

## **Prehistory and History at the Santee Indian Mounds**

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### **Introduction**

I am very happy to have this opportunity to talk with you today about this archeological site. Twenty years ago, as a ~~very~~ young archaeologist just starting out in the field, it was my privilege to be able to assist in the analysis of the archeological collections that had been made at this site in 1972 and 1973 by a team of researchers under the direction of Dr. Leland Ferguson, then with the SCIAA and now a professor at the USC in Columbia. You may not believe it to look at it, but over the course of two summers the entire top of the main mound behind me was excavated, and over 4000 square feet at the base of the mound were excavated, in the very area where you are now standing. Today I will recount to you what was found, and why this site is an important and indeed, in many respects, a sacred spot on the South Carolina landscape.

Why is this location so important and so special? First and foremost, as I shall describe shortly, the place where we are standing has been a focus for human visitation and settlement for as long as people have been in South Carolina. Second, because the site was protected for generations, first by thoughtful landowners who refused to farm it or even allow casual digging, and in recent years by the staff of the South Carolina Department of Parks, Recreation, and Tourism and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, the archaeological remains found here in the early 1970s were in a remarkable state of preservation, and were able to tell us a great many things about the Indian and Revolutionary War period use of this area. This site is one of the best examples I can think of to illustrate how archaeological research can complement and add to our knowledge of the historic period, and to the study of history. Finally, this site is important because it serves as a visible and highly public reminder of the continuing struggle we all must face if we are to preserve and protect our state's heritage for the future. Even now the mounds and their surroundings must be protected from a host of destructive forces, such as pothunting or looting, or erosion from the nearby lake waters, or even sometimes from the well meaning efforts of the people charged with managing these resources.

## **Paleoindian**

Over a dozen fluted points have been found along or near the banks of the Santee River Swamp, reflecting the remains from the first humans to enter the region more than 11,000 years ago. These early populations were small and moved widely over the landscape. The world they faced was markedly different than the one we know,

## **Archaic and Woodland**

Over the next 10,000 years many people made use of the Santee River terraces, and artifacts from their camps and hunting stations are densely scattered over the area. By 6,000 years ago evidence for cypress appears, in the form of pollen, and the river swamp began to assume its modern appearance and extent.

## **Mississippian**

The Scott's Lake site is a major Mississippian ceremonial center located along the shores of Lake Marion. A large earthen mound is located on the site, and a smaller mound is located nearby. Archeological remains have been located up to several hundred feet away from the mound, although the full extent of the site remains unknown. Of ca. 50 mound sites reported from South Carolina in the early 1890s (Thomas 1891), Scott's Lake was <sup>is</sup> ~~prior to the Fish and Wildlife Service logging operations~~, virtually the only undisturbed mound site left in the state of South Carolina. Lam

Occupied ca. A.D.1200-1450, no evidence for extensive occupation after this time, although only a small part of the Indian occupation has been examined. The site may have been an independent chiefdom early on that was later absorbed into the province of Cofitachequi, centered at Mulberry. The reduction in use of the center may have occurred as part of the emergence of the paramount chiefdom of Cofitachequi. Often the elites in these chiefdoms deliberately reduced the power and influence of elites in other centers when they took power, and this is what may have happened here. DeSoto  
1540

Evidence for structures in the form of lines of postholes and layers of fired clay/daub was found atop the mound during the 1972-1973 excavations. These appear to have been temple structures, where valuable tribute items were stored and where sacred ceremonies occurred. These structures may have also been sacred precincts where the highest elites lived.

We know these mounds were built in stages, and it is likely that several successive mound surfaces were constructed, with the mound rising higher with each episode. New mound stages likely were built when one leader or chief

succeeded another, or when one ruling clan was replaced by another. From work at many other mounds like this in the region we know that major trash deposits are likely to occur off one or more sides of the mound, typically in the area away from the plaza. We also know that the submound area as well as the fill between successive stages is likely to contain the graves of ~~many of~~ the elites of this society. *Los Chids*

This site was likely the center of a small chiefdom, the first social form with institutionalized patterns of inequality, that is, with hereditary groups of people having higher status and hence access to food, prestige items and other valuables. The birth of the world's civilizations took place at sites like this, and by studying the archeological record of the regions chiefdoms we can begin to understand how society's like our own emerged. Unlike the situation in the Near East, furthermore, in this part of the world these sites are not covered and hence confused with the debris of thousands of years of subsequent occupation. The record is thus comparatively easy to read.

What was at this center? <sup>A</sup> Ceremonial mound, a probable burial mound, an open area or plaza between them, and houses around these. The whole community was likely encircled by a ditch and stockade line. Remains of houses were found in the village area during the 1972-1973 excavations, and it is likely that dozens of these structures were once present. We don't know for absolute certain, though, whether this site was continuously occupied, or saw use primarily during ceremonial seasons or times, remaining empty the remainder of the time, or serving as a chiefly compound occupied by a few leaders or priests and their families. There is much to learn about the use of this site! *valent ceremony site*

Some historic use of this site is likely, as evidenced by a report from the early 18th century.

On January 9, early in the winter of the year 1701, the English explorer John Lawson, on a stopover during his 1000 mile travels through the Carolinas, described at length in his famous volume A New Voyage to Carolina visited with the Santee Indians somewhere near here, perhaps on these very grounds. His account tells us much about these Indians, and about the use of sites like this one.

"The Santee King... is the most absolute Indian ruler in these parts... He can put any of his people to death... Authority... rarely found amongst these Savages. ...Near to [their houses] are several Tombs... the largest and the chiefest of them was the Sepulchre of the late Indian King of the Santees, a Man of great Power, not only amongst his own Subjects, but dreaded by the neighboring Nations...

The manner of their Interment, is thus: A ~~mole~~ pyramid of Earth is rais'd, ...being worked very smooth and even, sometimes higher or lower, according to the Dignity of the Person whose Monument it is. On the top of it is... ~~the roof~~ of a house...about which is hung gourds, feathers and other such like Trophies. The bones they carefully preserve in a wooden Box, each year oiling and cleansing them: By these means [they] preserve them for many ages"

*Perhaps the nextest ... both sides of some iron. etc.*

### **Revolutionary War Period**

During the American Revolution British forces built a fort atop the mound, and maintained a hospital, quartermaster's quarters, and quarters for enlisted men in the area around the base of the mound. On April 15, 1781 American forces under the command of General Francis Marion (the "Swamp Fox") and Lieut. Col. Harry ("Lighthouse") Lee besieged the fort, and after eight days forced the British forces within it to surrender by the stratagem of erecting a large tower and shooting down into the stockade. The American encampment and fortifications have never been found, but are assumed to have been within a few hundred feet of the mound. The British fort atop the primary mound summit, portions of the British fortifications at the base of the mound, and a small area in the smaller mound were excavated in 1972 and 1973 by Dr. Leland Ferguson of the University of South Carolina. The archeological remains both atop the mounds and over the surrounding area were found to be in a remarkable state of preservation, permitting Ferguson to reconstruct events during the Revolutionary War battle, such as the probable location of the American tower, and where the British officers and enlisted men were quartered. Ferguson also found that the archeological deposits around the base of the mound were undisturbed, with no evidence for plowing. Both Indian house floors and features from the Revolutionary War period British encampment were found to lie a short distance below the surface.

Fort Watson must be seen in the larger perspective of the Southern Campaign of 1778-1782, the British Empire's nearly successful attempt to wrest <sup>le</sup> control of the South away from the Revolutionary forces. In late 1778 the British forces captured Savannah, and by early in 1779 most of Georgia was in their hands. The British grand strategy was to roll up the eastern seaboard, capturing first the weakest colony of Georgia and then moving on through South Carolina, North Carolina, and finally Virginia. I don't think many of us today have any real appreciation as to how close they came to succeeding, or that the South witnessed more battles during the Revolution, and after 1778 more critical battles, than anywhere other part of the colonies. In March of 1780 Charleston was besieged, and the city fell to British forces on May 12th. The British fanned out across the state, setting up posts and supply lines, and on August 16th, at the

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battle of Camden, an American Army under Horatio Gates was badly beaten ~~attempting to attack~~ the British forces under Cornwallis and Rawdon.

The tide did not begin to turn in favor of the Americans until the battle of King's Mountain on October 7, 1780 when a Loyalist force of over 900 men was annihilated, greatly chilling local interest in the British cause. Even with this victory, and subsequent successes at Blackstocks on 20 November 1780 and at Cowpens on January 17, 1781, the British still controlled the major towns and ports of South Carolina. Only the countryside increasingly belonged to the Americans.

In January of 1791 Cornwallis began his campaign to reduce North Carolina, initiating a series of movements that ultimately led to Virginia and Yorktown, and ultimate surrender on October 19, 1791. At Guilford Courthouse on March 15, 1781, although outnumbered two to one, Cornwallis defeated the American forces under Major General Nathaniel Greene, although his losses were extensive. Marching to Wilmington on the coast, Cornwallis decided to March north to Virginia in an attempt to win a major and decisive victory rather than return to South Carolina, where campaigning was occurring across the countryside in confused fashion. While Cornwallis marched north, Greene and his forces turned to the south, and over the course of 1781 recaptured much of South Carolina.

Fort Watson, lying between major British centers at Charleston and Camden, was thus in the winter and spring of 1780/1781 protecting a major supply line for British forces in the interior at a time when Cornwallis was preparing for and then launching his North Carolina campaign. Strategically, its capture created problems for the British forces in the interior, although it was not until the following year, in July of 1782, that Savannah was abandoned by the British. The evacuation of Charleston did not occur until December of 1782.

The April 1781 battle for Fort Watson was thus a small skirmish in a much larger campaign for control of the South. Following soon on the American defeat at Guilford Courthouse, the victory may have helped Greene decide to move south rather than pursue Cornwallis north, with fateful results. The ultimate recapture of the southern colonies by the American forces, when coupled with the British army's surrender at Yorktown, made the victory both certain and complete.

After the battle of Guilford Courthouse in North Carolina, Major General Nathaniel Greene, the American Commander in Chief in the South, sent Col. "Light Horse" Harry Lee (Robert E. Lee's father) to reinforce Marion and begin

the campaign that would drive the remaining British forces from South Carolina. The first campaign these two would fight was against Fort Watson.

Col. John Watson, formerly on Sir Henry Clinton's staff, specifically asked for service where the action was, was made the Commander of a Battalion of provincial Light Infantry, and was assigned in the winter of 1780, in his own words, "to protect the communication [along] the Santee River to Camden, and to cover the Eastern District of the Province....I was to consider Camden on the left and George Town on the right, as my flanks..."

His description of the landscape along the Santee River, with its tremendous expanses of virgin forest, reminds us of the great changes that have occurred since the 18th century: "This whole Country, the great Roads excepted, is one continual Wood, without any underwood; and universally flat, except for places called the High Hills of Santee."

Watson quickly found a strong point to fortify as his command center, the place we are gathered at today.

"having found a place, supposed to have been the burying Ground of their Indian Chiefs in former times, resembling the Barrows of this Country [England]; we scarp'd it, stockaded it at Top, abattis'd it at bottom, and rendered it as strong as the materials we could collect, and the only utensils we had, our Tomahawks would admit."

An abatis is a barricade of felled trees with sharpened branches, the 18th century equivalent of barbed wire.

(Explain what scarp'd meant)

Settling in, he provisioned his quarters, and in one of his requests to a Georgetown merchant, he asked how "to get those little supplies all troops must want who have been in the field for three months, such as wine, etc., etc."

Watson quickly set about scouring the eastern part of the state for partisan forces:

"I left 40 of the Men, who seemed least qualified for the severity of our Marches, under Lt. McKay, a very good Officer of Col. Tanning's Regiment, whom I appointed Commandant of the Post, and we began in our turn to heat up Mr. Marion's Quarters." A total of 120 men were involved ~~on the British side~~, 80 British regulars and 40 Loyalists.

*Left at Fort Watson*

Watson's first run in was with the original "Fighting Gamecock" General Thomas Sumter, who seized a supply caravan heading to Fort Watson — no doubt laden with the wine and other essentials deemed so essential to a soldier's life in the field. Sumpter attempted to send the captured supplies down the Santee river in boats, but Watson was able to ambush the party and recaptured his lost provisions.

Another of Watson's foraging parties was returning to the post with provisions on March 7, 1781, and was only a mile and a half away, when one of the wagons broke down. In Watson's words:

" I left an Ensign, whose name was Cooper, with 20 men, to repair, and bring it on... our men were.. just..begin[ning] to dress their dinners, when we heard..firing. Every man was instantly in Arms [and] we were soon up to the spot... Having repaired the cart, they were preceding home... when Sumpter wholly surrounded them and called to [Cooper] to surrender — but forming his Men in a Circle, around the trees nearest him, he replied "light infantry never surrender" and began firing as hard as they could. Seeing us approach they [the rebels] quitted one Gallant Ensign, and formed to receive us. This business did not last long before they fled, leaving.. killed and wounded. We took some prisoners and 30 horses. Lord Rowdon came the next day.. and flattered [the] Corps much, by his manner of thanking them, and took particular notice of Mr. Cooper, he so well deserved... His Lordship too, much approved the Post, we had taken, and the manner in which we had strengthened it.

Perhaps luckily for him, Watson was absent in the eastern part of the state, ironically looking for the very enemy that was beseiging his fort — when the final battle occurred in April of 1781. While Watson was ~~in the eastern part of the state~~ searching for the partisan forces, and Marion's headquarters, the Americans converged on Fort Watson.

In the words of Francis Marion, the Swamp Fox himself: "Lieut. Col. Lee [joined] me at Santee [on the] 14th {of April, 1781}...; the 15th we marched to [Fort Watson] and invested it. Our hope was to cut off their water; some riflemen and continentals immediately took post between the fort and the lake [Scot's Lake].

Marion described the fort on the eve of the battle:

"The fort is situated on a small hill forty feet high, stockaded, and with three rows of abatis around it; no trees [are] near enough to cover our men from their fire."

The commanding British officer, Lieutenant McKay, kept a daily journal during the siege that followed, and the entries from each day tell us something about what happened here:

Sunday [the] 15th: At four in the afternoon, a party of the Enemy's horse and foot appeared in the skirts of the Wood on our front [i.e., along Scott's Lake, *point this out*]. A party Sallied out [and] a Skirmish ensued, in which we had one [man] mortally wounded... at the same time they appeared in force on our Left [*point out area to east of mound*] [and] the Party was recalled to the Works... A Flag was sent to Summon the Post to surrender... but was returned with the following reply "That a British officer Commanded, and they...never surrendered posts [timidly]—if they wanted it, they must come and take it." A Firing ensued, in which we had [one man] wounded, the loss of the Enemy cannot be ascertained but several were seen to fall. [That] night, they set Fire to the Hospital... and made the Nurse Prisoner.

Monday [the] 16th— no Provisions or Water in the Works.

A military storehouse was apparently located just outside the fortifications, but fire from the American forces kept the British from reaching it

Tuesday [the] 17th The Enemy fired a few shot, and killed a private of {the} Rangers. At night a party was employed in getting up provisions and sinking a well.

The American forces quickly realized what the British were up to. Colonel Lee wrote in his memoirs, in the section describing the ~~of~~ battle that:

"McKay, the commandant, saw at once his inevitable fate, unless he could devise some other mode of procuring water, for which purpose he immediately cut a trench from his fosse (secured by abbatis) to the river, which passed close to the Indian mount"

Marion wrote at the same time that;

"The third day after we had invested it, we found that the enemy had sunk a well near the stockade which we could not prevent them from, as we had no entrenching tools to make our approach."

Returning to Lieutenant McKay's journal:

Wednesday [the] 18th: Some shot as usual from the enemy, and as opportunity offered [these] were returned, through the day. [T]he enemy had one man killed.



At night, to our Satisfaction, [we] had it in our power to relieve... our distressed troops [who] since the first appearance of the enemy [had been] without provisions or water. Under cover of the Darkness, the Enemy broke ground within one hundred Yards of our Works and retook part of the Baggage... that had been retaken from general Sumpter.

Thursday 19th: The Enemy as usual kept firing but without effect, [I]n the course of the day we sunk our well deeper [as our] water [was] threatening to fail us. The Enemy [was] at work at their Entrenchments...

Friday [the] 20th: Some Firing as usual from the Enemy... we lost Corp. Shanks of the Infantry...in the course of the day a covered passage was made to the Well.

Saturday [the] 21st: Some Firing as Usual. {I} was wounded in the face by a splinter. In the afternoon [they] brought down a Wooden machine which they had built... a Scaffold made of rails and [dirt], nearly level with the top of our Works for their Marksmen to pick off our Centinels... this night employed in...raising a traverse to counteract the Enemy's Scaffolds and [in] sinking our ditches.

This wooden machine was Major Mayham famous tower, which was used to great effect several times in the southern campaign. As Lee noted in his memoirs,

"Major Mayham... proposed to cut down a number of suitable trees.. to erect a strong oblong pen, to be covered on the top with a floor of logs, and protected on the side opposite to the fort with a breastwork of light timber. The besieged was, like the besieger, unprovided with artillery, and could not interrupt the progress of the work.

Lt. McKay was able to counter the enemy scaffolding initially by raising an interior traverse, but the end came on Monday, April 23rd, as he dramatically notes in his daily journal:

"Some firing as usual from the Enemy in which [I was again] wounded and two men [were] killed. The Enemy having finished their Entrenchments under cover of their fire [presumably from the tower] made a lodgement under our works, with an intention to undermine us. A Flag was a second time sent to Summons the Post. ...we were reduced to the disagreeable necessity of Capitulating by the Cowardly and Mutinous behavior of A majority of the Men [who] grounded their Arms and refused to defend the Post any longer, notwithstanding every Exertion made by the Officers to encourage and force them to their duty."

The American accounts indicate that this refusal to fight on was likely the only logical one for the defenders. As Lee later wrote:

"A party of riflemen, being ready, took post in the Mayham tower the moment it was completed. ..a detachment of musketry, under cover of the [tower's] riflemen, moved to make a lodgement in the enemy's ditch, supported by the... infantry with fixed bayonets. Such was the effect of the fire from the riflemen, having thorough command of every part of the fort from the relative supereminence of the tower, that every attempt to resist the lodgement was crushed.

The fire from the tower was so effective that Marion, writing at the close of the battle, was able to note that two of his men were able to climb up the sides of the mound and pull away the abattis.

Upon their surrender the British soldiers were taken prisoner and sent to Charleston, although the officers were allowed to retain their swords "in consideration of the bravery with which the fort was defended." We have copies of the articles of capitulation, which note that "all public stores" [were to be] surrendered to the American forces.

After the battle the fort was demolished, and historical silence again descended over the mound area.

### **The Results of the Archeological Investigation Events at Fort Watson**

Entire top of the mound excavated using 5 x 5 foot squares, and 4000 square feet was opened at the base of the mound using 10 x 10 foot squares. These found the fort atop the mound, and one of the three screening walls, or abattis that were at its base.

Through distributional analyses of the artifacts atop the mound, Ferguson was able to reconstruct how it was used, both before and during the battle. Before the battle the mound summit appears to have been where the officers lived, just like the Indian chiefly elites before them. Broken pearlware and creamware china from tea <sup>sets and samovars</sup> ~~services~~ indicate the British tea ceremony took place atop the mound. A cluster of nails and other debris in the northeast corner was likely where officer's quarters were located; this building was later torn down during the battle and used to build the interior traverse or screening wall.

The stockade line was traced around the summit, and a twelve foot break in it indicates the British gate was on the south side, facing Scott's Lake and the Santee River.

During the battle an interior ditch was dug and earthen platforms were raised and used as foundations for a traverse or screening wall to keep the riflement atop Mayham's tower from hitting the area near the entrance. The distribution of musket and rifle balls in the interior was used to reconstruct the battle. British musket balls of ca. .69 caliber were found intact and were distributed across the summit, while American rifle balls <sup>of smaller caliber</sup> were found in large numbers in the southern and eastern sides of the fort, both on inside and outside the stockade. This indicates that the American attack, reported as coming from two directions, was launched from the southeast near Scott's Lake, and from the northwest, where Mayham's tower was likely located. By shooting into the fort from the tower the American's were able to prevent the British defenders from protecting the entrance from a frontal assault, forcing a surrender.

The superb condition of the deposits at the time of the 1972 and 1973 excavations are the result of careful protection of the site. Generations of landowners refused to farm it or allow collecting or digging. One unthinking person with metal detector, if allowed to plunder this site, would have made it impossible for us to interpret this site, and the battle, properly. If you wonder why archeologists get upset about undocumented collection, think of what we have learned here at Fort Watson, and what we would have lost had the site been plundered by weekend treasure hunters.

### **Lessons to Be Learned in the Shadow of this Mound**

As we have seen, the area where we are standing has been the scene of significant events throughout the history human occupation in South Carolina. So much human drama has occurred on these grounds that they form, in a very real sense, a sacred spot on the South Carolina landscape. From the first Indian hunters beginning to settle in the state 11,000 years ago, to the Indian chiefs of a thousand years ago, to the British and American forces who fought and died here in the waning days of the American Revolution, and to those of us gathered here today, this location has held great meaning. It is up to us in our generation to ensure that this location is passed intact to future generations, so our children and grandchildren may be able to come to this place and appreciate it as we do today.

Preserving and protecting the past is a difficult task, and a great challenge before us all. It requires that we remain vigilant in our opposition to those forces and people within our society who see no value in locations such as this, and who would destroy them in a moment if they thought personal or monetary gain would result. So too we must protect sites like this from damage or destruction

caused by ignorance or inaction. The site you see around you was almost lost when Lake Marion was filled fifty years ago. South Carolina at that time was unfortunately unique in the Southeast in that most of our lakes were built with no concern for documenting or preserving the cultural resources and heritage in the areas to be flooded. We are lucky that the lake only came to the edge, and not over, the site you see before you.

We must remain vigilant, because the loss of our heritage is accelerating with the development of our state, and is occurring all around us. Resources that could educate and renew us spiritually, as well as enrich us more directly through their tourists value, continue to be lost to this day. ~~Here too the Santee Mound serves as an example, albeit an unfortunate one.~~ Perhaps the greatest damage to this site in all the years it has stood here occurred less than three years ago. In the aftermath of Hurricane Hugo the area to the north of the mound was logged by federal Fish and Wildlife authorities with no attention given to the damage this might do to cultural resources. The immediate concern on the part of all parties was to clear up the numerous downed trees scattered over the park area, blocking visitor access. need page

This activity took place in clear violation of federal preservation law, and stands in marked contrast to the extensive program of cultural resource management that occurred in the National Forests of our state after Hugo, where clean-up and timber salvage operations took great care to avoid and protect cultural resources. Heavy logging skidders, trucks, and other equipment tore through the sites shallow archeological deposits, remains that until 1990 had been preserved intact by generations by landowners, who had carefully seen to it that the site was never plowed or vandalized. The area logged encompassed portions of the main Indian village, areas where the British abattis, field hospital, and enlisted men's quarters lay, and where the American Revolutionary forces under Francis Marion and Light Horse Harry Lee camped and later built their tower to shoot down into the Fort Watson in April of 1781.

We still do not know the damage this activity caused to the site's shallow archeological features, although judging by the ruts that are visible to this day to the north of the mound, the damage is likely extensive. In spite of concerns raised by a number of South Carolina's professional archaeologists, however, and by the staff of the state historic preservation office, who developed a plan of action to assess and rectify the damage to the site, to date the Fish and Wildlife Service has failed to deal with the situation, and in fact continues to ignore federal preservation laws in its ongoing management of wildlife refuges in South Carolina. While the voices of a few archaeologists may be ignored, if enough people are educated in the importance of our heritage, and express their concerns, what occurred here is unlikely to happen again.

Happily, South Carolina is now a regional leader in historic preservation, thanks to the work of public agencies like SCIAA, the South Carolina Department of Archives and History, and the South Carolina Heritage Trust, and numerous public and private advocacy groups like the Archeological Society of South Carolina, the South Carolina Council of Professional Archaeologists, and the SC Historical Society. The site before you stands as an example of what is important about our past, and what we must do to protect it. You can help preserve our state's heritage by joining and supporting organizations like the Archaeological Society of South Carolina or the South Carolina Historical Society, and by checking the box for wildlife on your tax forms (proceeds go to purchase sites like this). You can also let your political leaders know how you feel about the management of cultural resources in the state, and you would be amazed at the response congressional or legislative inquiries can provoke. *now, lets get some BBR*

*After school*