

# The North Carolina Archaeological Collection: Contents and Research Potential

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## INTRODUCTION

Since 1939, archaeologists affiliated with the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill have conducted surveys and excavations across North Carolina and the Southeast. The resulting collections, totaling over 8 million artifacts, are managed as the North Carolina Archaeological Collection (NCAC) by the Research Laboratories of Archaeology (RLA). This poster summarizes the temporal and spatial breadth of this collection, highlighting sites that have yielded diverse assemblages, particularly those containing faunal and ethnobotanical materials.

Space to store archaeological collections at UNC-Chapel Hill was secured as part of the University's obligations under a statewide archaeological survey funded by the Works Progress Administration from 1940 to 1942 (Coe 1947, Ward and Davis 1999). This work resulted in the recovery of over 200,000 artifacts from 281 sites, a collection which grew substantially as major research projects were undertaken in the following decades. After several moves, a 2002 Save America's Treasures grant matched by the University enabled renovation of a permanent curation facility.

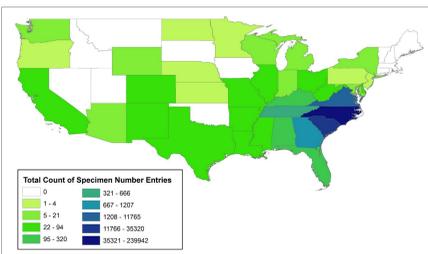


Figure 1. Map showing count of specimen numbers per state.

## BY THE NUMBERS

The total count of **specimen numbers** (see explanation box below) for any given archaeological site represented in the North Carolina Archaeological Collection can serve as proxy for both the size and diversity of the curated assemblage, since specimen numbers are given to specific material types by context. A collection with one specimen number may have one pottery sherd or a hundred, but either way it would not be a very diverse collection. In contrast, the assemblage from a site with one hundred specimen numbers is likely to have a diverse array of contexts and materials in the NCAC.

There are presently 8,230 "sites" with accession records in the NCAC. Some of these are not archaeological sites in the conventional sense but rather country-, state-, and county-level collections (Figure 1). The smallest count of specimen numbers for a site is 1, and the maximum is 22,641 (for Town Creek Village, 31Mg3). The median count of specimen numbers per site is 3. There are 828 sites classified as outliers (greater than 1.5 times the interquartile range) with 13 or more specimen numbers each. Most of these come from 12 states (see Table 1, below).

To determine which of these outliers yielded faunal and ethnobotanical material, the associated specimen numbers were queried for records containing "b" and "eb." All burial contexts were excluded from the resulting list of accession numbers. We then calculated the total count of faunal and ethnobotanical specimen numbers per site. These counts ranged from 1 to 3,334, with a median of 3. A total of 64 sites are outliers with counts of 37 or greater (For a list, scan the QR code below). They are in North Carolina (n=42), South Carolina (n=11), and Virginia (n=11) (Figure 2, right). Some of these sites and projects are highlighted to the right.

Alabama	Florida	Georgia	Illinois	Kentucky	Louisiana	Mississippi	North Carolina	New Mexico	South Carolina	Tennessee	Virginia	TOTAL
1	1	11	1	1	1	2	619	1	49	3	42	732

Table 1. Number of Sites in the Contiguous USA Classified as Outliers (at least 1.5 times the interquartile range) for Total Count of Specimen Numbers in the NCAC Database

## Decoding Specimen Numbers

Materials in the North Carolina Archaeological Collection are numbered using a three-part system.

The first part is an accession number assigned to a group of materials that come from excavating or collecting at a specific location during a specific time frame. For example, accession number 33 is assigned to material collected from the surface of the Town Creek Village site (31Mg3) by Joffre Coe in the summer of 1937.

Second is a letter that designates a subset of specific materials within a given context. For example, "a" is code for "artifact" (most typically chipped-stone projectile points, but also other worked materials such as ground stone, animal bone tools, or items of adornment), "p" is code for "pottery," and "eb" is code for "ethnobotanical."

Third is a sequential "specimen number" unique to the subset of materials within an accessioned collection. For example, 33p1 is the specimen number entry for 1552 pottery sherds Coe collected from Town Creek in 1937, as mentioned above; 33a9 is the specimen number entry for 4 chipped stone projectile point fragments he collected.

## CONCLUSION

Variation in documentation quality and past sampling strategies can sometimes make legacy collections challenging to work with, particularly for faunal and botanical materials. However, researchers interested in using the NCAC will benefit from digitized field notes and daily reports of RLA field directors, as well as the fact that waterscreening and flotation were implemented for most RLA projects beginning in the 1960s. Sub-sampling and careful application of statistical approaches can enable comparisons across modern and legacy collections; the collections can also be used to conduct microscopic and compositional analyses. While much ground-breaking archaeofaunal and archaeobotanical work has been done with the NCAC, many samples remain unanalyzed. These materials await your curiosity and interest in advancing the study of Southeastern foodways and human-plant-animal relationships!

## REFERENCES\*

Coe, Joffre L. (1947). Memorandum on the Laboratory of Archaeology to Chancellor R. B. House, February 22, 1947. Ms. on file. Photocopies of correspondence and other documents, and Trawick Ward's notes regarding the history of the RLA, RLA Archive, Research Laboratories of Archaeology, UNC Chapel Hill.

Ward, Trawick H., and Davis R. P. Stephen Jr (1999). *Time Before History: The Archaeology of North Carolina*. University of North Carolina Press, Chapel Hill.



\*Scan for Faunal and Ethnobotanical REFERENCES

### LEGEND

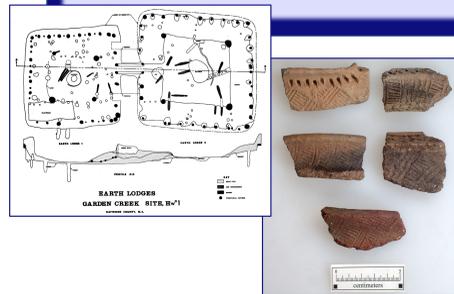
- ★ Primary Components Identified
- 👤 Principal Investigator (Dates)
- N Total Count of Specimen Entries
- 🐾 Total Count of Faunal & Ethnobotanical Specimen Entries
- 🔍 Research Objectives

### Cherokee Project

Warren Wilson Site (31Bn29), Townson (31Ce15), Garden Creek Mounds 1 (31Hw1) and 2 (31Hw2), 31Hw7, Tuckasee (31Jk12), Coweeta Creek (31Ma4)

- ★ Middle Archaic to Early Colonial
- 👤 Coe and Keel (1961–1968)
- N 55,392
- 🐾 10,675

The Cherokee Project traced the ecological and cultural development of the Cherokee Nation. A NSF grant supported radiocarbon, archaeofaunal, and archaeobotanical analyses.



### Catawba Project

Spratt's Bottom (3Yk3), Nassaw-Weyapee (38Yk434), Charraw Town (38Yk17), Ayers Town (38Yk534), Old Town (38Yk798), New Town (SoC 632 & 635)

- ★ 18<sup>th</sup> to early 19<sup>th</sup> century Catawba
- 👤 Davis and Riggs (2003–2014)
- N 24,386
- 🐾 2,755

The Catawba Project used documentary sources and archaeological materials to investigate cultural processes, change, and continuity in 18<sup>th</sup> to 19<sup>th</sup> c. Catawba history.



### Siouan Project

Edgar Rogers (31Am167), Holt (31Am168), George Rogers (31Am220), Haw River (31Ch29), Mitchum (31Ch452), Webster (31Ch463), Wall (31Or11), Fredricks (31Or231), Jenrette (31Or231a), Lower Saratow (31Rk1), Powerplant (31Rk5), Hairston (31Sk1), Upper Saratow (31Sk1a), William Klutz (31Sk6)

- ★ Woodland to Historic
- 👤 Dickens, Ward, and Davis (1983–1998)
- N 72,728
- 🐾 10,311

The Siouan Project studied the impact of European colonization on Indigenous peoples in central North Carolina, excavating villages along the upper drainages of the Neuse, Cape Fear, and Dan rivers.

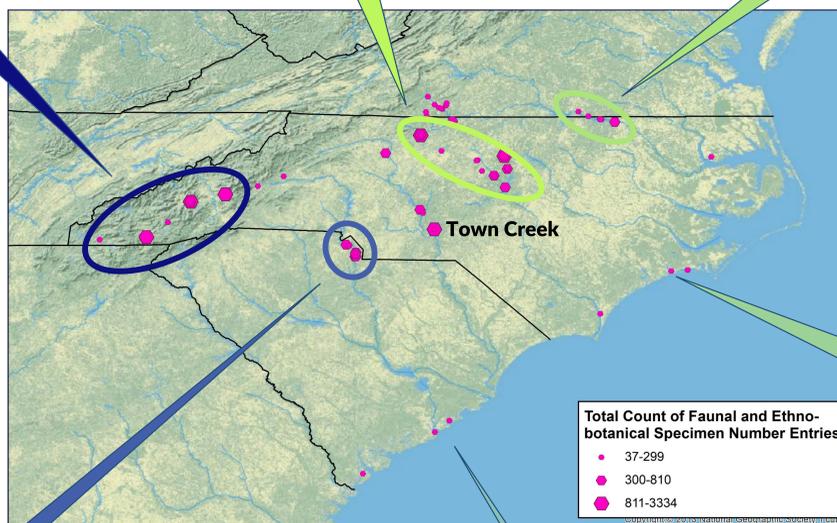


Figure 2. Map of sites with counts of faunal and ethnobotanical specimen numbers equal to or greater than 37.

### Town Creek

Mound (31Mg2) and Village (31Mg3)

- ★ Mississippian
- 👤 Coe (1937–1987); Davis/Boudreaux (2000–2014)
- N 24,802
- 🐾 3,459

Research has focused on understanding the events that led to the mound's construction (the northeastern-most Mississippian-Period platform mound known archaeologically).



### Roanoke Rapids Reservoir Project

Gaston (31Hx7), 44Mc623, 44Mc645, Long Midden (31Wr3), Eaton Ferry (31Wr4b), 31Wr8

- ★ Woodland
- 👤 Coe (1955)
- N 5,101
- 🐾 910

These investigations were a brief project designed to survey and salvage archaeological sites threatened by the construction of Roanoke Rapids Reservoir.



### Cedar Point Site (31Cr16)

- ★ Likely Late Woodland
- 👤 Lofffield (1974)
- N 118
- 🐾 46

The RLA conducted test excavations in 1974, yielding evidence of a shell midden and possible palisade. Faunal and botanical analyses have not been published.



### Lighthouse Point (38Ch12) and Stratton Shell Ring (38Ch24)

- ★ Early Woodland
- 👤 Trinkley (1976–1979)
- N 766 (38Ch12) and 231 (38Ch24)
- 🐾 185 (38Ch12) and 37 (38Ch24)

Research explored the formation processes of shell ring sites and the lifeways of their Indigenous inhabitants.

