

BEFORE THE CHEROKEE¹

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"Look at this Indian axe head my Grandfather gave me." "Gee whiz, Ralph, it sure is heavy; I bet some old Cherokee could have really lowered the boom on someone with that." When you mention Indians to most people they think of the particular tribe of Indians living in their area during the historic period when the country was being settled. In East Tennessee this means the Cherokee.

As an Indian relic collector, who has become much more interested in the meaning of relics than in their beauty and dollar value, I have had the urge to read a lot of archaeological reports and have learned that not every Indian who set foot in East Tennessee was a Cherokee; in fact, there were village-dwelling Indians in this end of the state about fifteen hundred years before the Cherokee began to settle in the Tennessee River Valley. The public has heard little or nothing about these people because there have been no colorful legends or stories written about them. They had no written language and there was no white man on hand to make a record.

This period before the Cherokee is one that I am going to write about. I did not discover these truths myself, nor are they just someone's theories. They come from years of archaeological field work and study by two University of Tennessee professors, Thomas M. N. Lewis and Madeline Kneberg, and other professional archaeologists. I have studied the findings of these scientists, and came to realize some time ago that mere collecting just keeps a fellow in the squirrel class.

There were people in East Tennessee long before the first village-dwelling Indians, but little is known about them, other than that they lived in caves or rockshelters in small family groups, and that they were kin to the very early village-dwelling Archaic Indians of western Tennessee.

The first village-dwelling people to come to the valley of East Tennessee from the northern woodlands have been named the Watts Bar Indians because one of their large villages was discovered in the Watts Bar basin. They arrived about 1500 years ago and they lived in small compact villages. Their crude, one-room huts were made of 6-inch logs set upright in the ground and covered with cane mats, or some other weatherproof material. They hunted deer, bear, wild turkey, and other animals; they caught fish and gathered freshwater mussels.

The pottery of the Watts Bar people was tempered with small bits of crushed quartz to prevent cracking during the manufacturing

¹Fred William Fischer is seventeen years old and a student at the Young High School, Knoxville. He prepared this paper and presented it before the Tennessee Junior Academy of Science at Clarksville, November 10, 1951. It is brought to our members as representative of the very fine work done by our Junior Academy members.—*Editor*

process, and was decorated by wrapping cords around a paddle and then striking it against the soft, unbaked vessel. They made grooved axes and ungrooved axes with pointed poles; they made mortars and pestles, pipes, and slate ornaments.

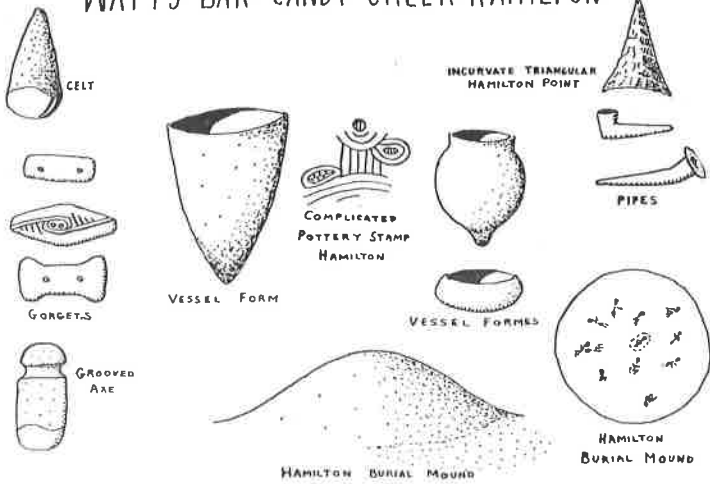
When one died, his arms and legs were flexed tightly against his body which was then wrapped in bark or other material. The body was placed in a small, shallow grave near his house. The Watts Bar Indians had the valley to themselves for awhile until another tribe which has been named the Candy Creek Indians moved in on them. These Candy Creek people were originally from the same large Indian group as the Watts Bar people, but they had become separated and did not come into the valley until after the Watts Bar Indians had occupied it for quite some time. The Candy Creek people were much like the Watts Bar people, but in their travels they picked up the idea of tempering their pottery with crushed limestone instead of quartz. They also got a new pottery decorating technique from some Indians living in Georgia. Complicated and beautiful designs were carved in wooden paddles and then were pressed into the soft clay of the vessels before they were fired. This custom of decoration remained even through the time of the early Cherokees.

In time, another tribe related to these two earlier tribes moved in, but its people were so different in their way of life that they simply couldn't meet the Candy Creek people on any common ground. The result was that the weaker Candy Creek villages were pushed up the rivers and smaller streams into more secluded places. This new and more numerous people are known as the Hamilton Indians. They lived in communities rather than villages, and each community had a ceremonial center where the dead were buried in mounds. These mounds are usually 40 or 50 feet in diameter and about 12 feet high. The homes were scattered like farm houses up stream and down stream from these ceremonial centers. The huts were portable and could be removed from the river bottoms during high water stages. The gathering of fresh-water mussels for food was also more important than it was with the earlier groups, and animals did not seem to have been hunted quite so much.

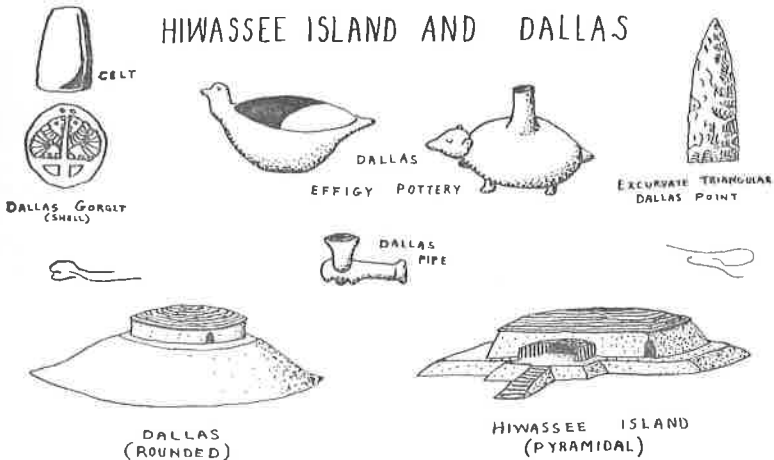
In about 1300 A.D. these people were driven out by a new and more advanced tribe known as the Hiwassee Island Indians. These newcomers build houses about fifteen feet square. The walls were formed by setting saplings three or four inches thick in the ground in an upright position. The upper, tapering ends were bent over towards each other and spliced to form a continuous wall and roof construction. The villages were built around a public square, with a temple or community building erected on flat-topped pyramidal mounds facing the square. The whole village was surrounded by a stockade of logs. These people made beautiful painted pottery which was tempered with crushed shell. They also made stamped and textile-marked pottery. The axes which they made were without hafting grooves, and the polls were square instead of pointed like those of the earlier people.

The Hiwassee Islanders had it all over their predecessors in a good

WATTS BAR-CANDY CREEK-HAMILTON



HIWASSEE ISLAND AND DALLAS



TEMPLE OR SUBSTRUCTURE MOUNDS WITH COMMUNITY BUILDINGS

many ways. They knew a good bit about agriculture, and they cultivated corn, beans and pumpkins. This made living much more comfortable than it had been for earlier Indians who had to depend upon wild foods entirely. How did they bury their dead? That is a puzzle which has never been solved. Not a single grave of the Hiwassee Island people has ever been found. The Hiwassee Island Indians are believed to have come originally from Mexico. Other somewhat related tribes are believed to have come into the Southeast from the same direction.

In about the 15th or 16th century one of these other groups arrived

in the East Tennessee Valley. These people, known as the Dallas Indians, were like the Hiwassee Island Indians in many ways. They were not as good architects as the Hiwassee Islanders, but they were top-notchers in the manufacture of stone and shell objects. Their villages were laid out like those of the Hiwassee Island people except that the large, flat-topped mounds which supported their temples were rounding in shape instead of pyramidal. Short, heavy logs were used in house construction, in contrast to the long, slender saplings of the Hiwassee Island Indians.

The Dallas people made fine effigy pottery from shell-tempered clay. They also made beautifully carved shell gorgets and effigy pipes of both stone and clay. From the Lake Superior region copper was traded and made into headdresses, axes, and pendants. These Indians buried their dead much like the early Watts Bar and Candy Creek peoples, in graves near their houses. With the dead were placed many of the things used during life, for these people believed that certain prized objects had spirits and that these spirits should go with the dead owner's spirit to the happy hunting ground.

It was not until the 17th century that the Cherokee began to come into East Tennessee from the southern Appalachian mountain region.

NEW LIFE MEMBERS

We are happy to report two new life members of the Tennessee Academy of Science: Mr. Sam M. Nickey, 2634 Sumner Avenue, Memphis, Tennessee, and Mr. H. E. Hood, 2905 Skyline Boulevard, Bakersfield, California. It is our desire to publish a photograph and a brief biography of each new life member. We present below Mr. H. E. Hood.

Huston Edwin Hood was born in Sanger, California, December 7, 1897. Later the family moved to Fresno, California, where young Huston attended grade school. At the end of World War I, he entered the field of radio and ever since has been closely associated with electronics. He established his own radio business in 1927, added to it in 1934, and has been operating it since that time as the Valley Radio Supply.

Mr. Hood is a member of the I. R. E. group in Medical Electronics with his major interests in electrical techniques in biology and medicine. His versatility is indicated by his membership in the A.A.A.S., American Institute of Electrical Engineers, Institute of Radio Engineers, Radio Pioneers, California Academy of Sciences, and a fellow in the American Geographical Society. In 1940, Mr. Hood married Mable Clayton of Henderson, Tennessee. They have a daughter, Mary Lou, who is now eleven years old.