

## INTRODUCTION

by Robert L. Stephenson

The Ninety Six Project is a complex of historically significant archeological sites in Greenwood County, South Carolina, near the present town of Ninety Six. The sites, together, form a more-or-less integral unit, yet each is separable from the others with its own historical and physical identity. They are all identifiable with the eighteenth century colonial period of development of the Upper Country of South Carolina, primarily in relation to the Indian Trade, the French and Indian War, and the American Revolution. In historical perspective only a short period of time is really involved -- some three decades -- but during that time some of the most significant actors of the drama of early American history paraded across this tiny stage turning the footlights of decisiveness up high on the scenes and acts that effected the whole theatre of Colonial America.

There are five individual sites that have been identified within the Ninety Six Project so far. These are:

- 38GN1 - Goudy's Trading Post Site of 1751 and its successor on the same location, known as Fort Ninety Six of 1759-61
- 38GN2 - The Holmes' Fort Site of 1780
- 38GN3 - The Star Fort Site of 1780-81
- 38GN4 - The Town of Ninety Six Site
- 38GN5 - The Stockade Site of 1780 around the Town of Ninety Six.

Other individual sites may be isolated and identified by numbers later, as the archeological and documentary research progresses. These would be Williamson's Fort, The Charleston Road, The Ninety Six Jail Redoubt, The Town Blockhouse, The Town of Cambridge, and perhaps others. All of these are encompassed in less than a square mile of land.

Concern with the Ninety Six Project is not a new effort. The Star Fort Historical Commission was established a number of years ago for just this purpose. As the name implies this Commission centered its initial concern on the Star Fort Site because it was the only portion of the whole complex of sites that existed as a visible, above-ground ruin. The earthworks of this fortification are still standing as a spectacular, star-shaped, embankment and moat. All of the remains of the other sites in the complex have long since been leveled except for a water-filled depression at Goudy's Trading Post that presumably was Goudy's cellar. The Commission began to actively pursue a course of action that would lead to an understanding of the people and events that took place at these sites, by employing Mr. W. Bruce Ezell, of Ninety Six, as Project Director. Mr. Ezell, who had previously been interested in searching out documentary references to Ninety Six, intensified his research and devoted much effort to it.

In 1961 the Commission contracted with the South Carolina Department of Archeology (now the Institute of Archeology and Anthropology of the University of South Carolina) under the direction of Dr. William E. Edwards, for archeological work at the sites. Dr. Edwards, with varying crews, worked sporadically on the project for a period of five years.

During this time eight trenches of varying lengths were excavated in and around the Star Fort and two long trenches were excavated at the site of the jail and the courthouse respectively. The Commission had a surveyor prepare a field map of these features showing the excavated trenches. The artifacts recovered during this period were cataloged and the catalogs, map, and most of the artifacts are now in the files of the Institute. Unfortunately the photographs and field notes from this initial period of excavation at the Ninety Six Project have not survived.

Meanwhile Mr. Ezell continued his research of the documents and also continued to plan, with the Commission, for a rather ambitious program of development of the sites and the immediately surrounding area.

Late in the fall of 1968, Mr. Ezell contacted the, then newly re-organized, Institute of Archeology and Anthropology at the University of South Carolina, for advice on continuing the archeological research. Plans were made between the Commission and the Institute for a full-scale archeological excavation of the area but could not begin until the work, then in progress, was completed at the Charles Towne Site in Charleston.

In the spring of 1970, arrangements were made between the Commission and the Institute to begin a long range excavation program. Mr. Stanley South, of the Institute staff, began working with Mr. Ezell on the documentary research in April and spent the month of May 1970 with a small crew of four to six men excavating at the sites. During these four weeks of exploratory excavation, a great deal of the area was examined by the "slot-trenching" technique, the purpose being simply to locate the features such as palisade lines, ditches, cellars, redoubts, and other

architectural features in the ground and to accurately plot them on a master map. Since the Star Fort (38GN3) was already located and visible above ground, no work other than surveying was done there. Also since documentary evidence suggested that the remains of Williamson's Fort would be nothing but a well, no effort was made to locate that site. This exploratory excavation revealed the general location and approximate outlines of Goudy's Trading Post and the Fort Ninety Six (38GN1), Holmes' Fort (38GN2), The Site of the Town of Ninety Six (38GN4), and the Stockade Fort around Ninety Six (38GN5). In addition to this, the open tunnel or "mine," dug in May and June 1781 by Count Kosciuszko in an attempt to blow up the Star Fort, was explored. All of these features were carefully plotted on a large-scale annotated map of the area and a brief report of the work was prepared (Stanley South, "Exploratory Archeology at Ninety Six (38GN1-38GN5)." M.S., September 1970).

The second Institute effort began on October 5, 1970, and lasted through November 25. During these eight weeks Mr. South, with Mr. Steven G. Baker as crew chief, and a crew of eight men, concentrated the main effort on opening up the excavations at Holmes' Fort (38GN2); in further explorations of the Jail Redoubt in the Town of Ninety Six (38GN4); and in excavation of the Blockhouse and palisade ditches around the Town of Ninety Six (38GN5). The results of these field investigations are briefly reported as Part IV of the present report.

Archeological research is a long, slow, often tedious process but, if done with the methodical care required of scholarly work, can be a most rewarding process. The excavation itself, the actual digging in

the ground, is only one phase of the work. It is, of course, the most essential phase because it is from the excavation that the raw data are derived. Yet, in terms of the amount of time required for the total process, it is really a minor phase. This is true of any archeological research, whether it be prehistoric or historic, but perhaps is more emphatically true of historic archeology because there are contemporary documents available to be studied. The archeologist is required to first gain as full an understanding of the site he is to excavate as is possible from a study of the terrain and any documents relating to it that he can find before he even begins to excavate. Then he must excavate. Then he must analyse the data from the excavations in terms of how those data fit with the known documentary record of this and other sites. He must study, compare, identify, and interpret the fragmentary artifacts that he has found as well as the architectural features such as postholes, ditches, pits, hearths, and other excavated soil disturbances. These interpreted data must then be combined with the documentary record to provide an intelligible interpretation of the sherds and patches of evidence and thus, as thoroughly as possible, a cohesive story of the life and times of a people living at this place at a specific time. Usually a good rule of thumb for research at an archeological site is to allow three to four months of laboratory research for every month spent in field excavation.

The Ninety Six Project is no exception to this generalization. It is not one, but a complex of historic sites. There are many contemporary documents pertaining to it. There are other contemporary

sites elsewhere that are pertinent to its interpretation. Fortunately Mr. Ezell had done extensive research on these documents before Mr. South began his studies on the project and some pre-excavation time was saved by use of that research. The excavations are proceeding in short increments of one or two months at a time in order to most efficiently integrate units of field data into the evidence from the documentary records. The time between field sessions is devoted to this integration of the two kinds of data and the preparation of reports such as this one. The ratio of one month of field work to three months of laboratory work is proceeding on schedule.

The Ninety Six Project is anticipated to be a large-scale endeavor and plans are for the archeological research to extend over a period of four or five years. The second year of this schedule is about to begin in June of 1971. This report and the previously mentioned report (South, September 1970) comprise reports of the first year of work. Similar reports will be prepared upon the results of work in future years and all of these will then be combined into a single total report of the whole project when the excavations have been completed. Each of these reports, however, is prepared in such a way that, barring subsequent contradictory evidence, they can be revised but slightly to form sections of the total report at the end of the project. The first report emphasized the initial exploratory testing of the sites and the locations of the features that make up the forts, towns, and other units of the Ninety Six Project. This second reports emphasizes the historical perspective derived from contemporary documents and stresses the

corroboration of the documents by evidence from the ground. Only a minor part of this report deals with the excavations of the fall of 1970. Subsequent reports will emphasize other aspects of the whole project.

The Star Fort Historical Commission has generously provided the bulk of the funds for the archeological research in this project. The Commission made a substantial grant for Dr. Edwards' work in 1961-65. It made another substantial grant to the Institute in 1970 for work that year and has made a third, larger, grant to the Institute for work to be done in 1971. Some funding, too, has come directly from the Institute in the form of the regular salary of Mr. South throughout the work; in the majority of salaries and wages paid to laboratory and research assistants during the times when field work was not going on; in administrative salaries of those, like myself, who have put in substantial increments of time on the project; and in providing much of the equipment, tools, supplies, laboratory space, and other facilities already on hand at the Institute.

It is a real pleasure for us in the Institute to work with the Star Fort Historical Commission on this project. Dr. B. M. Grier, Chairman of the Commission, has been most patient and understanding of our attitudes and approaches to the problems. The entire Commission has been thoroughly cooperative and helpful throughout. Mr. W. Bruce Ezell, with whom we have all worked most closely, has provided camping space for the crews, access to his research data, arguments and discussions on both research problems and logistic matters, and in general, has been a fine friend without whose help the project could not have been as effectively done.

## Acknowledgements

by Stanley South

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The administrative direction of the project was successfully handled by Dr. Robert L. Stephenson, Director of the Institute, who also wrote the introductory chapter.