1973

The Temple at Town Creek Indian Mound State Historic Site, North Carolina

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In 1937, Joffre L. Coe began archeological excavations at what was then known as the Frutchey Indian Mound in Montgomery County, North Carolina, near the little town of Mt. Gilead. Through his efforts the Frutchey family donated the land on which the mound was located for a State Park, and the site is now known as Town Creek Indian Mound State Historic Site and is administered by the North Carolina Department of Cultural Resources. For over thirty years archeology was carried out under Joffre Coe's direction through the Research Laboratories of Anthropology at the University of North Carolina.

By 1957, the palisade around the ceremonial center had been rebuilt, and in that year, with the help of Edward Gaines, I rebuilt the temple on top of the reconstructed mound. Since that time a burial house has been rebuilt, and the burials excavated and left in situ as an educational exhibit. Today the site is a classic example of the use of archeological data for interpreting past lifeways.
The plan for rebuilding the temple was written in 1955, when I was a student of Joffre Coe's at Chapel Hill. Later, at Town Creek Indian Mound, I used this student paper as a guide in constructing the temple. It is published here for the first time as a record of this phase of the interpretive program at Town Creek Indian Mound. The interpretation of this Indian site and the culture represented by it has been a dream long envisioned by Joffre Coe, and it has taken some forty years of dedication to bring it to realization.

Those of us who were students of Joffre Coe have come to share his dream through personal association with him and the Town Creek site, many of us having been archeologically indoctrinated on that proving ground. In the 1930's, in the formative stage of the dream, the struggle to turn Mr. Frutchey's cornfield with its hill of earth into a major interpretive statement based on archeology was no easy task. At that time decades of archeology had not been done on the site; only five months of scientific research had been accomplished, and the future of the dream was in considerable doubt. It was at this time that Joffre Coe was involved in the enormous task of helping others to share his vision.

Recently, in going over my files from the years I spent at Town Creek Indian Mound, I was pleasantly reminded of Joffre's dream when I discovered a copy of a talk he had given in the formative years of the project in which he presented his challenge to the State of North Carolina to preserve its cultural resources in the form of sites such as the Frutchey Indian Mound on the banks of Town Creek. The State of North Carolina responded to Joffre's challenge; not only creating a classic historic site devoted to interpretation of a non-European culture, but providing decades of research funding for understanding this story from the past.

In the pages to follow, through the permission of Joffre Coe, his challenge of the 1930's is published for the first time. We feel that it is important that this document be published along with the specific reconstructive report focused on the temple building as a reminder to all those involved in cultural resource management that it takes both vision and rigorous research to properly develop an historic property, and that such management has long been a responsibility in archeology.

The story at Town Creek Indian Mound State Historic Site is still being written as research and interpretive development continue under Joffre Coe's direction, through the administration of the North Carolina Department of Cultural Resources. A vital part of the dream is that the pages of the archeological book at Town Creek will continue to be turned as long as there remain those leaves beneath the soil still to be read by scientists with vision.
A STORY FROM THE PAST*

(by Joffre L. Coe)

Introduction

Within this hill of earth and in the surrounding cotton fields lie the chronicles of an unknown people. This is no ordinary history with pages of paper and printing in ink; it is a book with pages of earth and words that are the discarded objects of everyday life. It is not a book about a people; it is the remains of the people themselves. It is not a book that can be read in an easy chair in the comforts of home, but it is a book whose pages must be carefully turned with the shovel and the trowel in the hot sun and in the rain. The gnawing tooth of erosion, the plow, and the digging of untrained people have torn out pages, even chapters, and have left only a ragged part of the former book, but fragmentary as it may be it tells the story of a migration, a conquest, and the development of a city state. The reading is hard, the story is incomplete, but that which is learned gives us a better understanding of those who have gone before. These people did not write in a formal way, their deeds and exploits were handed down through generations as myths and legends, but they did leave a history, a history which contains none of the prejudices that are found in written history, a history which they unconsciously wrote day by day as they lived and died. It is a history of what they did, not a history of what they thought, and their remains are truly the

"Registers, the chronicles of the age
They were made in, and speak the truth of history
Better than a hundred of your printed communications."

In the homeland there grew a great discontentment. The towns had become too crowded, the game too scarce -- then came the great famine. All summer the elders and the high priests had prayed and offered sacrifices to the Rain God but all without avail. The rains had not descended, and the sun had burned even that maize which had sprouted. Winter was near and they had neither meat in their lodges nor grain in their granaries. What had they done to anger the gods so? Had they not offered their sacrifices as in olden times? Had they not prayed as their fathers had taught them? Why then had they lost favor in the eyes of their gods? Many were the quarrels and fights that arose, everyone blaming his misfortune upon his neighbor. Eventually a small but determined group, tired of civil strife and faced with starvation, collected their choice possessions, bade farewell to their friends and to their homeland and went north in search of an earthly paradise where game was in abundance and where their crops would never fail.

* This section was written in 1937.
Many months did they travel. Over stony uplands, through the brambles and bogs of the swamps, and across swift and treacherous rivers they made their way. Some died from hardships, some settled along the way, some were killed in conflict with hostile tribes, but the others pushed their weary way onward until they found their paradise. Footsore and exhausted they made their way into a little valley surrounded by low foothills. There they found game in abundance and fertile bottoms in which to plant their corn. Rising out of those broad plains was a small plateau, high enough never to be flooded, yet bordered on the east by a swiftly running stream that abounded in fish. Here they began to build their huts and lodges, constructing them in an oval with small saplings which they drove into the ground and tied together at the top forming what looked like an inverted bowl. These saplings they then covered with skins and bark to keep out the cold of the winters and the rains of the summers. They piled up stones in the little river to form a partial dam, then constructed a fish trap of sticks and reeds at the only opening.

Thus situated in their village of little brown huts, feasting upon deer, bear, turkey, and the produce of a fertile land, these people lived happily and content, but their happiness was not to be eternal, even in this paradise. Their homes must be defended from the marauding bands of hostile tribes, disease and sickness were all too prevalent, and the old must die. Often then was the quiescence of their new haven disturbed with cries of despair and the funeral chant. Often then did the relatives gather in sorrow at the council house* to watch the priests gently fold and wrap their loved one and place him in a freshly dug grave in the council floor. Some were newly born infants that never lived to breathe, some were children stricken by an unknown plague, some were warriors killed in battle, and others were old men who had long outlived their usefulness. One mother, whose child had died at birth, sorrowfully constructed a large urn of clay, carefully shaped and fired it. This she carried to the council house where she dug a hole in the floor large enough to receive it. Taking the urn in her arms she killed it by quickly knocking out the bottom so that its spirit might go with the child's. Then placing it in the hole she had just dug she swept the fragments of the broken bottom into the pit. Tenderly she wrapped the infant and placed it in the bottom of the urn, removed a string of shell beads from around her neck and placed them over it, covered the urn with a large bowl, and filled in the grave with dirt and smoothed over the floor.

Not always were the dead buried in the council house. Often the family wished to have their beloved ones near them, even in death. So they would dig their burial pits in the floor of their own house and lay them there for their eternal sleep.

The old council house constructed of poles and bark was not a very strong building, and it soon collapsed under the strain of a violent storm. Later under the direction of the priests a new council house

* Such a structure is now known archeologically as a mortuary house (editor).
was built. The walls of this temple were square with rounded corners, and were constructed of strong saplings which were sloped inward at the top. The roof was almost flat and was supported by four large posts near the center. This framework of timber was woven with smaller material and finally covered with a heavy layer of sod. The entrance, a short low tunnel, was placed on the east side, and on the west, directly opposite the entrance, was built the shrine. In the center of the floor a fire pit was dug and an opening was made in the roof to allow the passage of smoke. This earth lodge was well built and served the village for many years until one winter the heavy rains so weakened the supports that they collapsed leaving only a low mound of earth where the lodge formerly was.

Once again the elders were forced to build a new place of worship. This time they resolved to elevate their temple above the surrounding dwellings like those in their homeland. They would raise it above the rabble and place it nearer to their Sun God, securing greater prominence and greater prestige. On a given day all the men, women, and children of the village who were not needed elsewhere, gathered at the west side of their little plateau and under the directions of their elders began the construction of their new temple. A yellow clay was dug out of pits in the lowlands to the west of the village with sharp-pointed digging sticks, and from there it was carried to the temple site in baskets and skins where it was placed and packed along the outer edge of a hundred foot square until a rim of clay about ten feet wide and about five feet high was constructed. After the limits of their mound had thus been defined all the workers turned their attention to scraping and digging up the light topsoil from the nearby fields and filling in the center of the square. Sometimes a worker would fill his basket near the village and in doing so would scrape up several fragments of pottery or other village refuse which in turn was dumped into the ever-filling hollow square. After many months the square was finally filled and upon completion it looked like a low flat-topped pyramid. Upon the top of this elevation, the priests began to erect their temple building. This they made of logs and sod after the usual pattern, and on the east they built a ramp that led from the top of the temple platform down into the village.

Years passed until one day a careless priest allowed the wooden supports to catch fire. Soon the whole temple was burned, and once again these people set about to rebuild their temple. Instead of building a new earthen platform they added several feet of earth to the old mound and built upon it a new temple and a new ramp.

Finally a third level and a third temple were added to the pyramid before these people were forced to leave this land that they cherished so much.

"But now the wheat is green and high, on clods that hid the warrior's brest, And scattered in the furrows lie The weapons of his rest; And there, in the loose sand, is thrown Of his large arm the mouldering bone."
As the sun sets, so stops the work on the Frutchey Mound. For five months a small but faithful group has been laboring under adverse conditions striving to read the story that has waited so long unread, but now their meager funds are exhausted and their work must stop. The book has only been half read -- what does the other half have to tell? Shall we throw the book away now that we have seen the table of contents or shall we read its chapters and try to understand its story? Shall we call it worthless because it is old and weathered, with pages missing and others illegible, or shall we consider it priceless, knowing it is the only copy ever written? Why do we value certain historical documents so highly that we guard them under lock and key, yet we allow any untrained person to dig up and destroy our aboriginal records? Do we flatter ourselves into believing that history began in America when our forefathers settled it? Will North Carolina support a study of its early history or will it crawl under the generalization that "dead men tell no tales"?

North Carolina answered this challenge through the creation of Town Creek Indian Mound State Historic Site, sponsoring over a quarter century of archeology to read and interpret the soil pages in that priceless book. By 1955 the mound had long since been excavated and rebuilt to its original height and was now ready to receive a new temple. As a graduate student at the University of North Carolina in 1955, I wrote the following suggestions for constructing the temple (Stanley South).

SOME SUGGESTIONS FOR CONSTRUCTING AN INDIAN TEMPLE*

(by Stanley South)

Introduction

An attempt will be made here to combine historical and archeological evidence to produce some suggestions for constructing a temple of the approximate type used by Mississippian Period Indians in the Southeast around 1300-1600 A.D. The historical evidence comes from accounts left by traders and travelers among the Indians in Eastern America in the eighteenth century and from early ethnographic reports. The archeological evidence comes from the excavations of a temple mound at Town Creek State Historic Site, near Mt. Gilead, North Carolina. This paper

* This section was written in 1955.

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will be divided into two parts; the first concerns the construction of the temple building itself, and the second is devoted to the furnishings and furniture within and around the temple.

The first step will be to look at the floor plan of the actual temple as it was found by the archeologist** (Fig. 1).¹ There was a double row of postmolds forming the shape of the outer wall (A), with four large postmolds representing the supporting framework for the roof (B). A trench was found at the entranceway on each side formed by a series of posts having been set close together (C). A cluster of postmolds (D) between the two large front roof support postmolds, is interpreted as representing a vestibule wall. The row of postmolds (E) extending on either side of the entrance and the open space or doorway at (F) are interpreted as representing a shed or room attached to the front of the structure.

The four postholes separate from the structure itself (G) are seen to represent posts, probably totemic. The four postholes at (H) may represent an altar platform or table opposite the entrance. These features represent the floor plan of the temple as uncovered by excavation. The complete reconstructive floor plan based on this data is seen in Figure 2.

The fact that the temple had burned was evidenced by the charcoal posts in the postholes. At the group of postmolds (D), part of a plaster wall was found still in an upright position. Some of the fragments showed carving that had been done before the plaster had dried. The outer walls had fallen inward when the temple burned.

The smoothed inside face of the plaster was down and the rough, exterior side was up. Under the plaster a layer of charred ash was found. This was evidently what was left of the roof as it burned before the walls fell. Also found with this layer of ash were persimmon seeds, hickory nuts, and fragments of cane in charcoal form.² These were on the floor when the walls fell.

The wall plaster or daub was made of mud and clay mixed with sticks, grass, leaves, and pebbles, with impressions of cane running through some fragments. The color of the daub ranged from grey to buff to red, and no piece of daub was over five inches thick. The walls were plastered smooth on the inside using the hands as trowels. The rough side of the daub on some pieces showed impressions of thatch bundles, which would indicate that the temple was thatched on the outside with grass pressed into the still wet daub. This is almost all that is known archeologically about the temple above the floor plan.

**
I would like to thank Darby Erd for making inked versions of my original pencil drawings.

¹From notes in the files of the Research Laboratories of Anthropology, The University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill.

²Identified by Dr. Edison Adams, Department of Botany, University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, North Carolina.
FIGURE 1: The archeologically revealed floor plan of the Second Temple on the Mound at Town Creek Indian Mound.

FIGURE 2: The reconstructed floor plan of the Temple based on archaeological evidence.
Additional information can be seen in descriptions of temples or houses in the southeast as described by some of the people who saw such structures.

Adair says:

Every town has a large edifice, which with propriety may be called the mountain house, but the only difference between it and the winter house is in its dimensions and application... (Swanton 1946: 388).

So information about temples can be obtained by reading descriptions of their temples or their houses which, according to Adair, are virtually the same except for size. Adair's description of a Chickasaw house follows:

To raise their houses they fix deep in the ground, a sufficient number of strong forked posts, at a proportional distance, in a circular form, all of an equal height, about five or six feet above the surface of the ground; above these, they tie very securely large pieces of the heart of white oak, which are of a tough flexible nature, interweaving this orbit, from top to bottom, with pieces of the same, or the like timber. Then, in the middle of the fabric they fix very deep in the ground, four large pine posts, in a quadrangular form, notched a-top, on which they lay a number of heavy logs, let into each other, and rounding gradually to the top. Above this to the very top they lay a number of long dry poles, all properly notched, to keep strong hold of the under posts and wall-plate. Then they weave them thick with their split saplings, and daub them all over about six inches thick with tough clay, well mixt with withered grass; when this cement is half dried, they thatch the house with the longest sort of dry grass that their land produces. They first lay on one round tier, placing a split sapling a-top well tied to the different parts of the under pieces of timber, about fifteen inches below the cave; and, in this manner they proceed circularly to the very spire, where commonly a pole is fixed, that displays on the top the figure of a large carved eagle... (Swanton 1946: 387; italics mine).

From Iberville's Journal:

On the walls of the temple were figures of animals painted red and at the entrance was a shed eight feet wide and twelve feet long... (Swanton 1946: 639).

Here we see a possible explanation of the row of posts (E). This was possibly a shed with the entrance at the corner (F) and also another shed on the opposite side of the door. (Swanton 1946: 639) (Fig. 3).

Lewis Morgan, in his study of houses of the American Indian, says:
FIGURE 3: Reconstructive views of the Temple building.
It seems likely that a double set of upright poles were used, one upon the outside and one on the inside, between which the mattings of canes or willows were secured... (speaking of houses at Secotan and Pomerock in Virginia, Morgan 1881:117; italics mine).

Gravier says:

There is nothing fine about the temple except the vestibule wall... (Swanton 1946: 617; discussed in detail in next section; italics mine).

Adair says of the doorway:

The door of this winter palace, is commonly about four feet high, and so narrow as not to admit two to enter it abreast, with a winding passage for the space of six or seven feet... (Swanton 1946: 387; italics mine).

We have seen that description has been given by early observers of the double row of wall posts (A), the four large supporting posts (B), the portico or entrance way (C), the vestibule wall (D), and the row of postmolds (E) which may have been a shed with door at (F).

Now we will look at a more recent description of a building of a sacred nature, and one which will enable us to obtain more detailed information. This is the report made of the sacred Hidatsa earth lodge by Dr. Gilbert Wilson in the Fort Berthold Reservation in North Dakota in 1908. Dr. Wilson (1934: 358-74) describes the four center supporting posts:

The new posts were very heavy, about twelve to eighteen inches in diameter, depending on the size of the lodge, and thirteen feet long and supported four massive beams...

The supporting beams

The two lower beams were always at the side of the lodge, extending front to back, and the upper beams were always at the front and back, extending from side to side. [See Fig. 3 for relationship of beams to supporting posts.]

The outer wall

The supporting posts for the outer wall were twelve in number...the chinks between the posts were filled with willows laid parallel and cut the preceding summer so they would be dry when needed... (italics mine).
There were approximately twelve posts on each wall of the excavated temple as shown in the floor plan (Fig. 1).

The rafters

After the center framework was finished and the outer walls, there were one hundred rafters laid next... the rafters rest on the exterior stringers and project upward over the beams of the central posts with their lengths and ends adjusted to form the square or nearly square smoke hole. [See Figs. 4 and 5; italics mine].

The entrance

The length of the covered entrance was decided upon and the two forked posts were set firmly in the ground to form the door posts of the exterior entrance. A small log or pole supported on the forks to serve as a lintel. A trench connected each of these with the corresponding posts of the interior doorway and small logs were split and set on end with their tops against the entranceway roof and the lower end in the trench with the trenches filled. These formed the sides of the entrance passage. The sides of the covered entrance way were not plastered within or without, but split sides were turned inward and the bark removed as was the usual procedure for all posts and logs and rafters. [See Figs. 3, 4, and 5.]

The roof covering

A matting of dry grass was laid about six inches thick over the roof proper and the work was inspected from the inside of the lodge where any thin spots revealed themselves by the light which shone through. Dead, thick, long grass (river or swamp) was preferred for this covering. [See Fig. 6]

The door

A rectangular piece of dry buffalo hide was hung in the doorway, fur side out, so arranged as to swing inward. The pole framework for the skin was a wood frame fastened on the flesh side of the skin and consisted of two longer upright poles on either side, a pole attached at the top and bottom, and a horizontal bracing pole in the middle.

The historical accounts, the archeological records and the ethnographic reports have been examined and some idea of what the reconstructed temple should look like has emerged.

Figure 2 is a reconstruction of the floor plan based on Figure 1, showing the location of the posts. The four center supporting posts are shown as being two feet from the wall on this and the other plates, but in order to allow more support for the rafters, they should probably
FIGURE 4: Top view of the suggested reconstruction of the Temple.
HORIZONTAL POLES
TROPHY POLES
VESTIBULE WALL
WATTLE

FRONT VIEW SHOWING VESTIBULE WALL

FIGURE 5

THATCH
WIRE MESH
NAIL
ALUMINUM ROOFING
HORIZONTAL POLE
RAFTER
WATTLE OF CANE AND STICKS
METAL LATHE
EARTH-COLORED CONCRETE
HORIZONTAL POLE
DAUB

SIDE VIEW DETAIL OF WALL AND ROOF

FIGURE 6

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be at least three feet from the wall. In the Hidatsa earthlodge, described by Wilson, the supporting posts were much further toward the center in order to support the weight of the earth covering on the roof. On the excavated floor plan (Fig. 1) the supporting posts are two and three feet from the wall. This suggests this structure was not earth covered, but was covered with thatch because of the lack of support for a heavy roof resulting from the closeness of the supporting posts to the wall. Also the archeological evidence revealed no indication of an earth covering.

The shed (Fig. 4) on either side of the door should be included in the finished reconstruction since the archeological record so clearly reveals that it was present. The entrances at each corner could have been false entrances to the temple (Joffre Coe, personal communication). This is further born out by the narrowness of the actual entrance, and the fact that no early drawings of temples or houses show an entrance-way extending from the side of the wall as would be the case if there was no shed at the entrance to blend the entranceway with the temple.

The figures show the height of the roof at the smoke hole as 11 feet. This is when the center supporting posts are two feet from the wall. But if they are three feet from the wall the pitch of the roof is different and the height of the roof is less. This seems to be the better measurement because it accommodates the shed in front and also reduces the height of the temple at the top as well as giving more balance for the rafters to support the roof.

The height of the outer wall shown in the reconstruction drawings is six feet. This was chosen through consideration of the estimates made by the observers and the fact that after the reconstruction is complete, visitors to the temple would probably bump their heads if the wall were any lower. The height of the inner supporting posts is shown as eight feet including the thickness of the beams resting on them because this seemed to give the pitch needed to support the roof.

In Figures 3, 5 and 6 the method of wall construction can be seen. The two rows of posts have between them, horizontal poles laid on limbs protruding from the upright wall posts or lashed to the upright posts. To fill the gaps between the upright posts and the horizontal poles, sticks and upright lengths of cane are interwoven. The outside is thatched with bundles of broom sage and grass tied to the horizontal poles, beginning at the bottom and thatching to the top of the wall. The daub made of mud and sticks and grass is applied to the inside wall between the upright posts against the lathing of sticks, cane and horizontal poles.

The roof is first covered by placing canes onto the roof poles between the horizontal cross pieces tied to the rafters. After this layer of canes is applied, aluminum corrugated roofing is nailed to the rafters on top of the canes. The canes successfully hide the aluminum roofing when viewed from inside the structure. On top of the corrugated aluminum a wire mesh is fastened and then another layer of thatch bundles is tied to this wire mesh making the finished roof (Fig. 6).
The vestibule wall shown in Figure 5 is plastered on both sides with figures drawn in the wet clay on the side facing the door. The type of figures on the wall as well as other details is the concern of the second part of this paper on furnishings within and around the temple. No great detail will be attempted. Rather, a listing of some furnishings which would possibly occur, as described in early accounts is presented.

The vestibule

Concerning the vestibule wall I will quote Gravier again, but this time in its entirety.

There is nothing fine about the temple except the vestibule, which is embellished with the most pleasing and best executed grotesque figures that one can see. These are four satyrs, two of which are in relief, all four standing out from the wall, and having on their heads, their hands, and their legs— for fillets, bracelets, garters, baldric, and belts— snakes, mice, and dogs. The colors are black, white, red and yellow, and are applied so well and with such absence of confusion that they constitute an agreeably surprising spectacle (Swanton 1946: 617).

The idol

Within the temple was an idol which sat against the wall, in the corner, or possibly against the back wall in the center where the group of posts at (H) in Figure 1 are located. These may have been for the platform for the idol. The idol is described by Hariot:

The people of this contrie have an Idol, which they call Kiwasa: yt is carued of woode in length 4.foote whose heade is like the heads of the people of Florida, the face is of a flesh colour, the brest white, the rest is all blacke, the thighs are also spottedt with whitte. He hath a chayne abowt his necke of white beades, betweene which are other Rownde beades of copper which they esteeme more then golde or siluer. This Idol is placed in the temple of the town of Secotan, as the keper of the kings dead corpses. Sometime they have two of thes idoles in theryr churches, and sometine 3. but neuer aboue, which they place in a darke corner wher they shew terrible (Swanton 1946: 614).

The row of effigy posts

A possible explanation for the row of posts at (G) in Figure 1 is the row of effigy posts described by Beverley:
The Indians have Posts fix'd round their Quioccasan, temple which have Mens Faces carved upon them, and are painted. They are likewise set up round some of their other celebrated places... (Swanton 1946: 615).

Carved figures of wood

Adair noticed in some Creek towns carved figures:

I have seen in several of the Indian synhedria, two white painted eagles carved out of poplar wood, with their wings stretched out, and raised five feet off the ground, standing at the corner, close to their red and white imperial seats: and, on the inner side of each of the deep-notched pieces of wood, where the eagles stand, the Indians frequently paint, with a chalky clay, the figure of a man, with buffalo horns— and that of a panther with the same colour.

Near to the red and white imperial seats, they have the representation of a full moon, and either a half moon, or a breastplate, raised five or six feet high at the front of the broad seats, and painted with chalky clay; sometimes black paintings are intermixed (Swanton 1946: 616).

Boxes

Garcilaso's informants reported from the temple of Cofitachequi:

'Great wooden boxes without locks' containing the bones of the dead and he tells us that 'they were astonished that, without tools the Indians had been able to make them so well.... Besides these great boxes they had smaller ones, and cane baskets very well made (Swanton 1946: 561).

Adair speaks of a box with "a cover, and the whole is made inpene-trably close with hiccory-splinters..." (Swanton 1946: 587).

Shields

Garcilaso was told that upon the walls of the temple at Talomico there were hung:

...round and oblong shields, large and small, made of cane so strongly woven that they could turn a dart shot from a cross-bow... (Swanton 1946: 587).

Hariot says that the Carolina Indians had bark shields (Swanton 1946: 588).

Litters

Le Moyne (1564-65) says of litters:
...a seat is made on two stout poles and covered with the skin of some rare sort of animal, while it is set off with a structure of boughs, bending over forward so as to shade the head of the sitter (Swanton 1946: 599).

It seems likely that such a litter might be stored in the temple.

Mats

Du Pratz describes the Natchez mats in 1758:

ordinarily 6 feet long by 4 broad and...worked in designs. The gloss of the cane, yellows in aging. Some of them, besides having designs indicated by different weaves, have variously colored splints, some red, some black, making [with the natural shade of the cane] three different kinds of colors (Swanton 1946: 603).

Baskets

Lawson wrote regarding baskets:

The baskets our neighboring Indians make are all made of a very fine sort of bulrushes, and sometime of silk grass, which they work with figures of beasts, birds, fishes, etc. (Swanton 1946: 603).

Objects of wood

Adair and others mention spoons and platters of wood. The spoons were more like dippers or ladles, and Lawson says they showed little disposition to use them instead of their fingers. Wooden mortars and pestles of wood were also used; the wood preferred was hickory or oak (Swanton 1946: 556).

Miscellaneous

Some hickory nuts and persimmon seeds were found on the floor of the excavated temple. In the firepit were fragments of animal bones, fish bones, and some shell. Some beads were also found. On each side of the firepit is a small postmold, which may have been for the suspension of something over the fire on a spit.

The interior of the temple would conceivably have some of the articles mentioned above. There would probably be platforms of cane on which the idol was placed. On either side might be shelves holding herbs, wooden cups, and ladles. Around the walls, there may have hung shields made of bark or skin, with mats of cane placed around or near the altar. Pottery vessels would have been used for cooking.

In a project of this type there must be a compromise between authenticity and practicality. Too much imagination without regard for
historical and archeological evidence would produce a result of little authentic value. On the other hand too much concentration on authenticity leads one in a never ending search for answers, all of which can never be found. The ideal situation would be to have the original Indian builders of the temple rebuild it for us, but since this is impractical, there must be a compromise (Coe, personal communication).

In this paper I have tried to combine practicality with documentation and imagination and to make some suggestions as to how to go about constructing a Southeastern Mississippian temple and to mention some furnishings which may be used in the completed structure. More work will have to be done before a temple can be reconstructed, but this paper will perhaps serve as a beginning for further research.

REFERENCES


CONSTRUCTING THE TEMPLE AT TOWN CREEK INDIAN MOUND: A RETROSPECTIVE SUMMARY

(by Stanley South)

When I arrived at Town Creek Indian Mound State Historic Site in 1956 as on-site archeologist, I was the latest of a series of archeologists to become involved in the archeology and interpretive development of this historic site under the direction of Joffre Coe. Prior to my arrival the smallest of four archeologically revealed palisades around the ceremonial area had been reconstructed using juniper poles imported from a park in eastern North Carolina, the by-products of a forest thinning operation. Two circular entrance towers had also been built as they were found archeologically, incorporated into the palisade wall (Fig. 7). On the temple mound four major support posts of cedar had been positioned as dictated by archeological evidence. In a pile beside the palisade wall were a number of additional cedar poles, dried and ready for use in constructing the walls of the temple.

The sight of these raw materials and the four posts positioned on top of the mound was a daily reminder of the challenge that lay ahead in the completion of this temple construction project. Joffre Coe had
FIGURE 7: View of the reconstructed palisade wall and entrance tower of the ceremonial center and reconstructed Temple mound and Temple building.
asked that I undertake the research paper on construction of the temple as a class project, and with this in hand as a guide, I now began construction of the temple with the help of Edward Gaines, a veteran of many years of excavation and maintenance at the Town Creek site.

In looking for information of use in constructing a building of poles and thatch I came across a photograph of a building under construction on the island of Kusaie taken by my wife's brother in the 1950's (Fig.8). This structure was remarkably similar to the architectural concept used in the temple at Town Creek, so this photograph was used as an example of problem solving similar to that facing us at Town Creek. The Town Creek temple as it appeared at the end of the framing stage is seen in Figure 9.

In order to at least attempt to preserve the poles and other materials beyond their normal life in such a structure, we constructed a vat of gasoline storage tanks cut in half, lengthwise, and welded together at the ends; a difficult logistics project in itself given the lack of equipment and budgetary strictures of the time. This long vat was then filled with Penta wood preservative diluted with kerosene, and all poles and other materials, such as rope and thatch were soaked in this solution overnight in an effort to extend the life of the structure.

Roof poles were cut by Ed Gaines and myself from stands of nearby pine. We then used sharp, flat shovels to skin the bark from the trees immediately after cutting. We found that once the sap dried the process was much more difficult. The skinned poles were then dipped in the vat. These should have been dried first to allow the preserving material to penetrate, but we were impatient to get the temple built. We knew that pressure treated poles would be ideal for such work, but again the cost involved was beyond the resources available to us at the time.

Once all cedar poles were placed in position for the various walls the cross members were fastened in place using hemp rope. We made no effort to untwist the rope to eliminate the machine twisted effect, though this was a consideration that worried me considerably at the time regarding the authenticity of the effect created by this obviously non-Indian rope. I remembered Joffre's reminder that since we cannot have the original builders of the temple rebuild it for us we must sometimes compromise, and this helped solve this problem. We knew, too, that any attempt on our part to untwist and retwist the rope would still not provide us with a result that could be said to be more "authentic."

We cut reeds along the banks of Town Creek and Little River and placed them horizontally between the horizontal roof poles to cover the aluminum roofing that could be seen from inside the temple (Fig. 10).
FIGURE 8: View of a dwelling on Kusaie Island in the framing stage (photo courtesy of Don Barndardt).

FIGURE 9: View of the Town Creek Temple in the framing stage.
Once these were in place we nailed corrugated aluminum roofing to the cross poles, and on this we nailed chicken wire (Fig. 6). We then tied bundles of broomseed grass gathered on the site to the chicken wire using baling twine (Figs. 11-12). I was worried that the highly volatile nature of the Penta solution in which the bundles of thatch were soaked plus the inflammable nature of the dried grass would cause a problem should someone toss a cigarette onto the temple roof, and that this would likely result in frequent replacing of the thatch. However, in the twenty years since that time fire has never been a problem at the temple. I also expected that due to rotting, the thatch bundles would have to be replaced at frequent intervals, however, to my knowledge thatch bundles have only had to be replaced partially on two occasions in the past twenty years. On these occasions old bundles of thatch were often re-used, the main problem being the rotting of the twine holding the bundles in place. I believe wire was used in replacing these bundles.

A maintenance problem arose some years after the temple was built through the exposure of the overhanging roof poles beyond the temple wall. These rotted off at the point where the aluminum roofing ended. The problem was solved by placing short pieces of roof poles beside those shortened by rot, and fastening the two together with nails, all of which would be hidden by the thatch bundles. It was the thatch which caused these exposed roof poles to rot off by constantly holding moisture against the poles. The solution to preventing such a problem in future temples of this type would be to use pressure treated poles to begin with.

The wall poles were lathed with expanded metal lath and plastered with a mixture of mortar and red clay. The red clay served to give an earth color to the wall of the temple, and the concrete wall provided a degree of permanence not possible with clay alone unless considerable maintenance was undertaken. When the first section of the palisade wall and tower was plastered with concrete prior to my coming to Town Creek no clay or coloring medium was used, and for years the wall had been periodically mopped down with red clay slip in order to provide the necessary clay appearance to the daub. After some months of this periodic maintenance problem I began mixing cement with the clay slip which allowed it to adhere longer to the wall. This experience resulted in our mixing clay with the mortar when the temple was built. One small area near the false entrance on the north side of the temple was wattled with vines and cane, daubed with pure clay and grass daub, and then after it dried, was hit with a hammer in order to fracture some of the daub and reveal an appearance of Indian wattle and daub construction needing some repair (Fig. 12).

The entranceway was lined with cane mats woven by Ed Gaines and myself from reeds cut on the site. This was done using the earthlodge reconstruction at Ocmealgee National Monument as a model since, there, fragments of woven cane mats were found in place in this manner in the entranceway (Figs. 12-13), and similar entranceways are involved. The door to the temple was a drop-door swinging in place from rope loops,
FIGURE 10: View inside the Temple looking up to the smokehole.

FIGURE 11: Stanley South and Edward Gaines thatching the roof.

FIGURE 12: View of the Temple front showing false entrances and drop door.
allowing the door to be tied up, and also allowing the temple to be locked if necessary (Fig. 13).

The vestibule wall (Fig. 13) was engraved while the cement was wet with dancing figures in poses similar to those found on engraved shell gorgets in the Southeast. The artifacts held by these dancing figures are those found at Town Creek: a fragment of a conch shell dipper and mask, a wooden bear tooth shaped rattle, a copper bladed ax, and a bone scarifier. I believe that after the photograph in Figure 13 was taken I later added a shell cross in a circle to one figure, and a copper lizard to the other since these objects were also found at Town Creek.

Inside the temple a small altar was constructed against the wall opposite the door, and benches of horizontally laid logs were constructed in two tiers and covered with woven cane mats. The mats eventually were destroyed by tourist traffic, as our mat weaving skills were not adequate for our mats to withstand much use (Fig. 14).

On each wall an engraved figure was placed, using four popular clan animals in the Southeast, the bear, deer, wolf, and beaver (Fig. 14). A crosshatched motif found incised in fragments of daub archeologically recovered within the temple was incised onto the tail of the beaver.

When the temple was completed we placed a conch shell on the altar; and wings of birds, hides of native animals, gourd rattles, etc., were placed in the temple as suggestive of the many furnishings such a structure may well have had. These did not last long exposed to tourist traffic, however, and to my knowledge no such furnishings have been used since. The potential is there, however, for a richer interpretation of the material culture of South Appalachian Mississippian Indians, but to do so visitors should be admitted only by guided tour. An interesting phenomenon occurred after the temple was constructed when the spot of sunlight streaming through the smokehole was found to fall directly on the altar on its daily path, providing a dramatic emphasis on this important part of the temple interior (Fig. 14).

The archeological data revealed four postholes in front of the temple which were interpreted as trophy pole holes (Fig. 1). One of the regrets I had on leaving Town Creek was that I never got around to placing four cedar poles in position to represent this feature. I hope that someday this can be done to complete the interpretation of the floor plan data relating to the temple building. These poles would have been used to support carved wooden birds, skulls, scalps, and other parts of enemies as illustrated in a number of early drawings (Fig. 5).

While at Town Creek I also built the framework of the priest house opposite the temple mound, but the plastering of the walls using native materials and authentic daub of clay as well as thatching was done by other archeologists. I also placed pine poles in the compound separating the priest house from the plaza area, but the overnight
FIGURE 13: View looking into the entranceway showing vestibule wall.

FIGURE 14: View inside the Temple showing smokehole spotlight on the alter.
dip in Penta proved inadequate protection against ground moisture, and some of these subsequently rotted off at ground level and had to be replaced. The use of clay as daub rather than mixing cement and clay as I did with the temple resulted in a more authentic appearance including rain damage in those areas not sufficiently covered with thatch. Greater realism in such cases must be balanced against maintenance such effects require, just as was once required on the structure archeologically revealed on the site.

The game pole was also erected in the same hole archeologically revealed during my tenure at Town Creek. On top of this forty foot pole I placed the skull of a bear, and on the center pole of the entrance tower the skull of a deer was fastened (Fig. 7), but these too soon became victims of the tourist traffic and souvenir hunters.

Along the edge of the bank of Little River I constructed a palisade of pine poles, and a semi-subterranean entranceway which had been revealed by archeological work in this area. Immediately beyond this entranceway was the major midden deposit for the ceremonial area during its use, forming a deposit eight feet deep, revealing important data regarding the evolutionary development of ceramic attributes and motifs during the time the site was occupied. This unique semi-subterranean entranceway has also disappeared, a victim of rot.

Since my two year tour of duty at Town Creek from 1956 to 1958, a number of archeologists have also passed that way, each making their mark on research and development at the site. Benny Keel, for instance, built a mortuary house over the original position of such a structure archeologically revealed and then went inside and excavated the burials, leaving them exposed for viewing through windows in the mortuary house walls. I understand that since that time problems with maintenance due to moisture have forced the removal of the burials from this structure.

In this retrospective summary of construction of the temple at Town Creek Indian Mound I have depended on memory and photographs to place on record the challenge and problems involved in such a project. The two year period I spent at Town Creek was a part of the process of fulfillment of the dream spelled out by Joffre Coe in his "Story from the Past," just as the period spent there by each archeologist has been a part of that process. Some of the archeologists who come to mind who have contributed to this involvement after the original 1930's period are: Barton Wright, Howard Sargent, Ernest Lewis, John Walker, Helmut Naumer, David Phelps, Bennie Keel, Roy Dickens, and Leland Ferguson. Each has made his mark on the site toward contributing to Joffre's "Story from the Past." The experience gained through combining the responsibility to scientific archeology with the responsibility for preserving our cultural resources through interpretation of this important and unique historic site has also made its mark on these men. Management of our cultural resources through recovery of scientific archeological data while at the same time preserving the historic site for posterity is not a new phenomenon within archeology as some suppose. The papers presented here demonstrate this fact.