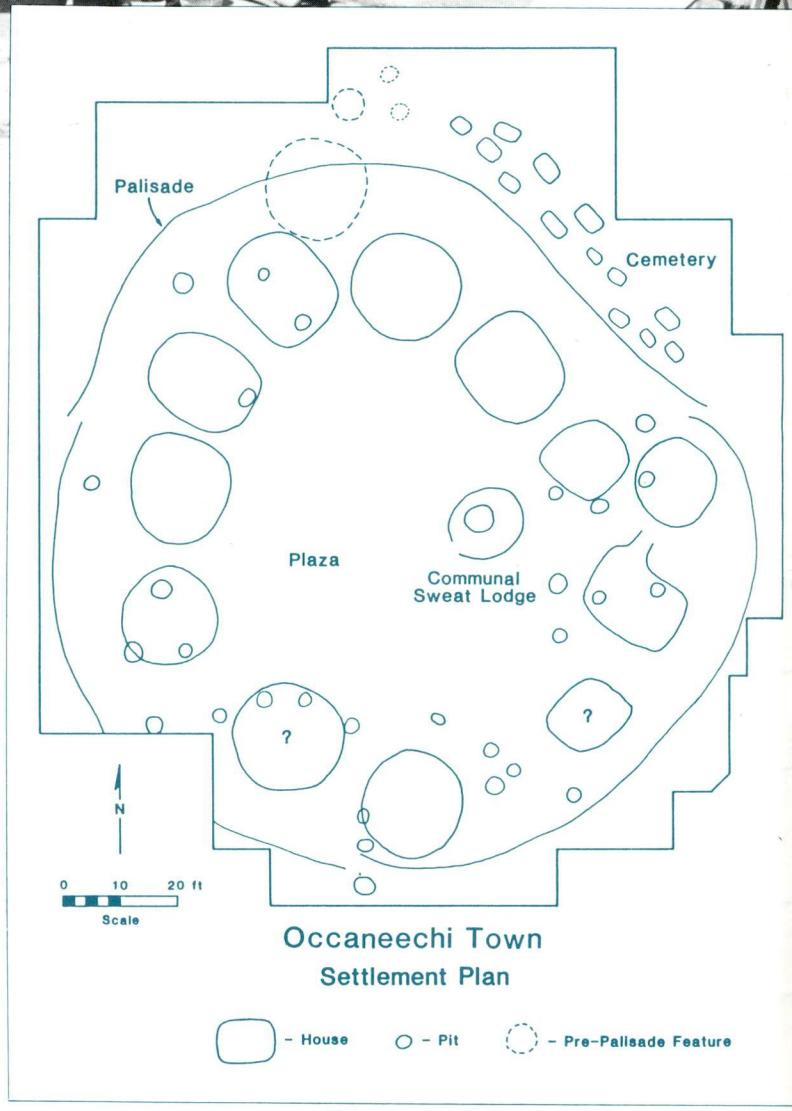


[3] These investigations were conducted by the author in collaboration with H. Trawick Ward and the late Roy S. Dickens, Jr., both of the Research Laboratories of Anthropology, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, and were funded by the National Geographic Society, National Science Foundation, National Park Service, and the University of North Carolina.

[4] A.D. is an abbreviation for Anno Domini, which are Latin words meaning "in the year of the Lord." Archaeologists use these words to describe periods of time. They also use B.C., which means "before Christ." B.C. is used with dates to describe the years before the birth of Christ, and A.D. is used with dates to describe the years after the birth of Christ.—ED.

tribe. Known as the Wall site, this village covered less area and was more compact than the earlier village at the Hogue site. It had a well-defined community plan consisting of an open central plaza surrounded by houses. The village was encircled by a sturdy palisade. The presence of several different palisades suggests that the village expanded over time. At its peak this community may have supported as many as 200 people, or about twenty-five families. Houses were circular, probably dome-shaped, and ranged from twenty to twenty-five feet in diameter. Few pits were dug for storage, and surprisingly few people were buried in the village. Unlike the graves at the Hogue village, those at the Wall site often were accompanied by grave offerings, such as small clay pots. Also, graves were placed either inside or around the houses rather than in a cemetery. Based on the artifacts and food remains found at the Wall site, the kinds of tools, foods, and ways of gathering food were not very different from those observed by archaeologists at the Hogue site.

After archaeologists discover the locations of old Indian villages, they carefully excavate them. They make careful notes of the patterns in the soil and the natural and man-made objects that they find. From their excavations of Occaneechi Town, they produced this plan. From this plan and what you have read, imagine what it would have looked like when John Lawson passed through in 1701.



Pottery-making, however, did change a lot. The pottery used by the Indians that lived at the Hogue site were mostly large storage or cooking jars. The outside surface of these jars were decorated by pressing a paddle wrapped with cord or nets into the damp clay before they were hardened by fire. The Indians that made the pottery at the Wall site decorated their pottery differently.

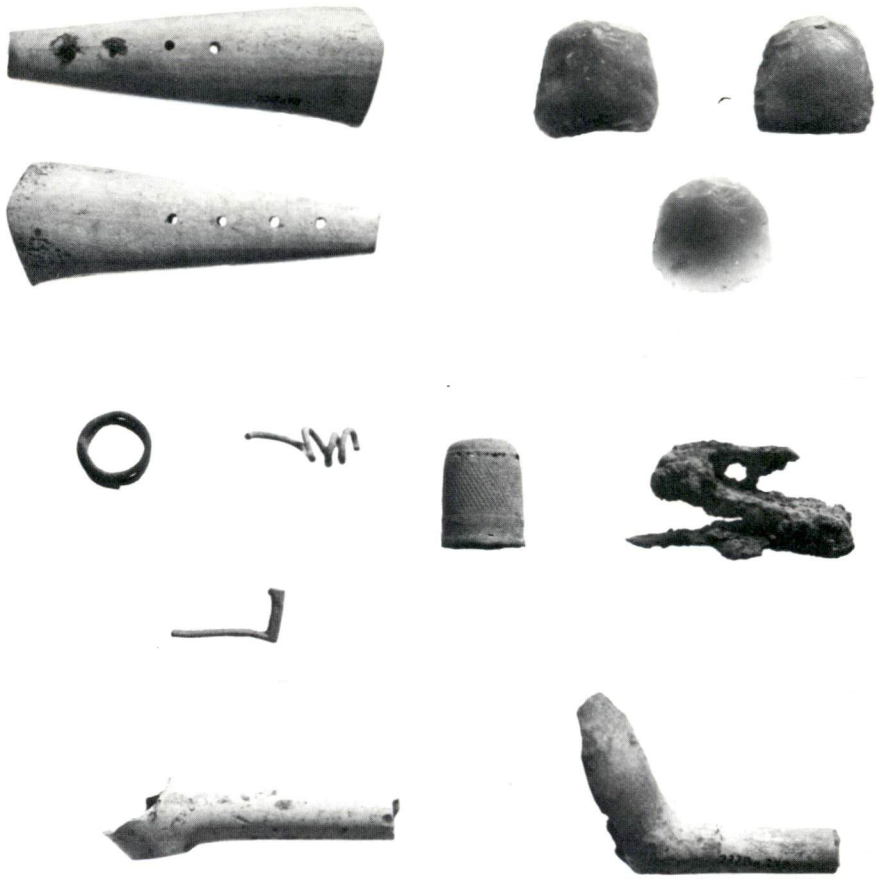
They pressed carved wooden paddles with geometric designs and often added other decorations by pressing a sharpened stick into the damp clay. The pottery at the Wall site also had different shapes and sizes and was probably used for different functions.

During the mid-1600s, a third village was established. This site was discovered in the spring of 1989 by University of North Carolina archaeologists. Archaeologists think that it may be the Shakori settlement called "Shakor," which early explorer John Lederer visited in 1670. Many of the **artifacts** found here are very similar to those from the Wall site. Artifacts are anything made or used by humans. The presence of glass beads and some other European-made artifacts, however, indicates that the Shakori were beginning to trade with the English. Indians did not know how to make glass.

Shakor also was a small village surrounded by a palisade. It covered about a half acre and probably had a population of about 150 people. The small number of burials discovered at this site suggests that disease may not yet have devastated this piedmont tribe.

The final village in this location was established by the Occaneechi Indians after 1676. They moved here when they abandoned their island settlement along the Roanoke River near Clarksville, Virginia. Although they were a small group, the Occaneechi were prominent in the deerskin trade. They served as middlemen between the English and the more remote Indians. Archaeologists excavated at "Occaneechi Town" between 1983 and 1986 and completely uncovered a small, quarter-acre settlement. This village of twelve houses was surrounded by a palisade. It probably was occupied by fewer than seventy-five people for less than ten years. The dead were placed in a cemetery just outside the village. Most of the dead were accompanied by an assortment of European trading items. These included rum bottles, a brass kettle, a flintlock musket, spoons, scissors, knives, axes, hoes, pipes, glass beads, and brass ornaments. The presence of these in the grave indicate that the Occaneechi did indeed have "Plenty of Provisions." But archaeologists think that the number of burials and small community size also suggest that the Occaneechi were rapidly declining both as a people and as a society. In fact, they abandoned the Eno Valley shortly after Lawson's visit. By 1714 they had joined the Saponi, Tutelo, and survivors from other weakened tribes at Fort Christanna in southeastern Virginia.

With the fall of the Occaneechi went the dominance of Siouan Indians in the piedmont. The "Flower of Carolina," with its swift streams, rolling hills, and rich soils, now awaited the migration of new settlers as the English colonies expanded westward. ■



While traveling in the piedmont, Lawson's group of explorers came across a group of traders. The men were using horses to haul trade items to exchange for furs owned by the Indians. Many of these trade items have been found in the ground by archaeologists. The objects found include (from top left to bottom right) *bone knife handles, gun flints, coiled brass wire, a thimble, a gun mainspring, and pipes. Why do you think that the Indians wanted these items?*