SUMMARY REPORT OF 2014 ARCHAEOLOGICAL INVESTIGATIONS AT THE NISBET SITE (SoC 638), LANCASTER COUNTY, SOUTH CAROLINA

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Between May 13 and May 23, 2014, excavations were undertaken by the Research Laboratories of Archaeology at the Nisbet site (SoC 638), an eighteenth-century Catawba site near the Nisbet Bottoms in northern Lancaster County, South Carolina (Figures 1 and 2). These investigations were part of UNC's 2014 archaeological field school, directed by R. P. Stephen Davis, Jr. and Brett H. Riggs, and assisted by Mary Beth Fitts, David Cranford, and Rosie Blewitt. The following 13 students participated in the five-week field school, the first two weeks of which were spent at the Nisbet site: Michella Brown, Abigail Bythell, Andrew Canup, Kiana Fekette, Courtney Houston, Caitlinn LaScala, Meg Leary, Sara Ma, Wyatt Martinez, Samuel Norman, Helin Park, Carson Rouse, and Karen Sherrier.

The Nisbet site is thought to represent a small cluster of houses occupied by members of the Catawba Nation sometime during the period between the Seven Years' War and the American Revolution. It is located on the east side of Catawba River and is situated at the western edge of a broad upland ridge that flanks the north end of an expansive alluvial terrace known as the Nisbet Bottoms. Clay from these bottoms has been used by generations of Catawba potters to make their distinctive earthenwares. The Nisbet site is located on property owned by Nisbet Properties LLC, and at the time of investigation it was planted in wheat. We are grateful to the property's owners, in particular Ned Nisbet and the late John Nisbet, and the property's tenant farmer, Mr. Ken Pierce, for permitting us to excavate at the site.

Site Discovery and Metal Detector Survey

The site was first discovered on September 28, 2006, during a survey of the property by Steve Davis and Brett Riggs. Nineteen Catawba potsherds and a kaolin pipe bowl fragment were surface collected from the southern and western edges of the recently cultivated agricultural field and from the tops of pushed-up soil piles just beyond the field edges. On October 18, 2006, we

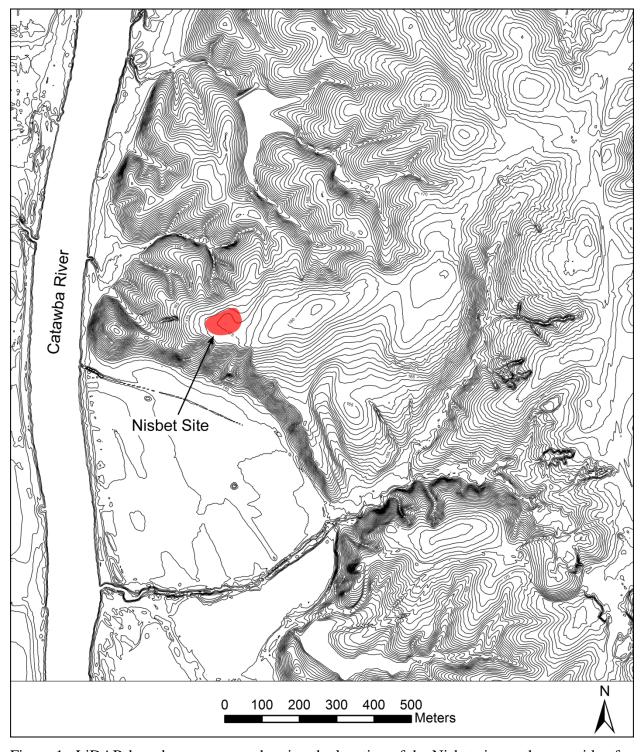


Figure 1. LiDAR-based contour map showing the location of the Nisbet site on the east side of Catawba River in northern Lancaster County, South Carolina. Contour interval is 1 meter.

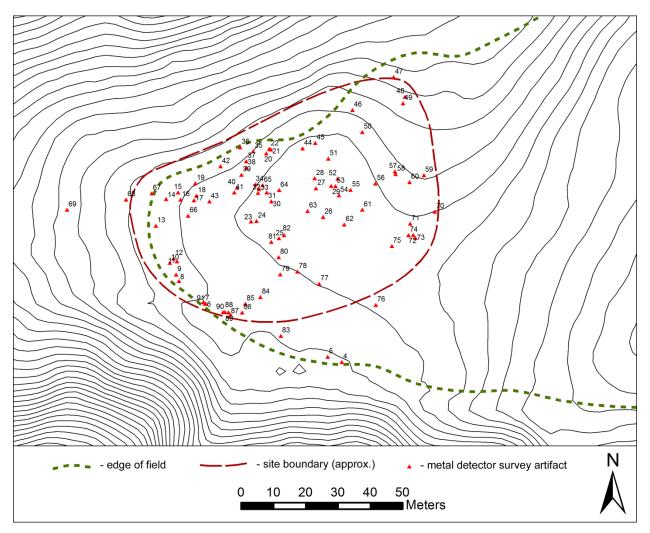


Figure 2. Map of the Nisbet site showing the approximate site boundary based on the distribution of metal-detected artifacts. Contour interval is 50 cm. An inventory of artifacts from the metal detector survey, identified by field specimen number, is provided in Table 1.

returned to the site with Mary Beth Fitts and undertook a systematic metal-detector survey of the adjacent field (Figure 2). This survey covered an area of about 4,700 sq meters (about 90 meters by 50 meters) and identified 98 artifacts, including 32 wrought nails, three snaffle bit fragments, a stirrup fragment, two scissor fragments, seven Catawba potsherds, two gun frizzens, seven pieces of lead, a brass bell fragment, three knife blade fragments, a buckle frame, a kaolin pipe stem, and other possible 18th-century iron artifacts (see Table 1). Of the 91 "metal hits," or locations where metal was detected, one was confirmed as the top of an intact archaeological pit feature that contained dark, organically-enriched fill. At the top of this feature were fragments of a broken kaolin pipe, a Catawba potsherd, and an unidentified fragment of iron.

Table 1. Inventory of Artifacts Recovered during the Metal Detector Survey.

Field Specimen No.	Description	Grid Location
FS# 4	Catawba Sherd, Twisted Wire (modern)	113.96R416.72
FS# 5	Wrought Nail	115.54R412.31
FS# 6	Heavy Iron Knife Blade Fragment	132.00R374.52
FS# 7	Heavy Iron Knife Blade Fragment	132.50R373.82
FS# 8	Wrought Nail, Catawba Sherd	138.98R366.26
FS# 9	Wrought Nail	140.97R365.38
FS# 10	Cut Nail	144.59R363.41
FS# 11	Wrought Nail	145.09R365.66
FS# 12	Bent Iron Rod Fragment	145.97R364.61
FS# 13	Wrought Nail	156.04R359.14
FS# 14	Lead Ball	164.37R362.28
FS# 15	Iron Buckle Frame	166.40R366.00
FS# 16	Kaolin Pipe Fragment, Catawba Sherd	164.18R366.74
FS# 17	1 Iron Handle	163.92R370.92
FS# 18	Wrought Horseshoe Nail, Quartz Scraper	165.36R371.66
FS# 19	Horseshoe Branch	169.19R371.32
FS# 20	Snaffle Bit Fragment	178.45R393.34
FS# 21	Snaffle Bit Fragment	179.67R394.71
FS# 22	Scissor Handle Fragment	179.86R394.23
FS# 23	Wrought Nail	157.43R388.62
FS# 24	Wrought Nail	157.54R390.26
FS# 25	Wrought Nail	152.20R397.20
FS# 26	Wrought Nail	158.78R410.89
FS# 27	Strike-a-Light (?)	167.65R408.70
FS# 28	Wrought Nail	170.73R408.27
FS# 29	Gun Frizzen	168.43R413.40
FS# 30	Wrought Nail	163.58R394.84
FS# 31	Horseshoe Branch	166.40R393.47
FS# 32	Wrought Nail	166.23R390.75
FS# 33	Harmonica Fragment (modern)	167.43R391.10
FS# 34	Cut Nail	168.88R389.97
FS# 35	Wrought Nail	179.15R389.28
FS# 36	Snaffle Bit Fragment (?)	180.31R385.21
FS# 37	Lead Ball (Chewed)	176.04R387.12
FS# 38	Cut Nail	174.01R387.10
FS# 39	Scissor Blade Fragment	171.87R385.64
FS# 40	Cut Nail	167.84R384.25
FS# 41	Wrought Nail	166.35R383.40
FS# 42	Wrought Nail	174.43R379.14
FS# 43	Wrought Nail, Stone Flake	163.58R375.73
FS# 44	Lead Sheet	179.98R404.56
FS# 45	Wrought Nail	181.70R408.48
FS# 46	Horseshoe Branch	191.89R420.01
FS# 47	Wrought Nail	202.04R432.77
FS# 48	Horseshoe	195.94R436.28
FS# 49	Wrought Iron Bolt	193.97R435.66
FS# 50	Lead Ball	185.04R423.03
FS# 51	Wrought Nail	176.82R412.53

Table 1 continued.

Field Specimen No.	Description	Grid Location
FS# 52	Cut Nail	170.60R415.41
FS# 53	Wrought Nail	168.33R414.71
FS# 54	Cut Nail	165.49R415.79
FS# 55	Wrought Nail	167.20R419.42
FS# 56	Wrought Nail	169.17R427.09
FS# 57	Cut Nail	172.84R433.14
FS# 58	Lead Disk	172.06R433.37
FS# 59	Gun Frizzen	171.72R442.09
FS# 60	Horseshoe, Quartz Core	169.53R437.65
FS# 61	Horseshoe	161.02R423.04
FS# 62	Wrought Nail	156.49R417.43
FS# 63	Brass Bell Fragment	160.66R406.13
FS# 64	Wrought Nail	167.09R397.26
FS# 65	Harness Ring	168.61R392.13
FS# 66	Wrought Nail	159.15R369.12
FS# 67	Cut Nail	166.13R357.82
FS# 68	Stirrup Fragment	164.16R349.92
FS# 69	3 Catawba Sherds	161.02R331.63
FS# 70	Wrought Nail, Catawba Sherd	160.45R445.52
FS# 71	Horseshoe	156.71R437.90
FS# 72	Wrought Nail	153.23R438.79
FS# 73	Lead Ball	152.30R439.46
FS# 74	Cut Nail	153.18R437.33
FS# 75	Wrought Nail	149.79R432.18
FS# 76	Lead Sprue	131.60R427.23
FS# 77	Wrought Nail	138.16R409.68
FS# 78	Possible Chain Link	141.93R402.95
FS# 79	Cut Nail	141.04R397.62
FS# 80	Knife Blade Tip	146.36R397.17
FS# 81	Horseshoe	151.09R394.88
FS# 82	Iron Fragment	153.15R398.82
FS# 83	Iron Fragment	122.00R397.79
FS# 84	Cut Nail	133.99R391.52
FS# 85	Wrought Nail	131.91R386.80
FS# 86	Wrought Nail	129.20R385.85
FS# 87	Wrought Nail	128.59R382.27
FS# 88	2 Iron Strap Fragments	129.31R381.56
FS# 89	Iron Rod	129.38R380.52
FS# 90	Iron Strap	129.38R379.96
FS# 91	Iron Fragment	131.93R374.28

The identified pit feature (Feature 1) was located near the western edge of the metal artifact distribution and at the very edge of the field. Other temporally diagnostic 18th-century metal artifacts and potsherds were distributed about 80 m to the east along a low elevated land surface. While metal detecting did not clearly define the site's overall limits, the surface

topography suggests that most of the site lay within the area that was sampled. Metal-detecting transects to the east of the identified site area failed to identify additional 18th-century artifacts; however, a few potsherds and green bottle glass were observed in push piles along the field edge 60 m southeast of the limits of systematic metal detecting.

Following the discovery of the Nisbet site, it was anticipated that we would conduct more extensive investigations there the following summer in order to obtain additional data on Catawba households in the years leading up to the American Revolution. In particular, we were interested in identifying components of the larger Catawba community depicted on the 1775 Henry Mouzon map of South Carolina, and the artifact sample from the site indicated that it likely dated to that time period. However, a series of more pressing projects, including two field seasons at Nassaw-Weyapee (2007–2008), a second season at Old Town (2009), data recovery excavations at Ayers Town and Ashe Ferry (2010), and a field season at Charraw Town (2011), delayed further investigations at the site until 2014.

Re-establishing and Transforming the Site Grid

Preparations for the 2014 excavations began in late February, 2014, with reconnaissance to determine present site conditions and to re-locate reference points for the site grid (in meters) that had been established in 2006 to piece-plot the metal-detected artifacts and map field and site boundaries. Those reference points consisted of three survey pins placed flush in the ground. One of these, designated Station #1 and given an arbitrary coordinate of 500R500, had been placed within the agricultural field and was now presumed to be disturbed from subsequent plowing; the other two, Station #2 (517.978R482.783) and Station #3 (464.597R507.278), were located in the woods just beyond the field edge. Both of these intact points were relocated with relatively little effort using a metal detector.

For the purpose of excavation, a new site grid was established with reference to the Universal Transverse Mercator (UTM Zone 17, NAD 83) coordinate system. This was accomplished by determining the UTM coordinates (in meters) of two newly set points (Stations #4 and #5) in the middle of the agricultural field using a Topcon GR-3 high-precision GPS satellite receiver. Once this was done, a total station was used to determine the UTM coordinates of Station #2 and Station #3. After the spatial relationship of these old and new grid points was determined, all other locations referencing the old grid were converted to the new grid.

Table 2. Transformation of Old Grid Reference Points to New Grid Reference Points.

Station	Old Grid	UTM Easting	UTM Northing	New Grid
1	500.000R500.000	-	-	
2	517.978R482.783	511358.936	3859168.191	168.191R358.936
3	464.597R507.278	511389.646	3859118.127	118.127R389.646
4	-	511375.951	3859149.693	149.693R375.951
5	-	511428.418	3859150.772	150.772R428.418
6	-	511363.025	3859142.185	142.185R363.025

For convenience during fieldwork, only the last three digits of the UTM easting and northing values were used to record locations within the site (Table 2). For example, the UTM coordinate (zone/easting/northing) for Station #2, 17 / 511358.936 / 3859168.191, was shortened to 168.191R358.936. The advantage of the new, UTM-based grid is that it permits the easy use of widely available GIS datasets for environmental and spatial analysis.

Additional Site Testing

Following establishment of the new grid, a soil auger and probe were used to test the area around Feature 1, and at other locations where metal-detected artifacts appeared spatially clustered, in an attempt to locate additional archaeological features. While this exercise did not find any other features, it did reveal that the topsoil in the vicinity of the site largely consisted of plowed-out, red subsoil clay that varied in depth (10–20 cm) and composition due to lateral soil movement and disturbance from a combination of land terracing, plowing, and sheet wash (i.e., erosion). As we later observed through excavation, the site had been deeply plowed with a subsoiler and had experienced substantial soil loss that likely eradicated many shallow archaeological features, including postholes, smudge pits, and clay processing facilities, removed significant portions of the tops of remaining features, and affected the overall content and spatial relationship of artifacts contained within the plowed soil.

Gradiometer Survey

In late March, 2014, Davis, Riggs, and Fitts returned to the site to conduct a gradiometer survey. This survey sought to identify magnetic soil anomalies that might represent either subsurface archaeological features or more deeply buried iron artifacts that were not found during the earlier metal-detector survey (Figures 3 and 4). The rationale behind locating archaeological features was that a gradiometer should be able to differentiate between refuse-

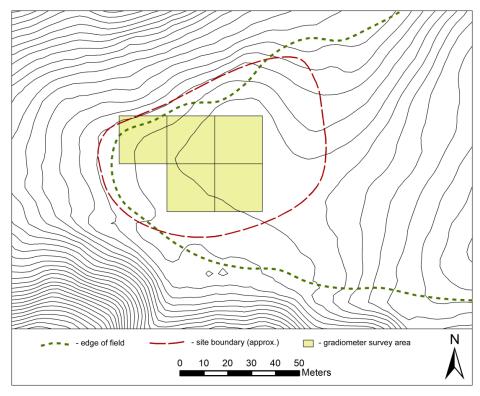


Figure 3. Map of the Nisbet site showing the area of the gradiometer survey. Contour interval is 50 cm.

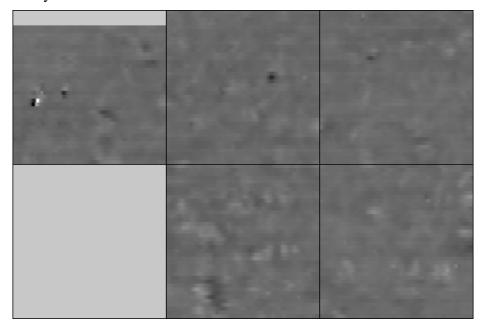


Figure 4. Results of the gradiometer survey, showing discrete areas of abnormally high magnetism (dark patches) and abnormally low magnetism (light patches). Ground-truthing of these areas failed to reveal any archaeological features. Feature 1 is located near the center of the top left 20x20 m block; the high-magnetism anomaly near the top center was investigated by Squares 166R393–394.

laden pit fill and the surrounding iron-rich, red-clay subsoil. The survey was conducted using a Bartington Grad60 magnetic gradiometer with dual sensors, with sampling at half-meter intervals. Five 20x20-m blocks within the metal-detected area, and including the location of Feature 1, were surveyed. Although several apparent anomalies (indicating discrete areas of both abnormally high and abnormally low magnetism) were identified, subsequent ground-truthing with probes, soil augers, and limited excavation failed to reveal any intact archaeological features. Even more discouraging was the fact that the gradiometer failed to detect the one known archaeological context, Feature 1. The magnetic anomalies all appear to represent soil variation of either natural or modern agricultural origin. The difficulty in detecting Feature 1 is attributed to the fact that most of this pit had been removed by plowing and soil erosion, and only the bottom 10–15 cm of fill remained.

Unit Excavation

Archaeological excavation at the Nisbet site began on May 13, 2014 (Figure 5). The immediate goal was to sample the area above and adjacent to Feature 1, thought to represent the remains of a sub-floor storage pit. Prior experience at other 18th-century Catawba sites such as Nassaw-Weyapee, Old Town, and Ayers Town suggested that such pits usually did not occur in isolation but instead tended to occur in clusters representing sequences of pit abandonment and new pit constructions. Similar patterns had been observed for both post-in-ground structures and cribbed-log houses. If Feature 1 was associated with a post-in-ground structure, then we also expected to find filled-in postholes representing wall and interior support posts.

The process of excavation proceeded as follows. First, a small work area over Feature 1 was cleared of wheat using a scythe. Over the course of the next two weeks, this area was expanded to approximately 13x14 m (about 182 m²). Excavation began with a 3x3-m block centered on Feature 1, and over the next two weeks this block expanded two to five meters in all four cardinal directions. The excavation employed 1x1-m grid units whose corners were located using a total station and measuring tapes. Unit corners were marked with aluminum gutter spikes, and mason's twine strung from corner to corner marked the limits of the area to be dug. Units were referenced by their southeast corner coordinates. Plowed soil varied between about 10 cm and 20 cm in thickness, and it was shoveled out as a single stratigraphic unit. Both the unit walls and floor were cleaned using flatshovels and trowels. The plowed soil, while mostly derived from subsoil, was distinguishable by artifact content, density, and texture (Figures 6–9).

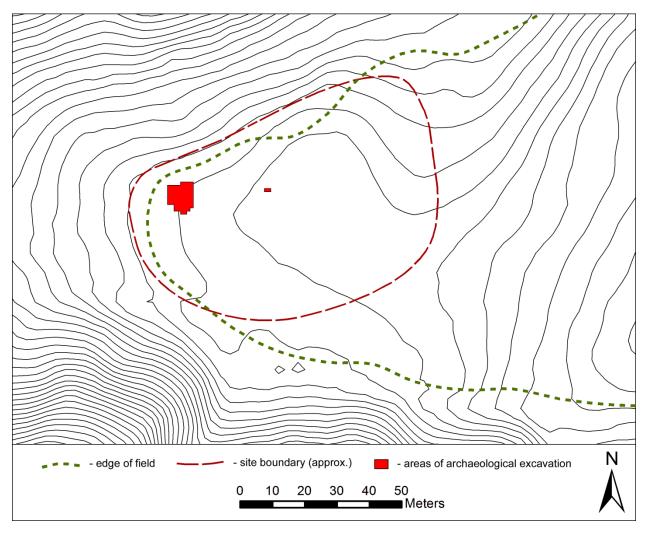


Figure 5. Map of the Nisbet site showing the areas of archaeological excavation. Sixty-five 1x1 m units were excavated in the main block, and a small 1x2 m trench was excavated about 30 m to the east.

All soil was dry-screened through ¼-inch mesh to recover artifacts. Artifact samples consisted mostly of potsherds and chipped-stone flakes, but they also included green bottle glass fragments, fragments of English-made ceramics, large glass beads, and occasional projectile points and point fragments. All of the stone artifacts represent earlier site occupations dating to the Archaic period. Naturally-occurring fragments of vein quartz and other stone also were found in most units, and these were discarded in the field.

Elevations were recorded for both the top and bottom of each unit corner, and soils were characterized by texture and color. Observations were recorded for each unit using a standard data sheet, and elevations also were recorded digitally using the total station. Upon completion



Figure 6. Beginning excavation at the Nisbet site (view to northeast).



Figure 7. Students excavating units and screening dirt. View to south.



Figure 8. Troweling top of subsoil surface for photography and mapping. View to south.



Figure 9. Main excavation block partly excavated with Feature 1 visible in foreground. View to north.

of several contiguous units, they were uniformly troweled and photographed in vertical perspective for subsequent compilation as a photographic mosaic of the excavated surface. Soil discolorations at the top-of-subsoil surface were designated as archaeological features and then mapped in outline with a total station.

A total of 67 units (67 m²) were excavated. Sixty-five of these comprised a roughly square block centered upon Feature 1; two other units forming a 1x2-m block (Squares 166R393–394) were excavated 30 m east of Feature 1 to investigate an anomaly identified during the gradiometer survey (see Figure 4).

Feature Excavation

Seventeen archaeological features were identified within the main excavation block at the Nisbet site, and 14 of these were excavated (Figure 10, Table 3). Features can be placed into one of three categories: storage pit (n=1); postholes and probable postholes (n=10); and tree disturbances (n=6).

Storage Pit (Figure 11)

Feature 1 was the only sub-floor storage facility found at the Nisbet site. It was roughly circular to sub-rectangular in outline, and had vertical to slightly undercut walls and a flat base. The pit measured 79 cm north—south by 59 cm east—west, and had a maximum depth of about 13 cm. Deep plow scars cut through the top of the feature. The fill matrix consisted mostly of dark reddish brown (5YR 3/4) sandy loam with pockets of fine yellowish red (5YR 5/6) sand, small (1–2 cm) dark red (2.5YR 3/6) clay inclusions, and smaller flecks of pale, unfired potter's clay and charcoal. The fill also contained fragments of Catawba earthenware pottery, and several pieces of a broken kaolin pipe, along with a ceramic loop handle and an unidentified iron fragment, were found on the top of the feature.

The west half of Feature 1 was excavated first in order to expose a profile of the fill matrix. Because of the fill's overall homogeneity, it was removed as a single zone (Zone 1). Fill removed by troweling from the top of the feature prior to excavation was waterscreened through 1/16-inch mesh; all remaining fill was bagged for later processing by flotation.

The interpretation of Feature 1 as a sub-floor storage facility is based on its similarity, both in terms of fill content and overall pit morphology, to features that were found within a post-in-ground structure at Nassaw-Weyapee; it also is similar to pits that were found in

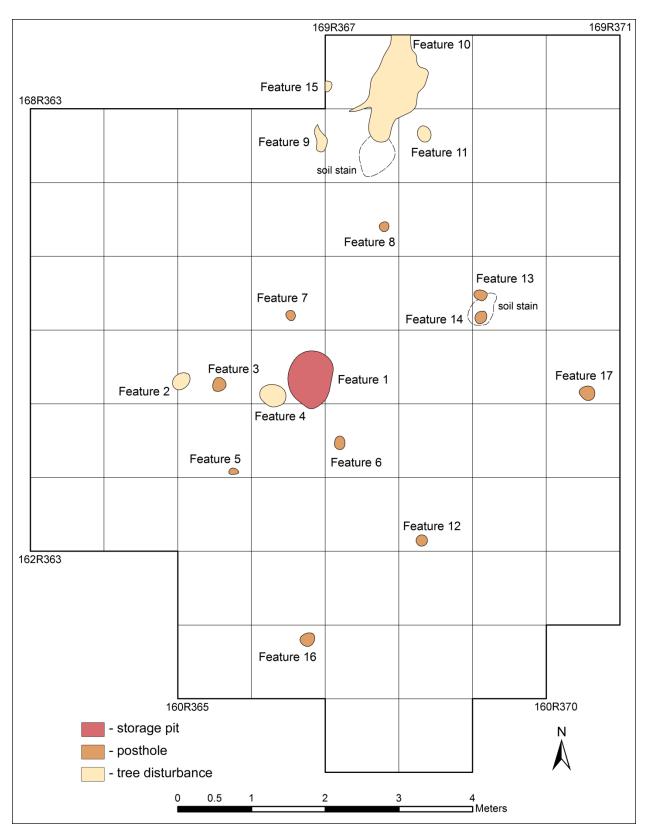


Figure 10. Plan of the main excavation block at the Nisbet site.

Table 3. Archaeological Features Identified at the Nisbet Site.

Feature	Туре	Length	Width	Depth	Center Location
Feature 1	storage pit	79	59	13	164.30R366.80
Feature 2	tree disturbance	27	20	16	164.29R365.04
Feature 3	posthole	20	18	8	164.27R365.56
Feature 4	tree disturbance	36	30	>25	164.15R366.31
Feature 5	posthole (?)	13	9	20	163.08R365.76
Feature 6	posthole	15	13	14	163.47R367.21
Feature 7	posthole	14	12	9	165.20R366.54
Feature 8	posthole	13	13	4	166.40R367.80
Feature 9	tree disturbance (not excav.)	38	14	-	167.60R366.93
Feature 10	tree disturbance (not excav.)	198	71	-	168.33R367.97
Feature 11	tree disturbance	22	18	>20	167.65R368.35
Feature 12	posthole	15	15	10	162.17R368.31
Feature 13	posthole	18	14	11	165.48R369.11
Feature 14	posthole (?)	18	15	6	165.18R369.11
Feature 15	tree disturbance (not excav.)	15	10	-	168.31R367.05
Feature 16	posthole	20	18	7	160.81R366.78
Feature 17	posthole	22	19	11	164.15R370.56

presumed house areas at the Ayers Town site (Davis et al. 2014; Fitts et al. 2007). Its spatial position relative to other features identified as postholes further suggests that it was the sole storage pit (or at least the only pit remaining) within a rectangular post-in-ground structure at the Nisbet site (see below).

Postholes and Probable Postholes (Figures 12–14)

Eight features (Features 3, 6–8, 12–13, and 16–17) are interpreted as filled-in postholes, and two additional features (Features 5 and 14) are interpreted as probable postholes. All but two of these appear to represent wall posts of a rectangular post-in-ground structure oriented along a northeast–southwest axis; the other two postholes (Features 5 and 6) are situated inside this hypothesized structure. This building measured approximately 5.0 meters (16–17 ft) long by 3.6 meters (11–12 ft) wide, with an interior floor area of about 17.5 m² (188 ft²). Feature 1 is located at the center of the building near the northwest wall. As with Feature 1, all of the postholes were relatively shallow due to extensive plowing and soil loss at the site. Features 5 and 6, both located inside the structure, were 20 cm and 14 cm deep, respectively. The other postholes, all wall posts, were only 4 cm to 11 cm deep.



Figure 11. Views of Feature 1: top of feature prior to excavation (top left); excavating the west half (top right); feature with west half excavated (bottom left); and excavated feature (bottom right).

Postholes were excavated with trowels and spoons, and all fill was waterscreened through 1/16-inch mesh. Fill was removed in its entirety without profiling, but a profile of the excavated feature was subsequently mapped with a total station. Few of these features contained cultural material other than small fragments of charcoal and fired clay.

Tree Disturbances (Figure 15)

A cluster of four features (Features 9, 10, 11, and 15) near the north edge of the excavation appear to represent elements of a large, single tree disturbance, based on



Figure 12. Top and excavated views of Postholes 3, 5, and 6.

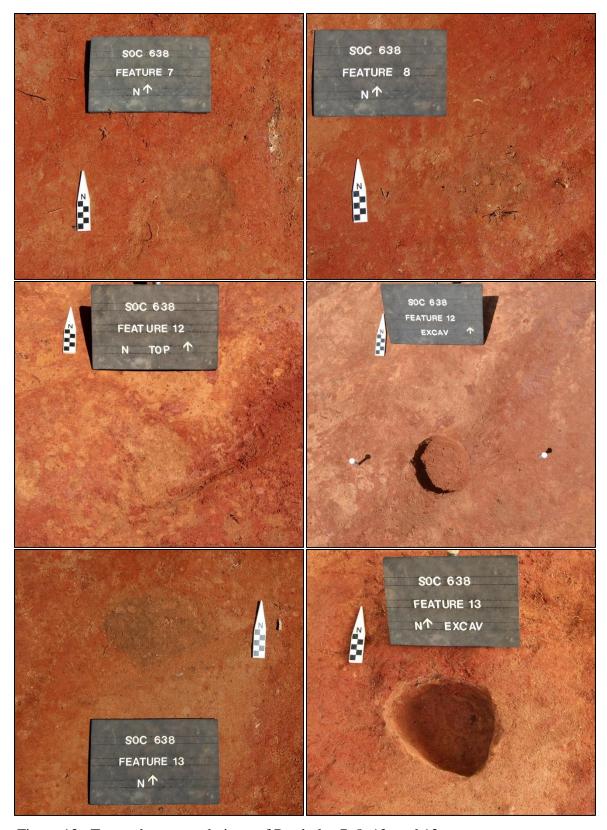


Figure 13. Top and excavated views of Postholes 7, 8, 12, and 13.

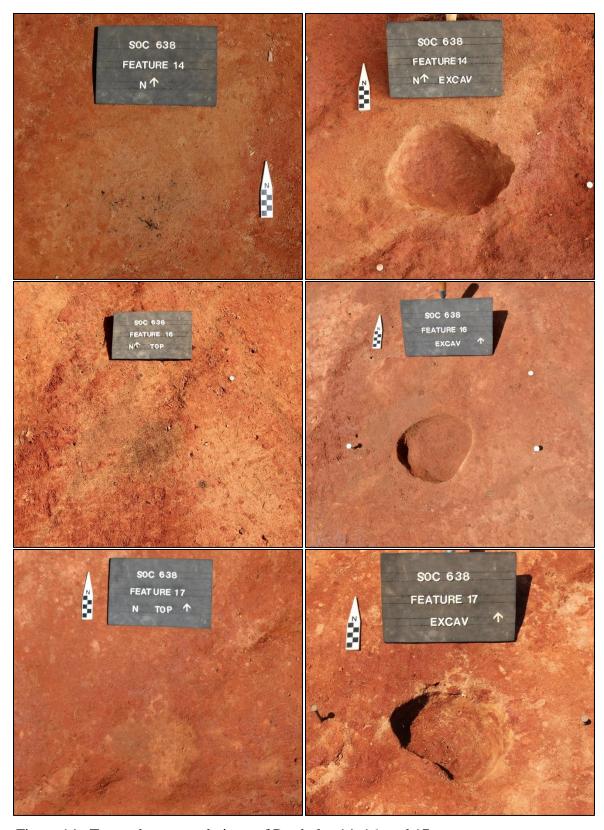


Figure 14. Top and excavated views of Postholes 14, 16, and 17.



Figure 15. Vertical view of Sq. 168R368 showing the tops of tree disturbances. Feature 10 is indicated by tan soil and black charcoal patches at the center of the photograph, and Feature 15 is the dark charcoal patch at the west edge of the excavation unit.

configuration and fill characteristics at the top-of-subsoil surface. Only one of these (Feature 11) was excavated, and it turned out to be a burned-out root. The other two tree disturbances (Features 2 and 4) were located just west of Feature 1. Feature 2 appeared to be a circular posthole and contained an English kaolin pipestem that was exposed at the top; however, later excavation revealed that it was a filled-in stump hole with a taproot that extended beneath the northeast edge of the feature. Feature 4, situated immediately adjacent to Feature 1, was a roughly circular concentration of charcoal about 30 cm in diameter. Initially thought to be a possible smudge pit, it too turned out to be a filled-in stump hole, and excavation was terminated at a depth of 25 cm.

Conclusion

The brief excavation at the Nisbet site revealed the archaeological remains of a single post-in-ground house which, based on an initial assessment of the associated artifact assemblage, can be attributed to a household of the Catawba Nation during the 1760s and 1770s. The general low density of artifacts in the plowed soil and the occurrence of a single subfloor storage pit suggest that the occupation of the site was short-lived compared to other archaeologically documented 18th-century Catawba sites such as Nassaw-Weyapee, Charraw Town, Ayers Town, and Old Town (Davis and Riggs 2004; Davis et al. 2014, n.d.; Fitts et al. 2007). The apparent limited spatial distribution of artifacts further suggests that the Nisbet site likely represents no more than two or three related households. While such small settlements undoubtedly were common within the Catawba Nation during the years leading up to and following the American Revolution, they are a heretofore unstudied and largely invisible element of the greater Catawba community. In this regard, the archaeological evidence from the Nisbet site provides important new information about the Nation during a critical period in its history.

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