

Archaeology in the Old Catawba Nation

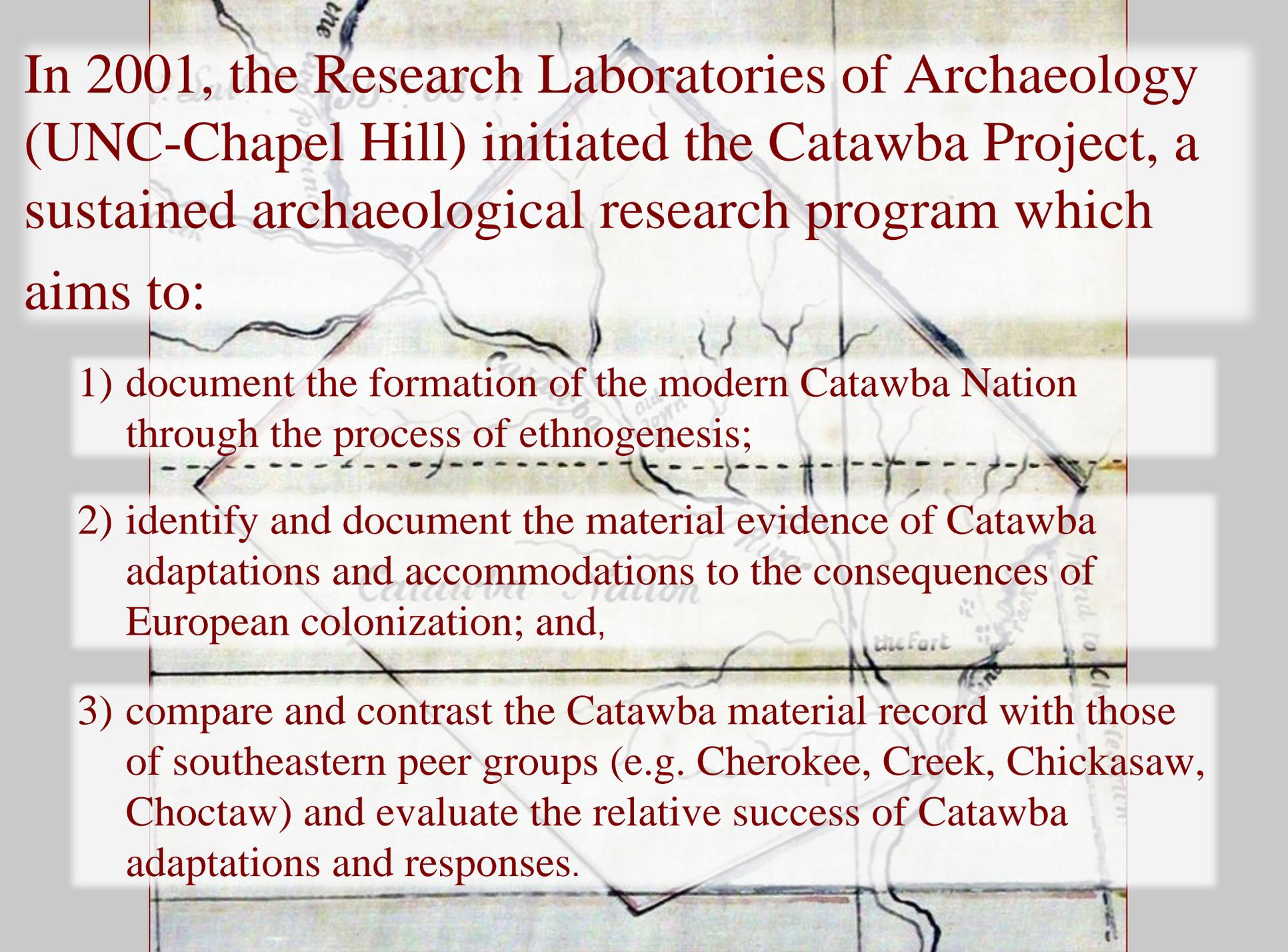


The Catawba Project

conducted by the

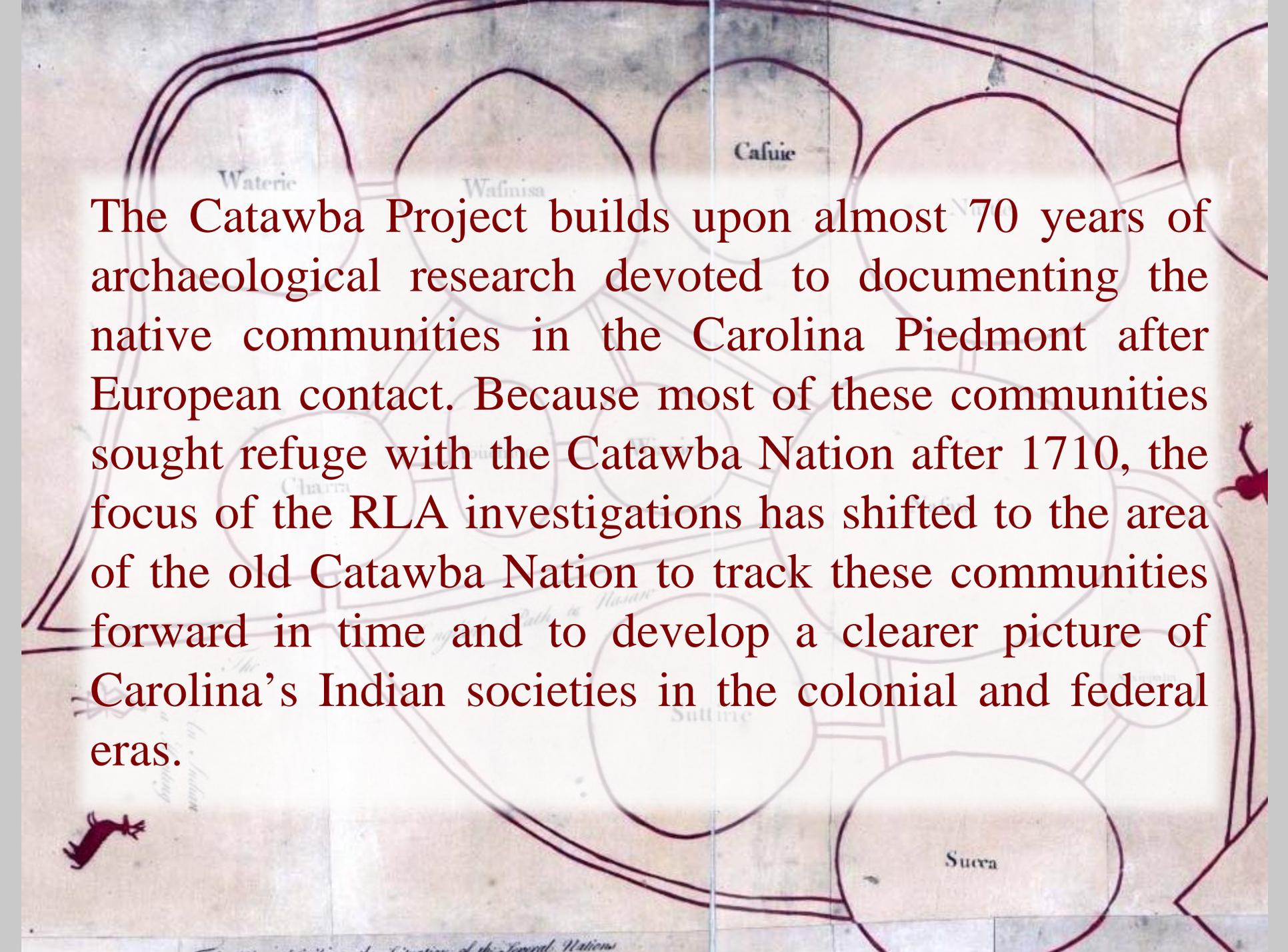
Research Laboratories of Archaeology

University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill

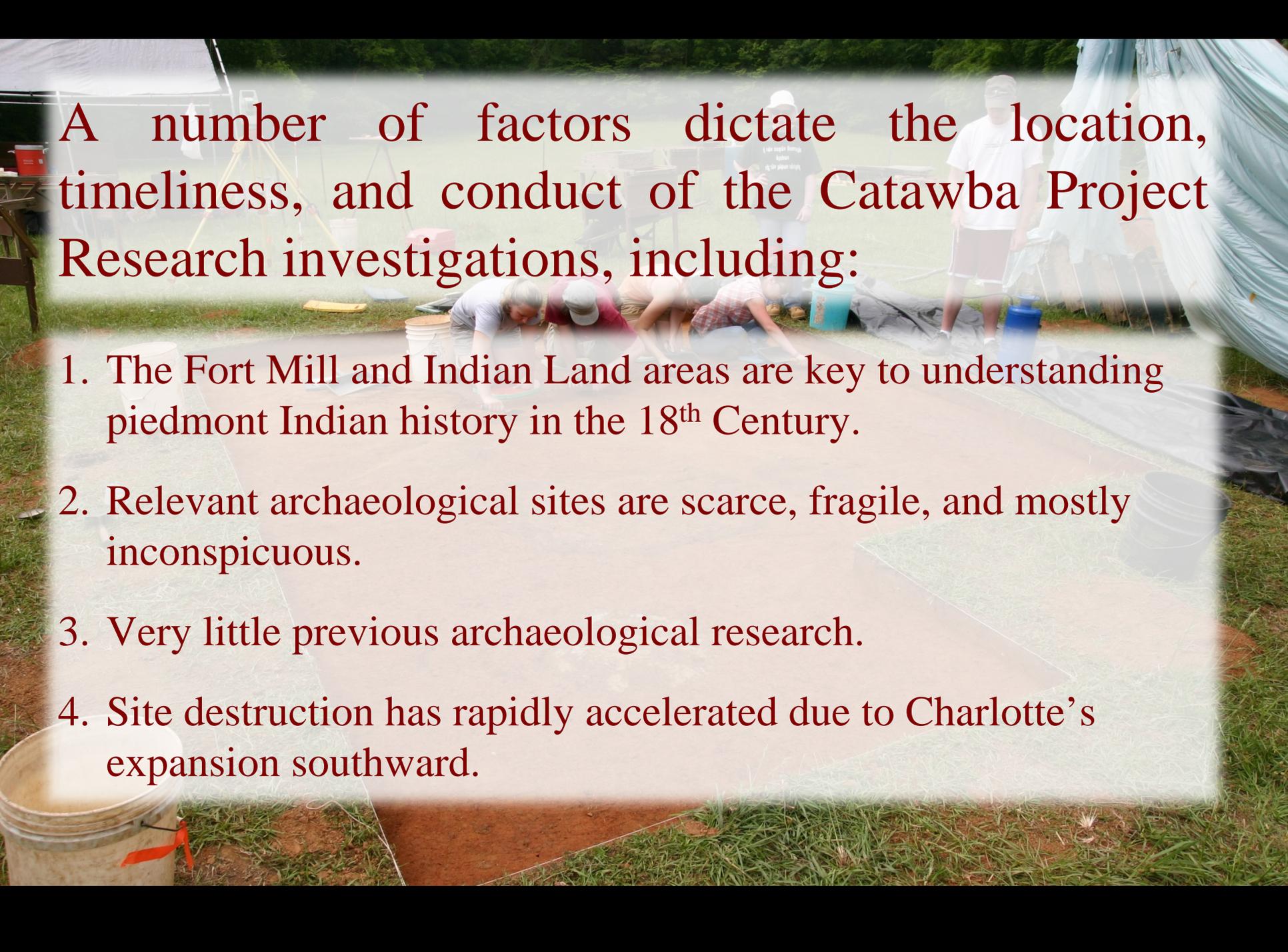
A historical map of the Catawba region, showing the river and surrounding areas. The map is overlaid with a grid and a large, faint watermark of a triangle. The text is in a dark red, serif font.

In 2001, the Research Laboratories of Archaeology (UNC-Chapel Hill) initiated the Catawba Project, a sustained archaeological research program which aims to:

- 1) document the formation of the modern Catawba Nation through the process of ethnogenesis;
- 2) identify and document the material evidence of Catawba adaptations and accommodations to the consequences of European colonization; and,
- 3) compare and contrast the Catawba material record with those of southeastern peer groups (e.g. Cherokee, Creek, Chickasaw, Choctaw) and evaluate the relative success of Catawba adaptations and responses.

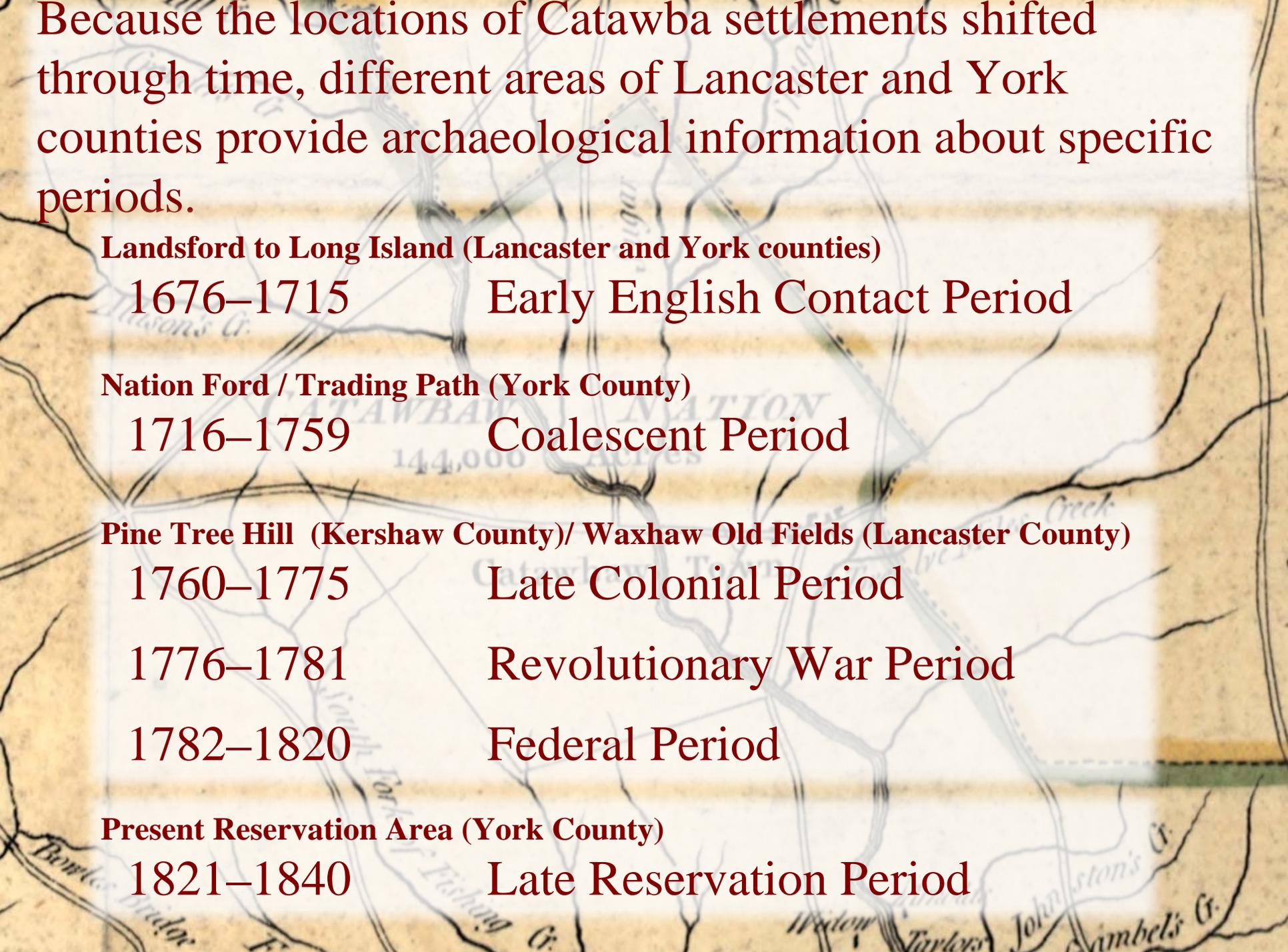


The Catawba Project builds upon almost 70 years of archaeological research devoted to documenting the native communities in the Carolina Piedmont after European contact. Because most of these communities sought refuge with the Catawba Nation after 1710, the focus of the RLA investigations has shifted to the area of the old Catawba Nation to track these communities forward in time and to develop a clearer picture of Carolina's Indian societies in the colonial and federal eras.

The background image shows an outdoor archaeological excavation site. Several workers are visible, some kneeling and working on the ground, others standing. There are various pieces of equipment, including buckets, a blue water jug, and a tripod. The site is surrounded by green grass and trees in the distance. A semi-transparent white box with a dark border is overlaid on the image, containing the text.

A number of factors dictate the location, timeliness, and conduct of the Catawba Project Research investigations, including:

1. The Fort Mill and Indian Land areas are key to understanding piedmont Indian history in the 18th Century.
2. Relevant archaeological sites are scarce, fragile, and mostly inconspicuous.
3. Very little previous archaeological research.
4. Site destruction has rapidly accelerated due to Charlotte's expansion southward.



Because the locations of Catawba settlements shifted through time, different areas of Lancaster and York counties provide archaeological information about specific periods.

Landsford to Long Island (Lancaster and York counties)

1676–1715

Early English Contact Period

Nation Ford / Trading Path (York County)

1716–1759

Coalescent Period

Pine Tree Hill (Kershaw County)/ Waxhaw Old Fields (Lancaster County)

1760–1775

Late Colonial Period

1776–1781

Revolutionary War Period

1782–1820

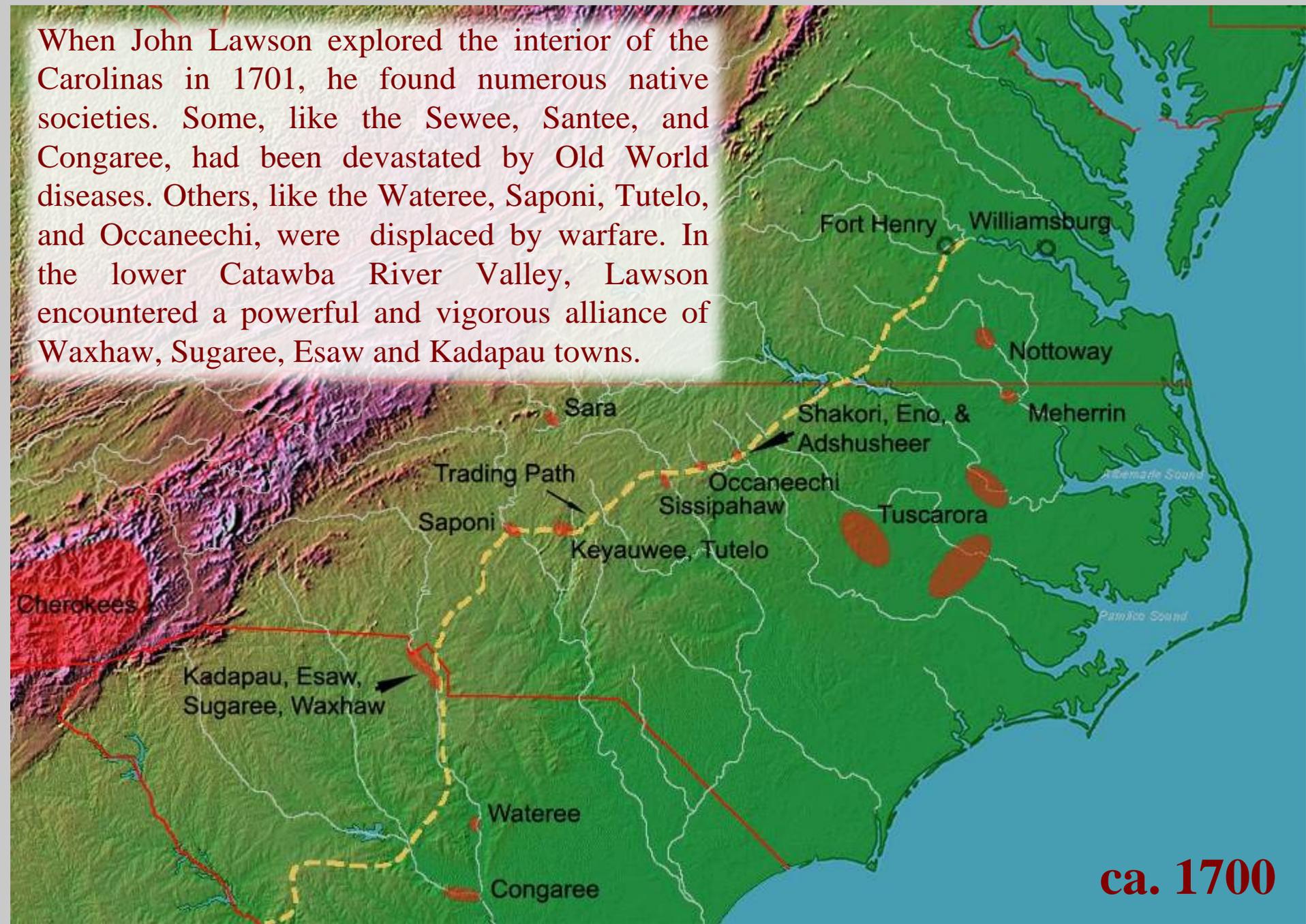
Federal Period

Present Reservation Area (York County)

1821–1840

Late Reservation Period

When John Lawson explored the interior of the Carolinas in 1701, he found numerous native societies. Some, like the Sewee, Santee, and Congaree, had been devastated by Old World diseases. Others, like the Wateree, Saponi, Tutelo, and Occaneechi, were displaced by warfare. In the lower Catawba River Valley, Lawson encountered a powerful and vigorous alliance of Waxhaw, Sugaree, Esaw and Kadapau towns.



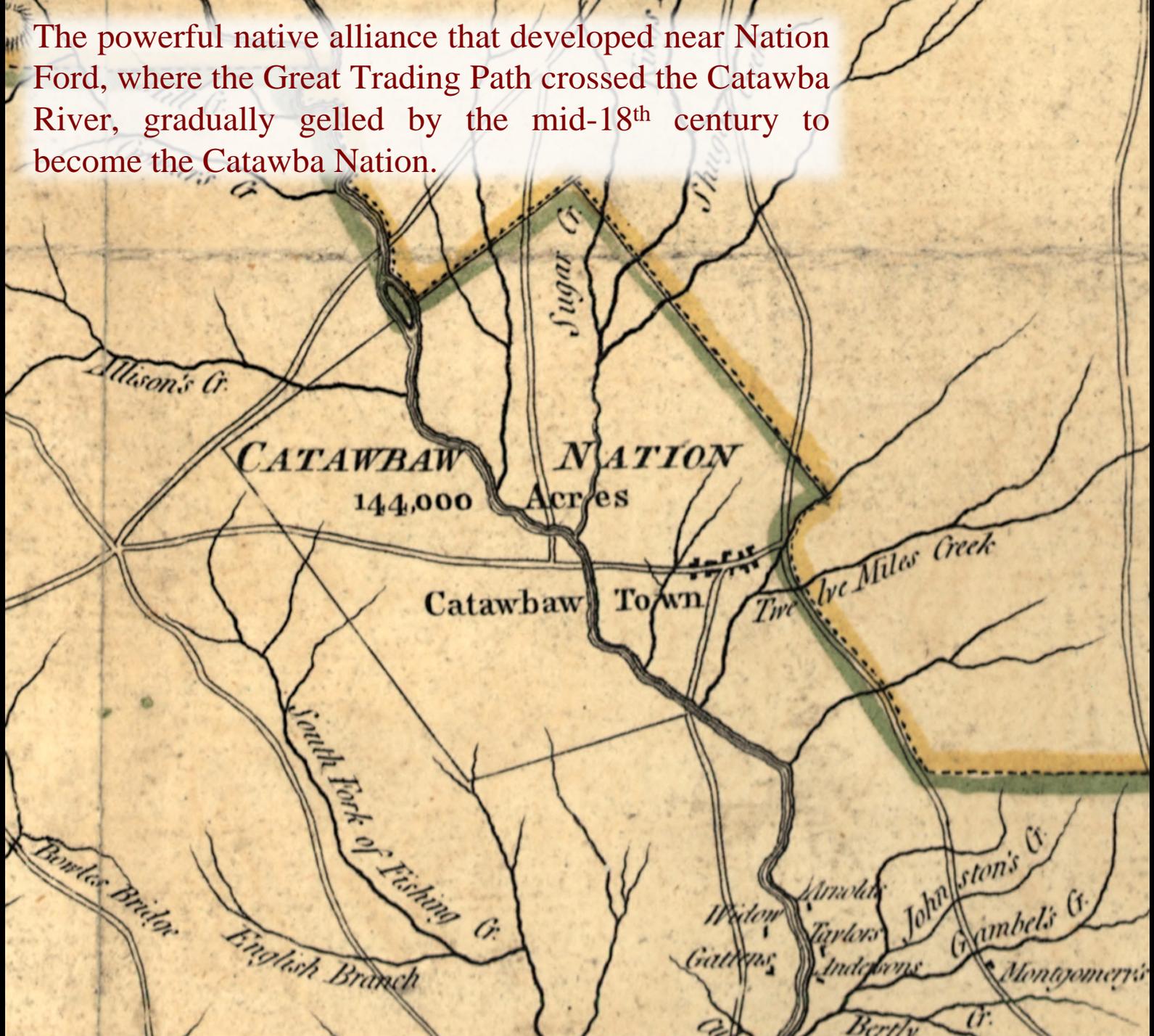
ca. 1700

By 1715, in the aftermath of the Tuscarora and Yamassee wars, the piedmont region was largely vacant. Many of the former piedmont groups moved south to take refuge with the Catawba alliance. Others formed new coalescent centers with the Cheraw (formerly Saura) along the Pee Dee River or at Fort Christanna in Virginia.

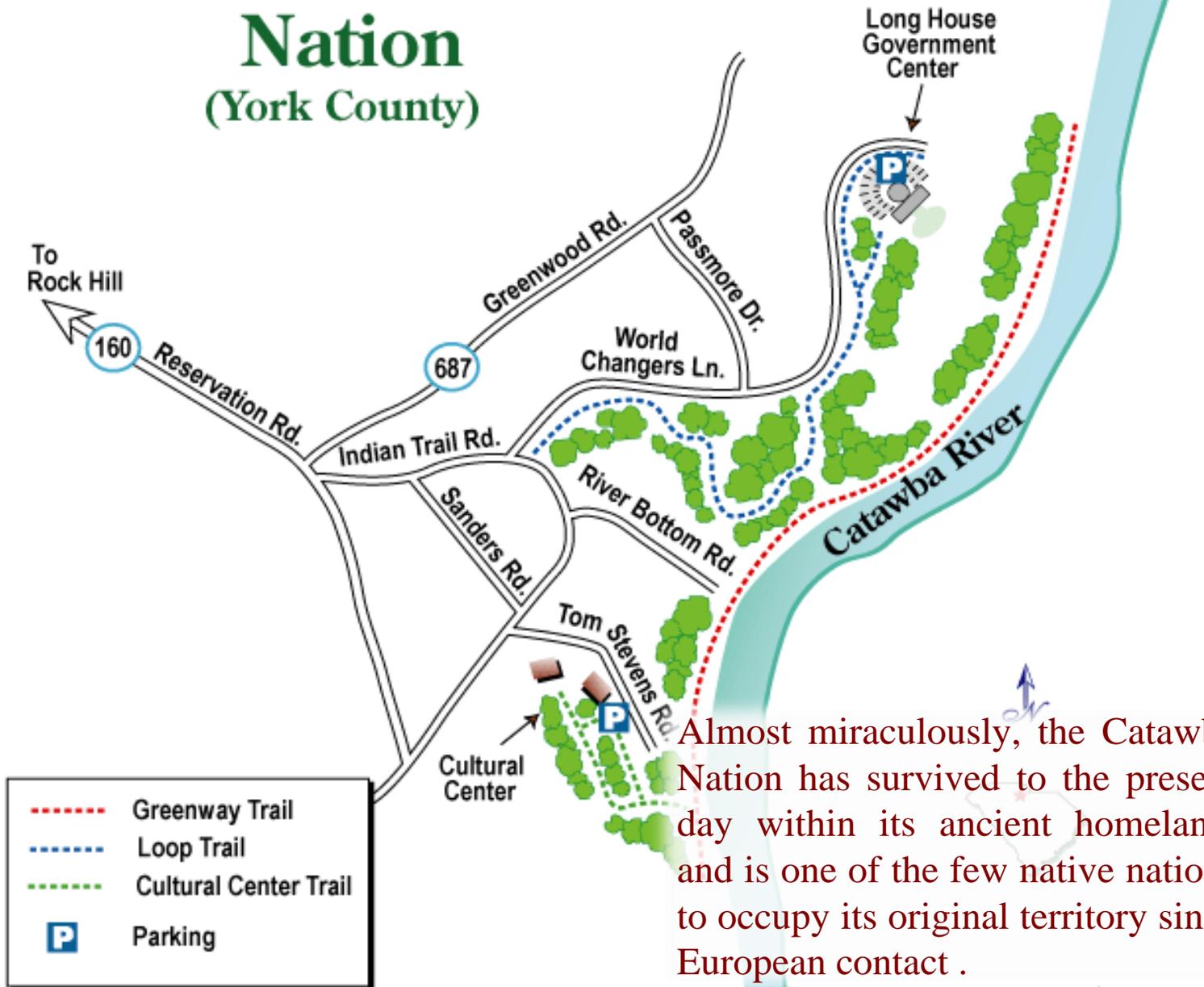


ca. 1715

The powerful native alliance that developed near Nation Ford, where the Great Trading Path crossed the Catawba River, gradually gelled by the mid-18th century to become the Catawba Nation.



Catawba Indian Nation (York County)

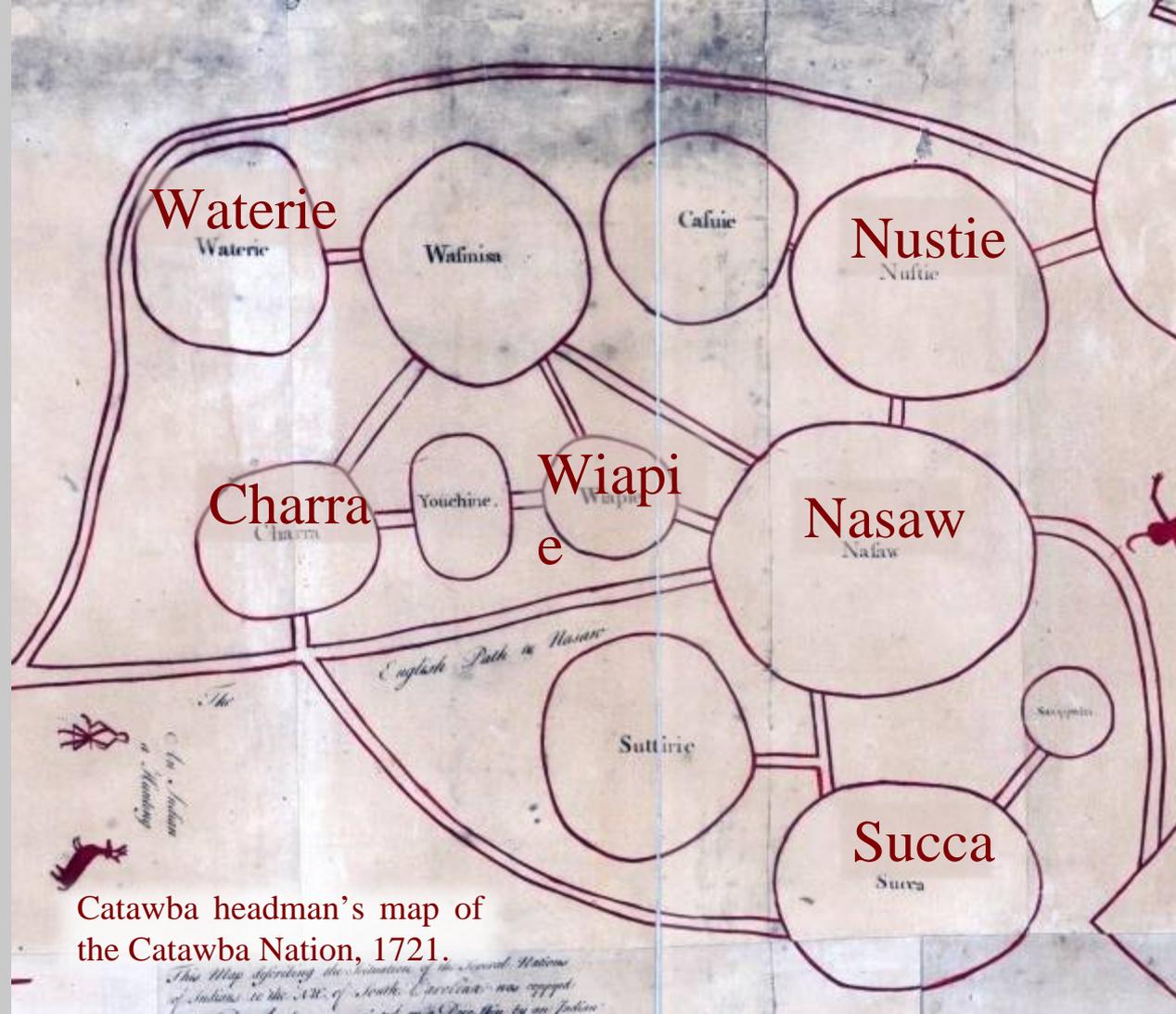


Almost miraculously, the Catawba Nation has survived to the present day within its ancient homeland, and is one of the few native nations to occupy its original territory since European contact .



One key to Catawba survival and success during the colonial era was early and constant military and economic alliance with the English at Charles Town. Catawba warriors protected the Carolina colony from attacks by French-allied natives and acted as ethnic soldiers for the English in their frontier wars. In return, Charles Town granted favored trading status to the Catawbas, and supplied the nation with the firearms, ammunition and other supplies critical to its survival.

Another strategy that the Catawba Nation employed to build and maintain its strength was incorporation of small tribes displaced by disease and warfare. As early as 1717, a Shawnee headman commented on the Catawbans that “there are many nations under that name.”



Catawba headman's map of the Catawba Nation, 1721.

About the year 1743, their nation consisted of almost 400 warriors, of above twenty different dialects. ... the *Katahba*, is the standard, or court-dialect—the *Wataree*, who make up a large town; *Eeno*, *Chewah*, [Cheraw] ... *Canggaree*, *Nachee*, *Yamasee*, *Coosah*, &c.

James Adair, 1775

During the French and Indian Wars (1754–1763), Catawba warriors supported South Carolina and Virginia troops in campaigns in the Ohio country and Canada. In return, the colonies supplied the Catawbas with essential goods; South Carolina even provisioned cattle and corn to Catawba towns when drought caused crop failures.



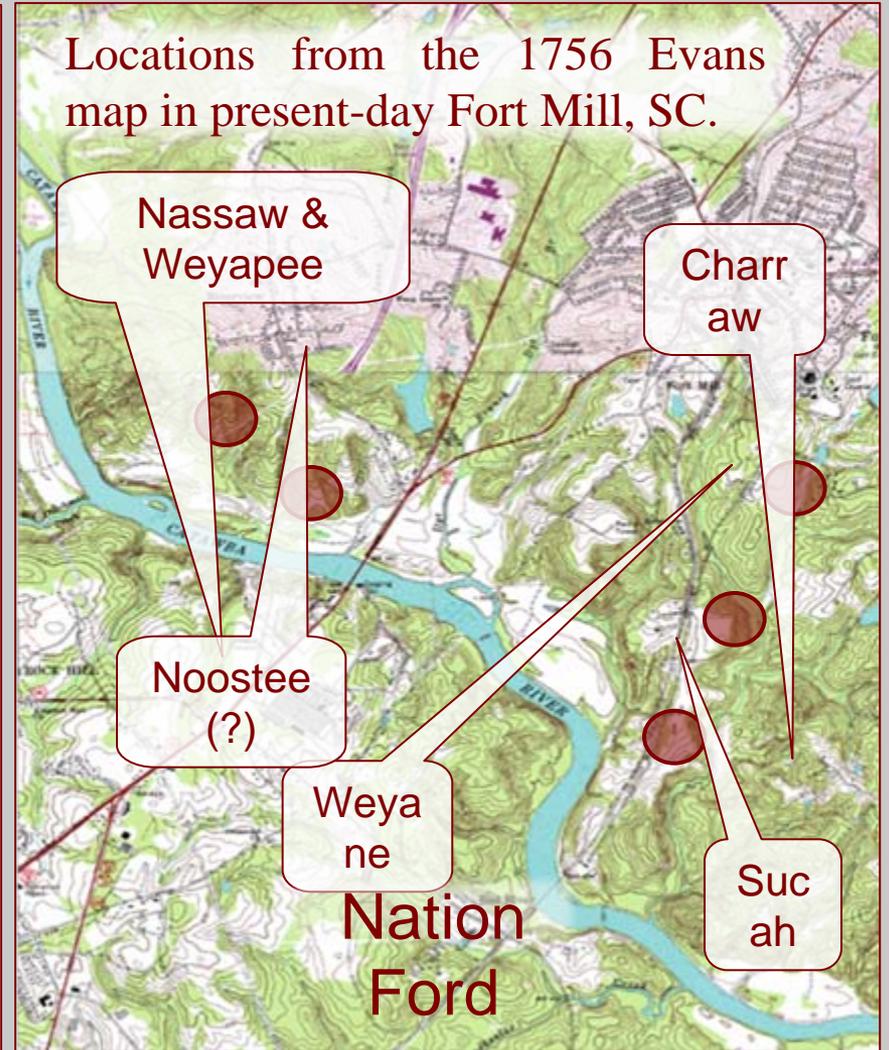
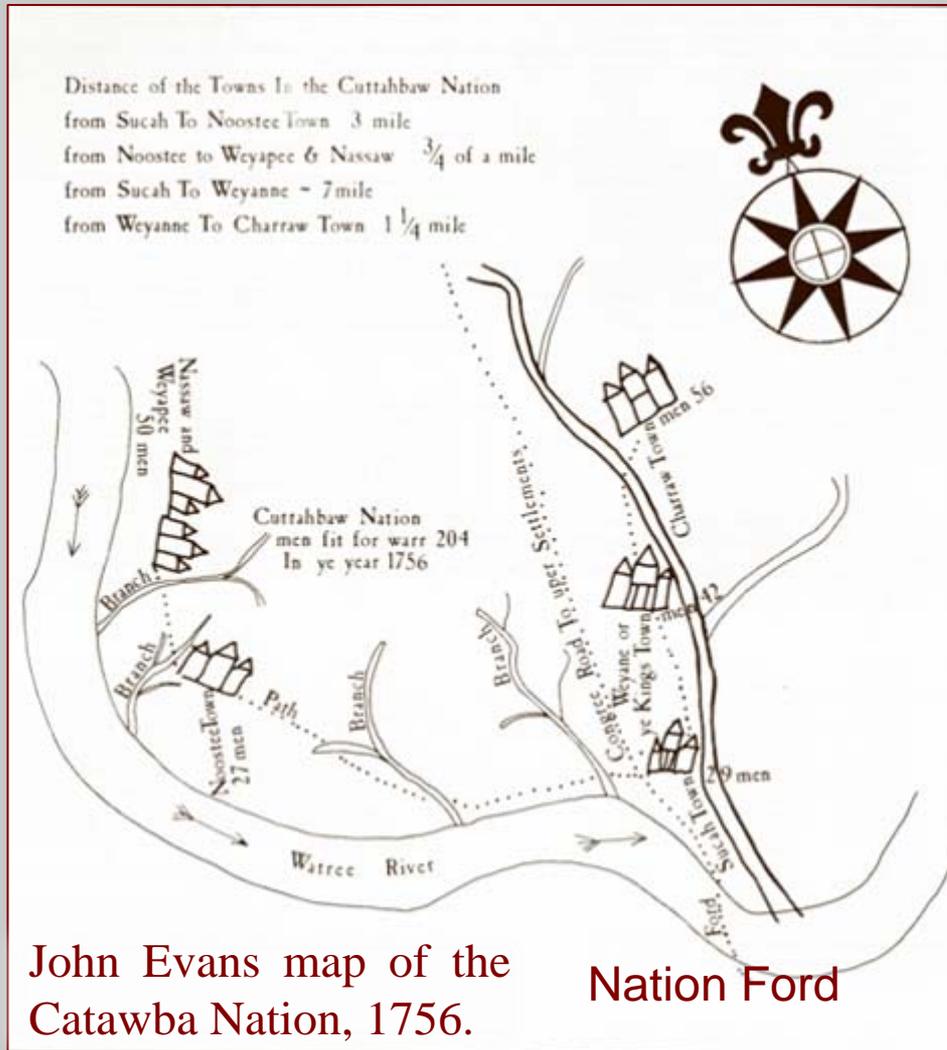
DEFEAT OF GENERAL BRADDOCK, IN THE FRENCH AND INDIAN WAR, IN VIRGINIA, IN 1755.

During the 1750s, Scots-Irish settlers flooded across Catawba territory, establishing communities on upper Sugar Creek (present-day Charlotte) and in “The Waxhaws.” These were lands that Catawba hunters claimed and used regularly, and friction quickly developed between the new settlers and Indians. Because alliance with the Catawbas was critical to the strategic interests of the Carolinas, the colonial governments of North and South Carolina frequently interceded on behalf of the Catawba Nation, averting open hostilities with the new settlers.



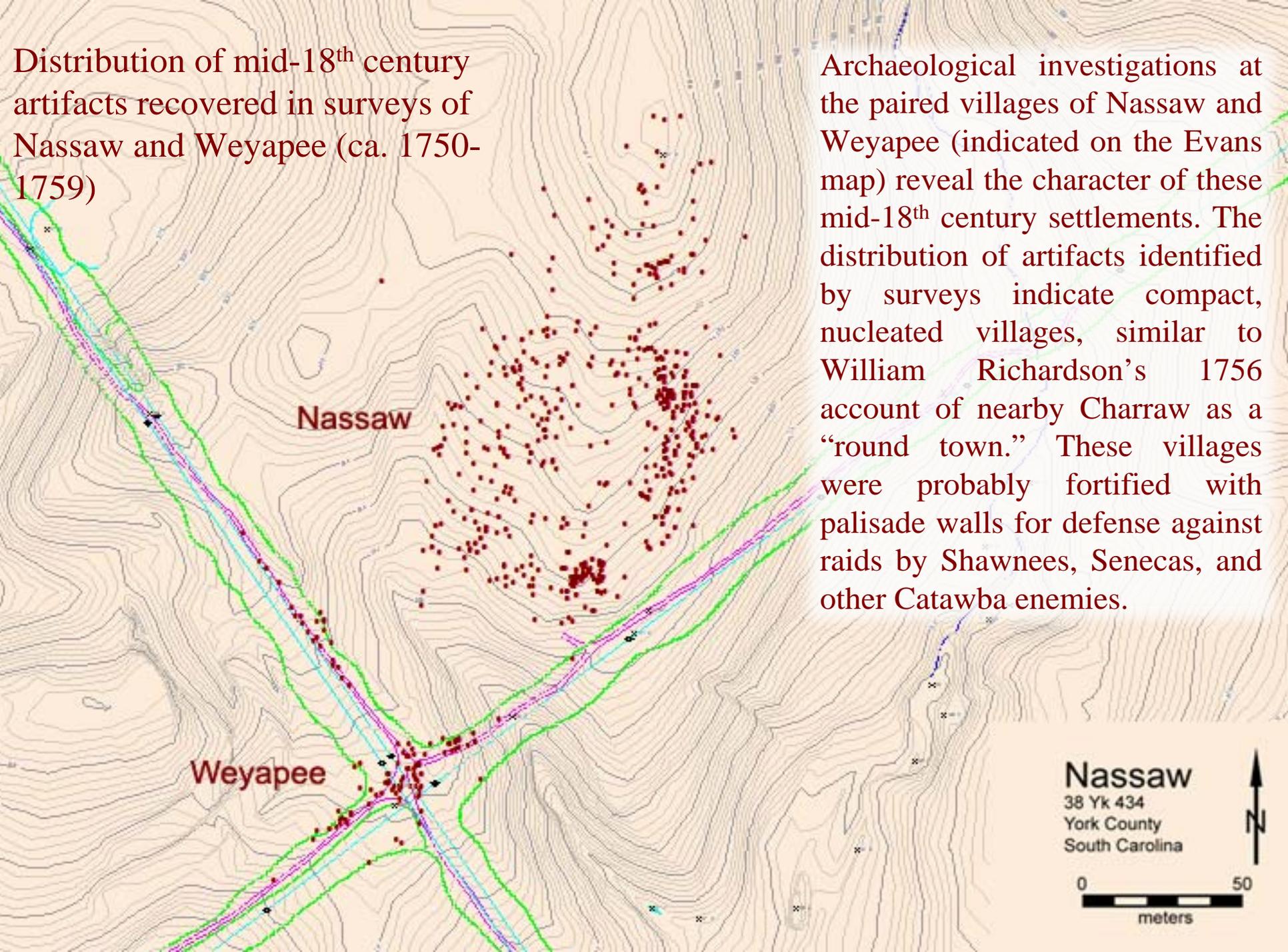
The Archaeology of mid-18th century Catawba

The archaeological record of mid-18th century Catawba villages is concentrated near Nation Ford, at present-day Fort Mill, SC. John Evans' 1756 map of the Catawba Nation is a primary source for locating and identifying these sites on the modern landscape. Other Catawba villages sites in this area (e.g. Spratt's Bottom; Ann Springs Close Greenway site) pre-date the 1756 map.



Distribution of mid-18th century artifacts recovered in surveys of Nassaw and Weyapee (ca. 1750-1759)

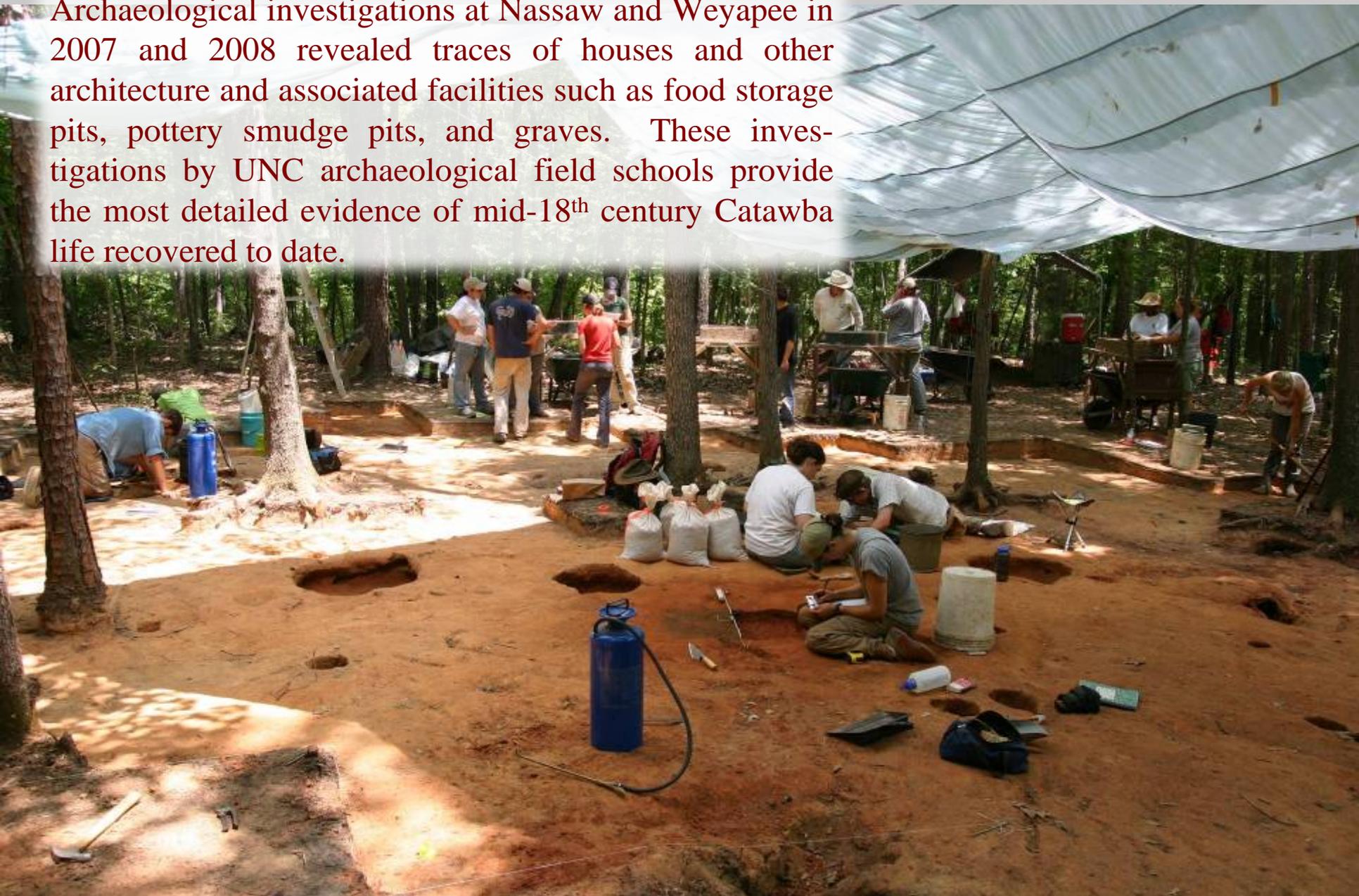
Archaeological investigations at the paired villages of Nassaw and Weyapee (indicated on the Evans map) reveal the character of these mid-18th century settlements. The distribution of artifacts identified by surveys indicate compact, nucleated villages, similar to William Richardson's 1756 account of nearby Charraw as a "round town." These villages were probably fortified with palisade walls for defense against raids by Shawnees, Senecas, and other Catawba enemies.

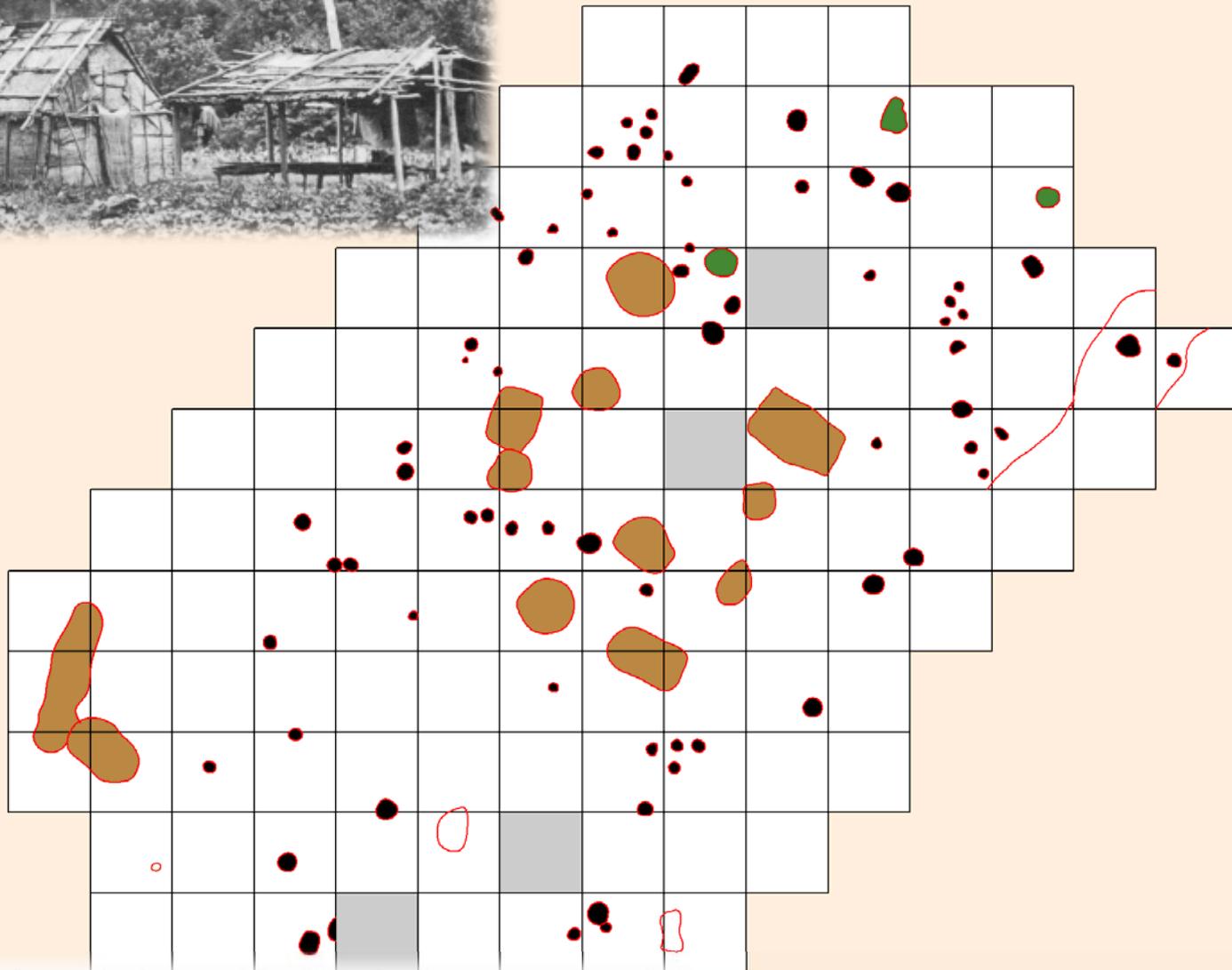


Nassaw
38 Yk 434
York County
South Carolina

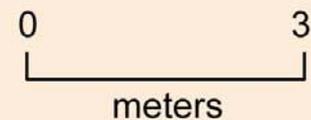
0 50
meters

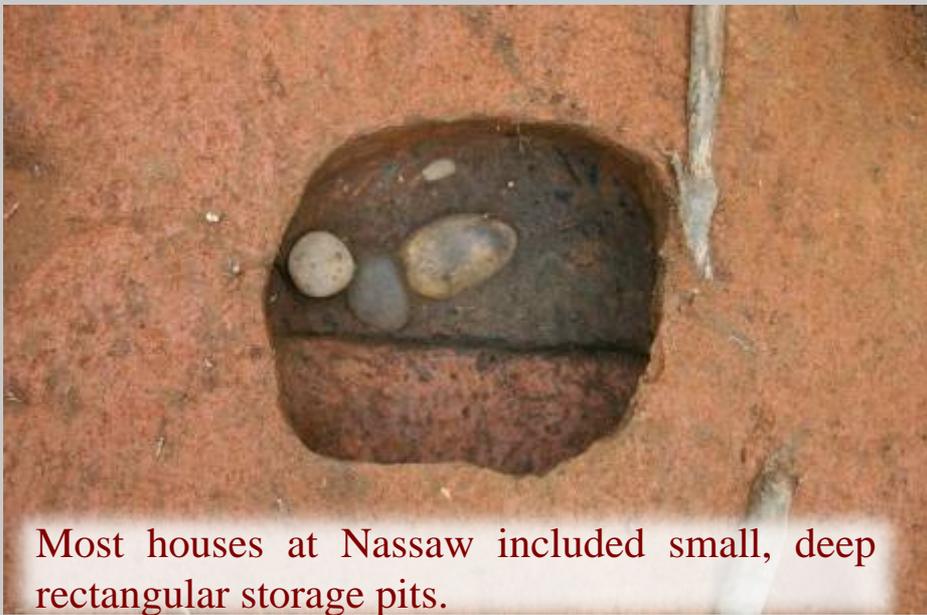
Archaeological investigations at Nassaw and Weyapee in 2007 and 2008 revealed traces of houses and other architecture and associated facilities such as food storage pits, pottery smudge pits, and graves. These investigations by UNC archaeological field schools provide the most detailed evidence of mid-18th century Catawba life recovered to date.





Patterns of postholes at Nassaw indicate rectangular houses built on earthfast post frameworks. These were probably gable-end buildings that resembled the Menominee lodge above. Subfloor pits (shown in brown) stored food and other household goods.





Most houses at Nassaw included small, deep rectangular storage pits.



Posthole with flintlock pistol barrel inserted as post wedge.



Many pits were filled with household garbage after they deteriorated and were no longer useful for storage.



Smudge pits with charred corn cobs and kernels were used to smoke the interiors of pottery vessels as a means of waterproofing low-fired earthenware.



Much of the household refuse recovered from Nassaw and Weyapee was fragments of native pottery vessels, like these sections of large cooking jars. The style of pottery at these sites resembles that made in the Catawba River Valley for several hundred years previous, and differs markedly from Catawba pottery made after 1760.



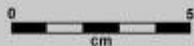
Folded & Notched Rims



Incised Bowl Decorations



Cord-marked Jar Fragments



Carved Paddle Stamped Jar Fragments



Pottery from Nassaw and Weyapee

Trade Goods from Nassaw and Weyapee



Catawba families at Nassaw and Weyapee acquired much of their “hardware” for daily life through trade with itinerant British merchants, or via diplomatic gifts from the South Carolina colonial government. Catawba towns participated in a vigorous deerskin trade as early as the 1670s, and were quickly engaged within a growing global economy that shipped raw leather to Britain and cheap manufactured goods to the Carolina interior.



Nassaw and Weyapee yielded thousands of glass beads once used for personal ornamentation. Most of these are embroidery beads used on clothing, sashes, garters, and other accoutrements. Many of these beads came from Venetian glassworks via the great trading houses of London and Glasgow, then through factors (merchants) in Charles Town before being hauled with other goods by packhorses to the Catawba towns.



Brass kettles, represented at Nassaw and Weyapee by cut and recycled sheet brass and cast bronze lugs, were highly prized by native and European cooks alike. In 1718, a single brass kettle brought 10 deerskins in the South Carolina trade.





Abundant gunparts and ammunition recovered from Nassaw and Weyapee indicate that Catawba warriors and hunters were well armed and heavily militarized, a function of the nation's close alliance with the British in the French and Indian War.

A Scottish dirk blade from a Weyapee pit may reflect Catawba warriors' association with Highland regiments in the Canadian campaigns during the French and Indian War.





Cherokee carved
stone tobacco pipes

English manufactured
kaolin tobacco pipes

Catawba calumet style
clay tobacco pipes

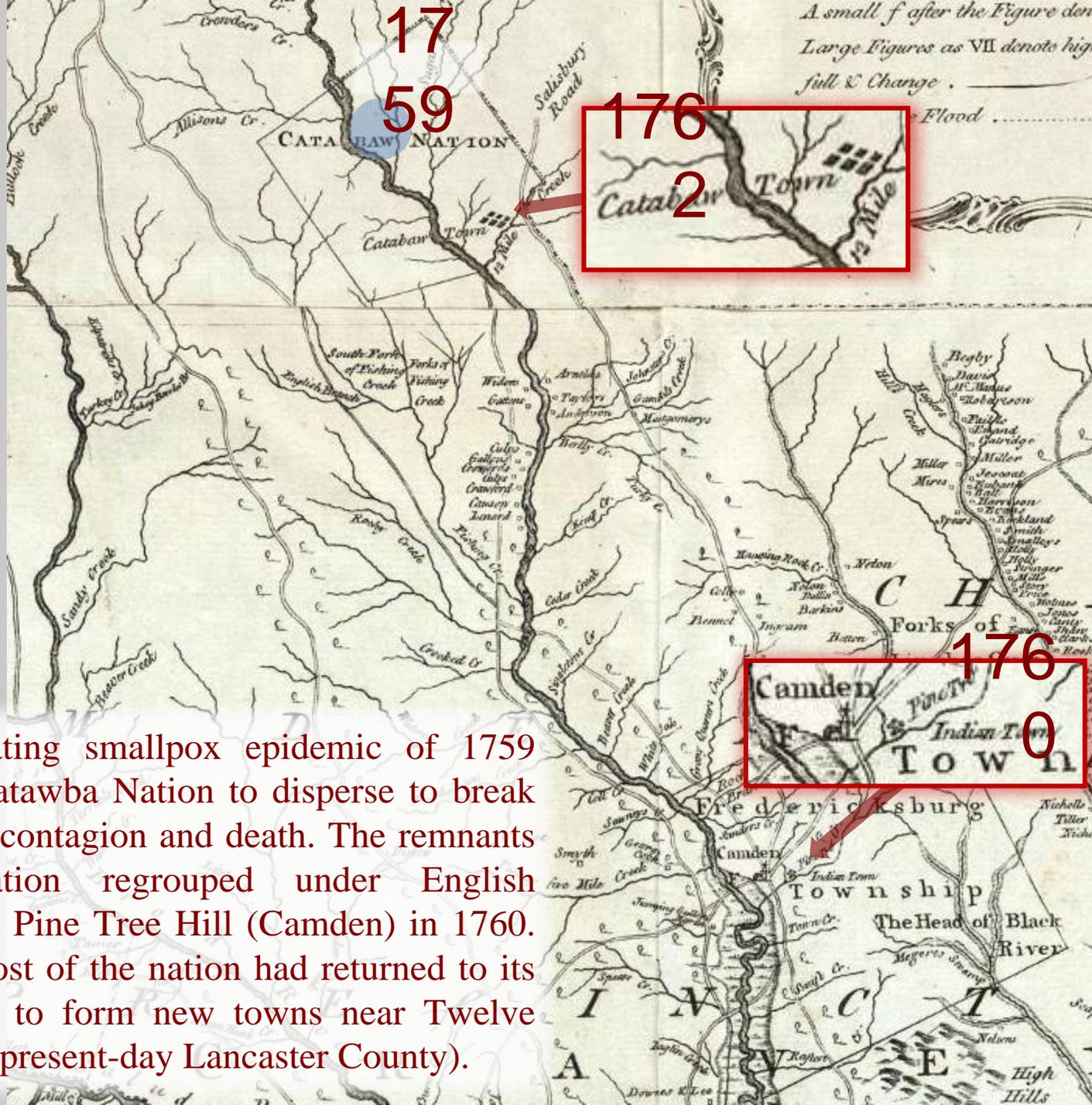
Catawba elbow style
clay tobacco pipe

Carved stone and ceramic tobacco pipes are numerous at Nassaw and Weyapee. Some of the stone pipes closely resemble Cherokee pipes from the 1750s, and are carved from stone from the southern Appalachians. Long stemmed kaolin pipes came from Charles Town traders, who also brought Virginia tobacco (processed in Glasgow factories) to the Catawba towns.

The demise of Nassaw, Weyapee, and the other towns at Nation Ford was an unexpected outcome of Catawba involvement in the French and Indian War. Catawba warriors were present at the siege of Quebec and at the battle on the Plains of Abraham in September 1759. After the fall of Quebec, warriors returning home contracted smallpox in Pennsylvania and brought the contagion to their homes at Nation Ford. Within three months, half of the Catawba Nation had perished and the remnant scattered.



The Death of General Wolfe at Quebec



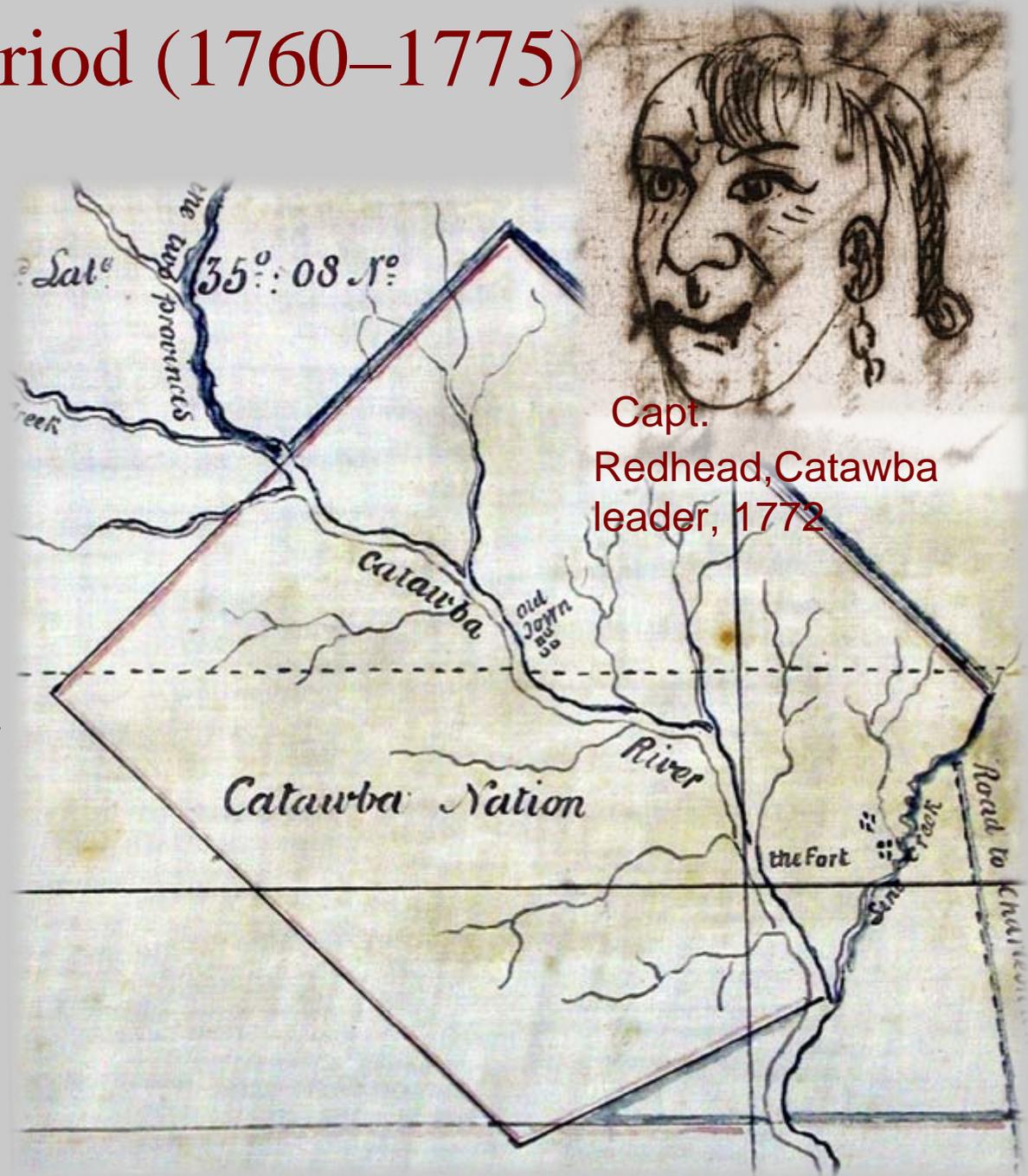
The devastating smallpox epidemic of 1759 drove the Catawba Nation to disperse to break the cycle of contagion and death. The remnants of the nation regrouped under English protection at Pine Tree Hill (Camden) in 1760. By 1762, most of the nation had returned to its old territory to form new towns near Twelve Mile Creek (present-day Lancaster County).

Late Colonial Period (1760–1775)

In the late Colonial Period, Catawba leaders negotiated with Crown officials to secure title within a defined boundary to protect their core territory from encroaching settlers. This boundary, surveyed in 1763, is partially preserved in the NC–SC state line.

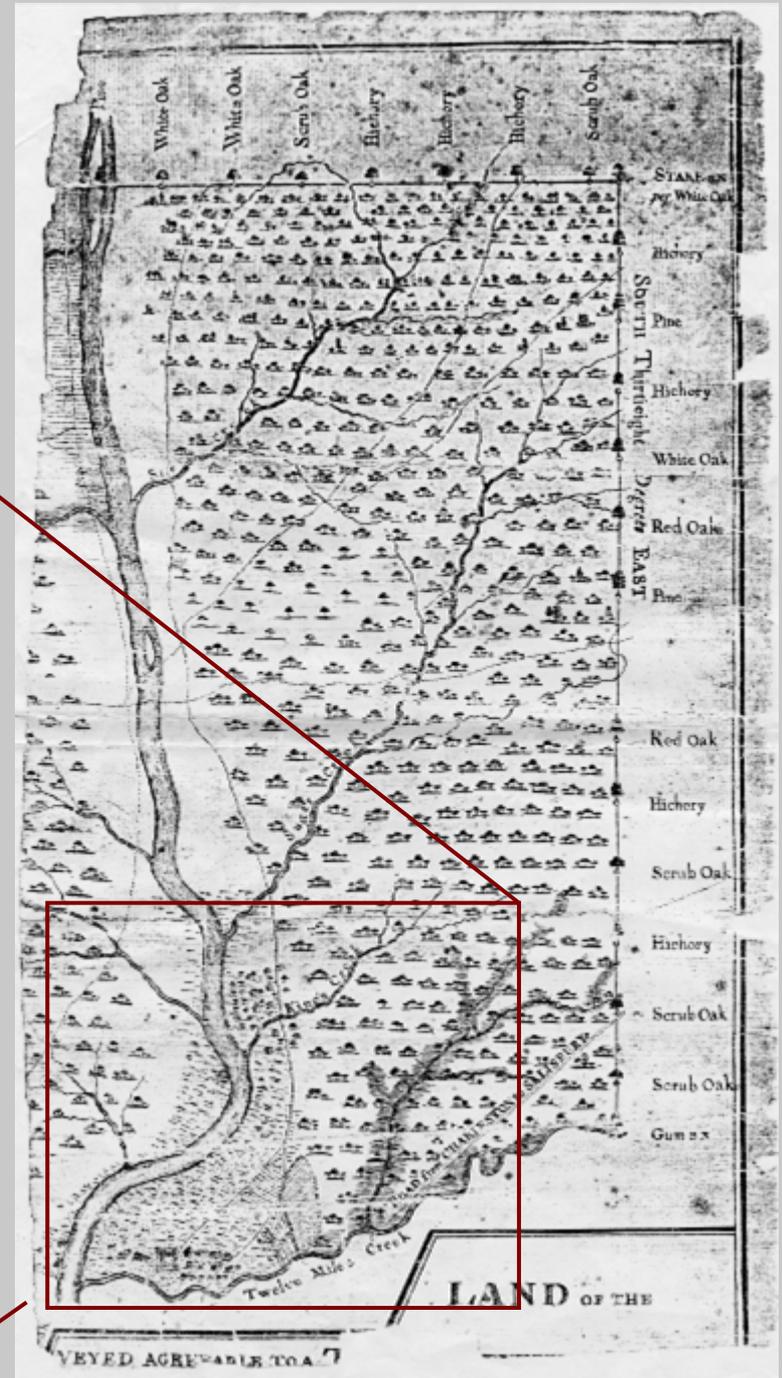
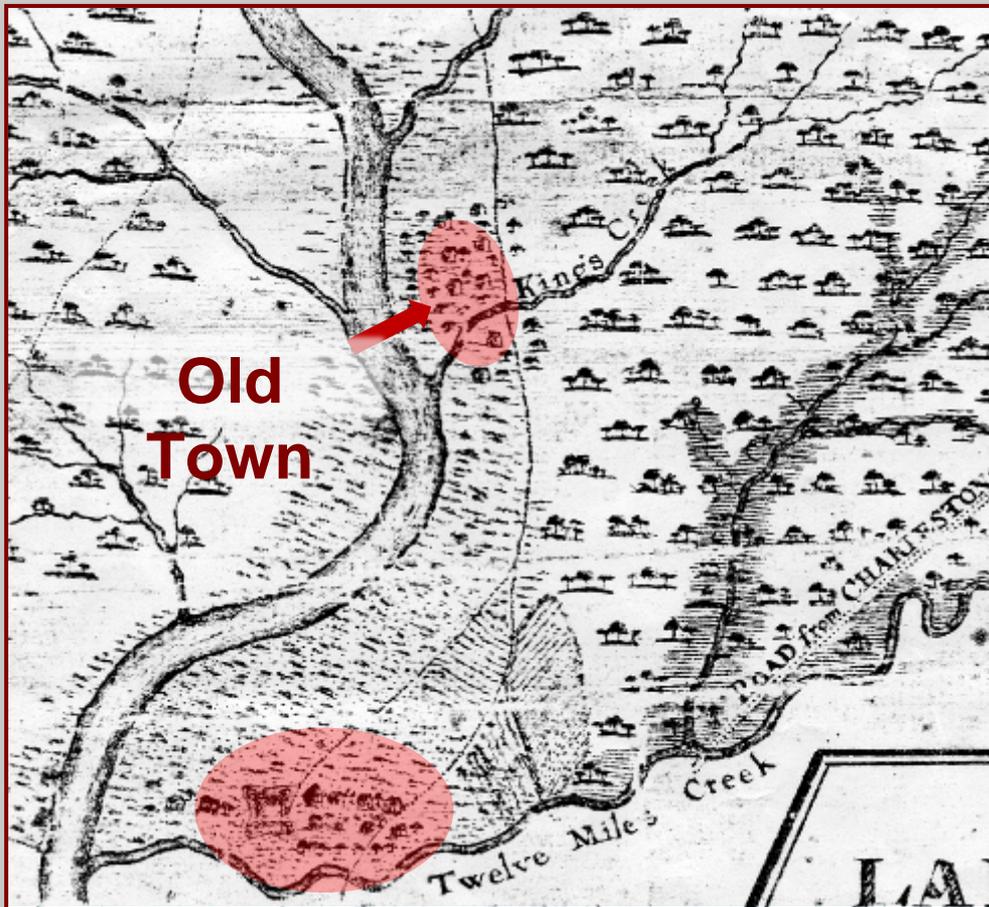
The Catawba Lands are a very fine body, it's a square of 14½ miles, they occupy but a very small part, their Town is built up in a very close manner and the field that they plant does not exceed 100 acres...

Wm. Moultrie, 1772



Capt.
Redhead, Catawba
leader, 1772

Samuel Wyly's 1763 survey of the lands reserved to the Catawba Nation indicates the locations of two towns. The town at Twelve Mile Creek included a fort built by South Carolina. The northern settlement, now called the Old Town Site, was King Haigler's village.



Catawba Old Town

(ca. 1762–1780, 1781–1800)

Lancaster County, South Carolina



Archaeologists located the Old Town Site, seat of one of the Catawba villages depicted on the 1763 Wyly map, in 2003. Investigations here recovered evidence of two occupation episodes, ca. 1762–1780 and ca. 1781–1800, with a brief abandonment of the town due to the British invasion of 1780.

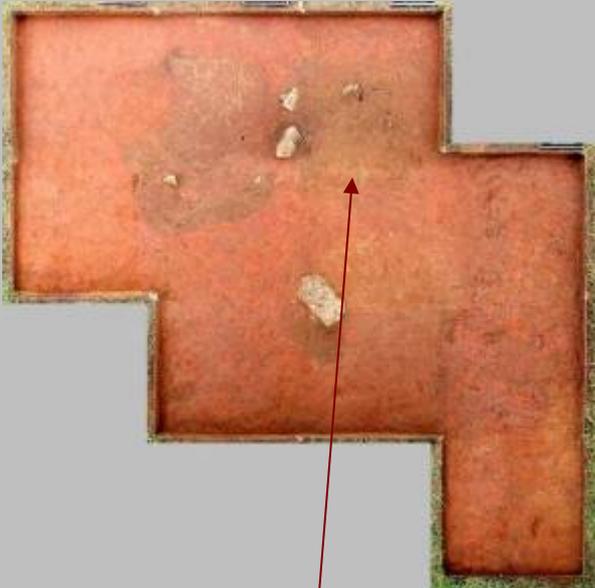




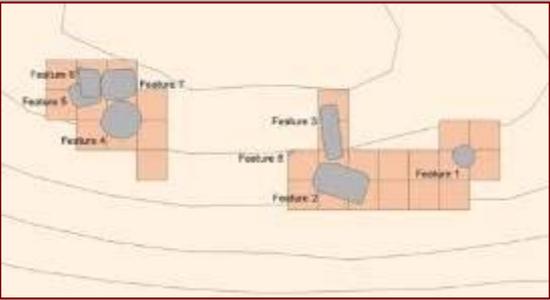
The 2003 investigations at Old Town uncovered a series of pits features, small cellars that were once beneath Catawba log cabins, similar to the dwellings of the Catawbas' Scots Irish neighbors.

Catawba Old Town

Photographic Mosaic of 2003 Excavation



one meter



Excavation Plan



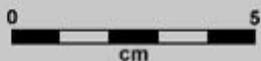
Cellar Pit (Feature 7)



Cellar Pit (Feature 2)



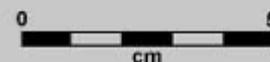
Shallow Pit (Feature 1)



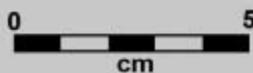
pedestal bases & foot rings



pedestal base



red-painted pan rim



black-painted English-style plate



polished bowl fragments

Catawba Earthenware from Old Town

Pits at Old Town yielded pottery that is radically different from the Nassaw and Weyapee wares. The plain and polished pottery from Old Town represents English pottery forms. Catawba potters may have adopted these forms and finishes while the nation was at Camden, 1760–1761.



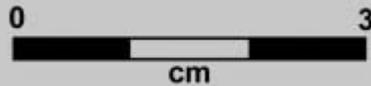
English ceramics from Old Town include fragments of an English porcelain punch bowl and stoneware cups.



bullet
mold



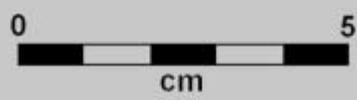
lead shot



rifle
buttplate



gunflints



Gunparts and ammunition from Old Town indicate that Catawba hunters and warriors abandoned cheap trade muskets in favor of state of the art rifles made in the American backcountry.



176
9

English George III halfpennies from Old Town may reflect use of currency in the Catawbas' regular interactions with Scots-Irish neighbors in the nearby Waxhaws settlements.



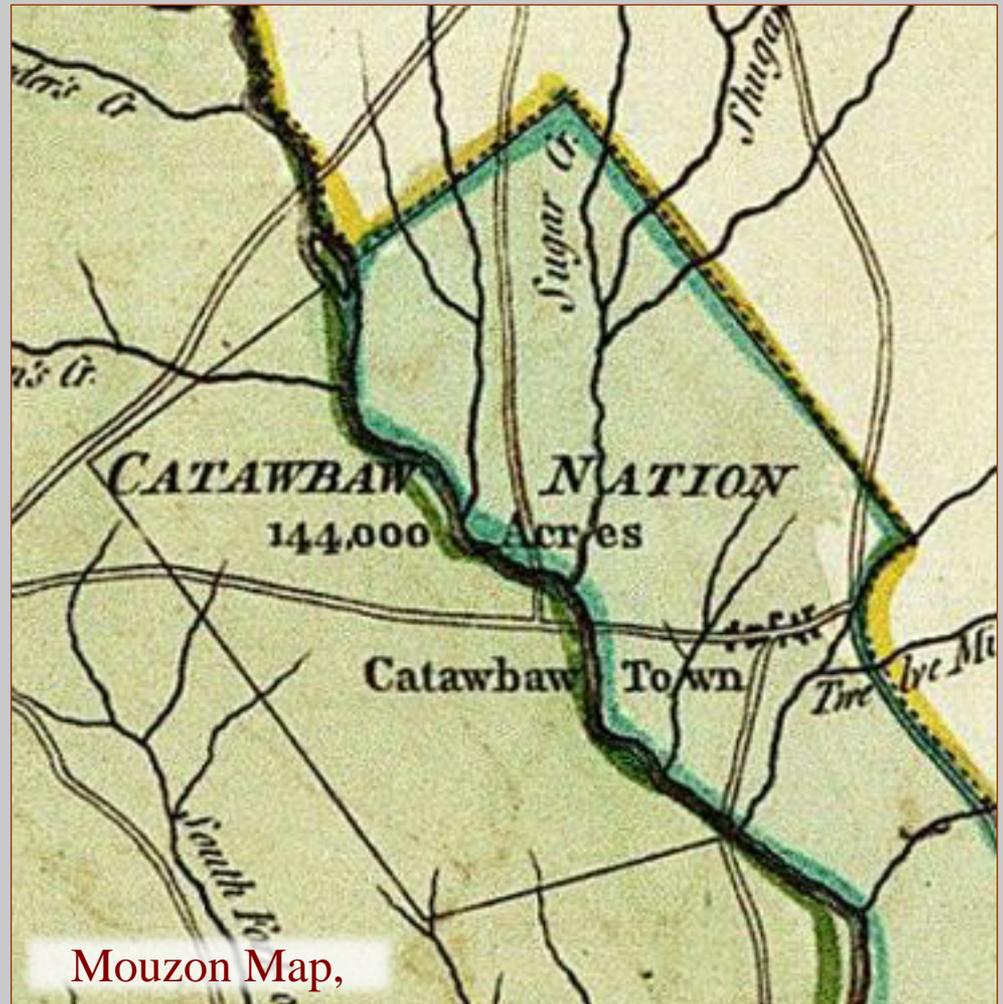
Personal ornaments from Old Town indicate continued use of commercially manufactured goods to produce native costume and project native identity. The small triangular nose bangles (lower right) were part of a native fashion wave that swept eastern North America in the 1770s.

Revolutionary War Period (1776–1781)

During the American Revolution, the Catawbas sided with their Whig neighbors, and served with American forces from 1775 until 1781. This small Indian nation boasted the highest per capita rate of service of any community in the colonies.

The day after Lord Rawdon reached Waxhaw, he with a life guard of twenty cavalry, visited the Catawba Indian towns, six or eight miles distance from his encampment. These towns are situated above the mouth of Twelve Mile Creek, on the east bank of the Catawba River.

Graham, 1827



Mouzon Map,
1775

The advance of Lord Cornwallis' army in 1780 drove the Catawbas from their homes, and the nation took refuge in Virginia. When they returned in 1781, they rebuilt their homes at Old Town.



2009 investigations at Old Town revealed evidence of the reoccupation of the village after the American Revolution



Here, students and their instructors clean the surface of Catawba storage pits at Old Town.

These excavations revealed multiple subfloor cellars that indicate repeated house rebuilding.

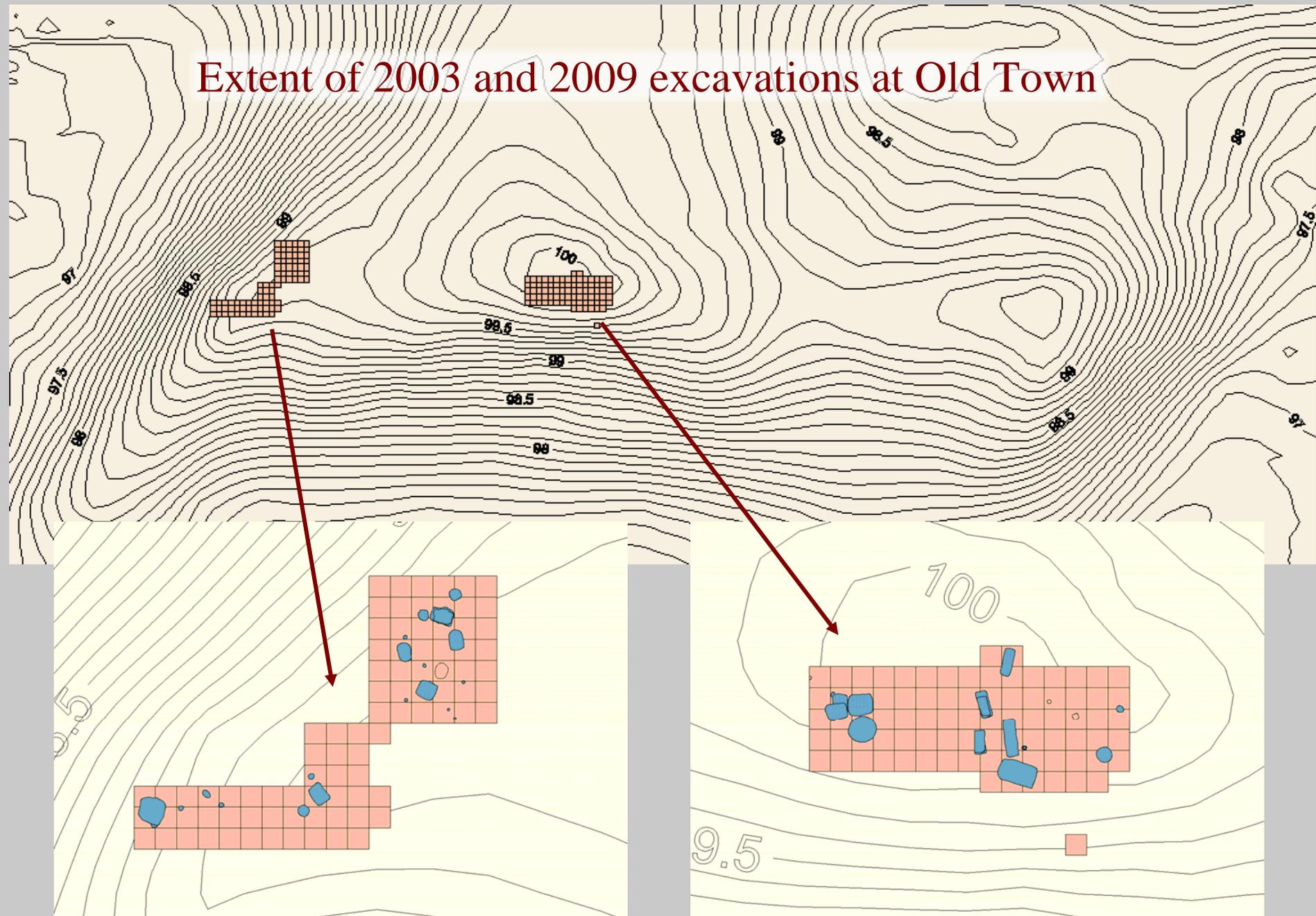


Photographic Mosaic of 2009 Excavation



Investigations at Old Town also revealed a series of coffin burials. These graves were mapped and documented, but were not excavated.

Extent of 2003 and 2009 excavations at Old Town





raw
potter's
clay

ceramic pan
fragments

pistol barrel

deer antler tine

Late 18th century pits at Old Town closely resemble food storage cellars documented in European and African cabin contexts in the Carolinas. After the pits were no longer used for food storage, villagers dumped household refuse to fill the empty holes.



Old Town pits yielded abundant evidence of pottery production for the growing ceramic trade with European settlers.

New Town (1800–1820)

By the beginning of the 19th century, the Catawba community had shifted to an upland ridge about a mile north of the Old Town site. The community at this location was known at the time as New Town. The New Town community (about 200 individuals) was largely dependent on leasing the Catawbas' reserved lands and on the production and sale of pottery for their livelihood.

Their Nation is reduced to a very small number, and [they] chiefly live in a little town, which in England would be only called a village.

Rev. Thomas Coke 1791



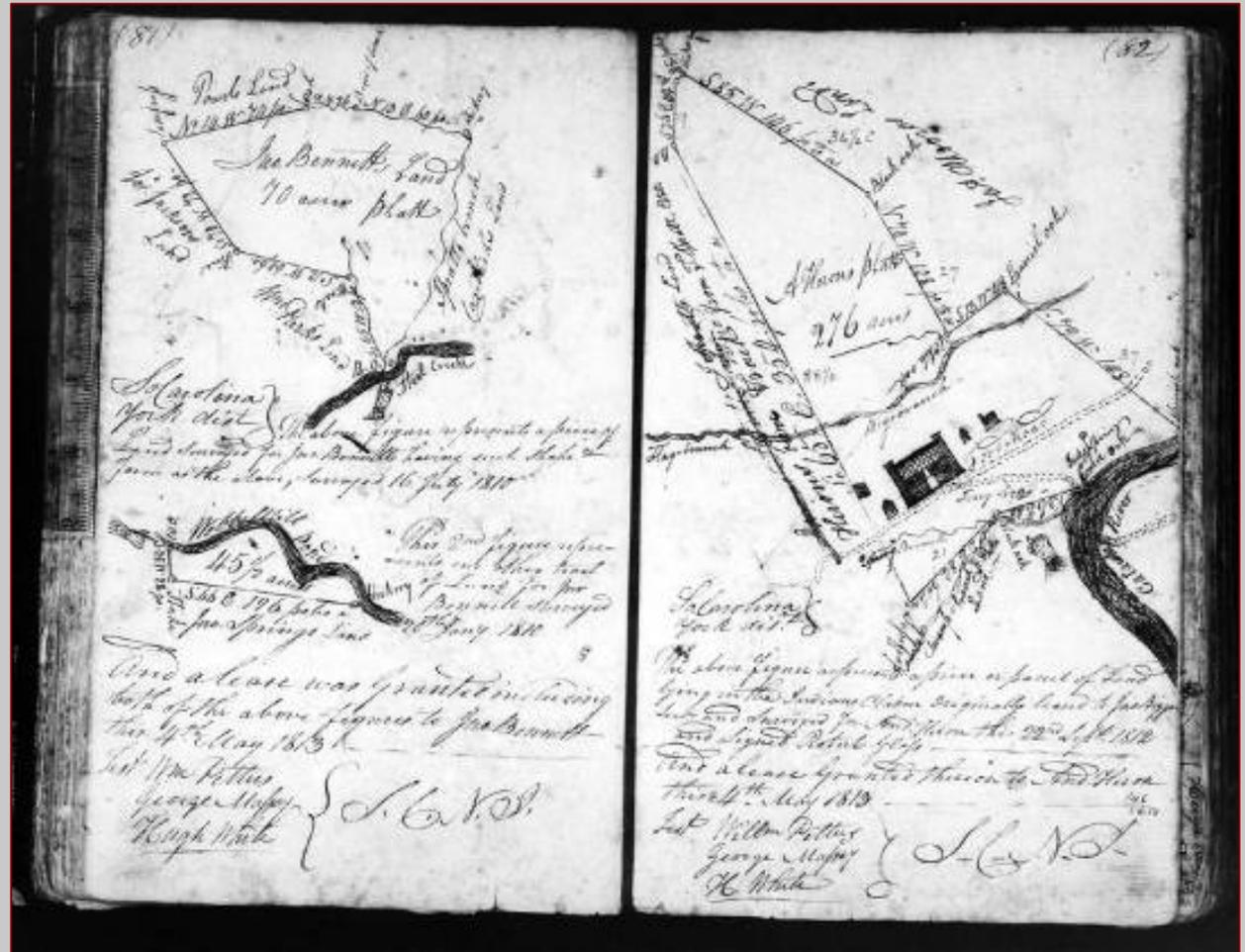
New Town

Price-Strothers
Map 1808

Catawba Land Leases

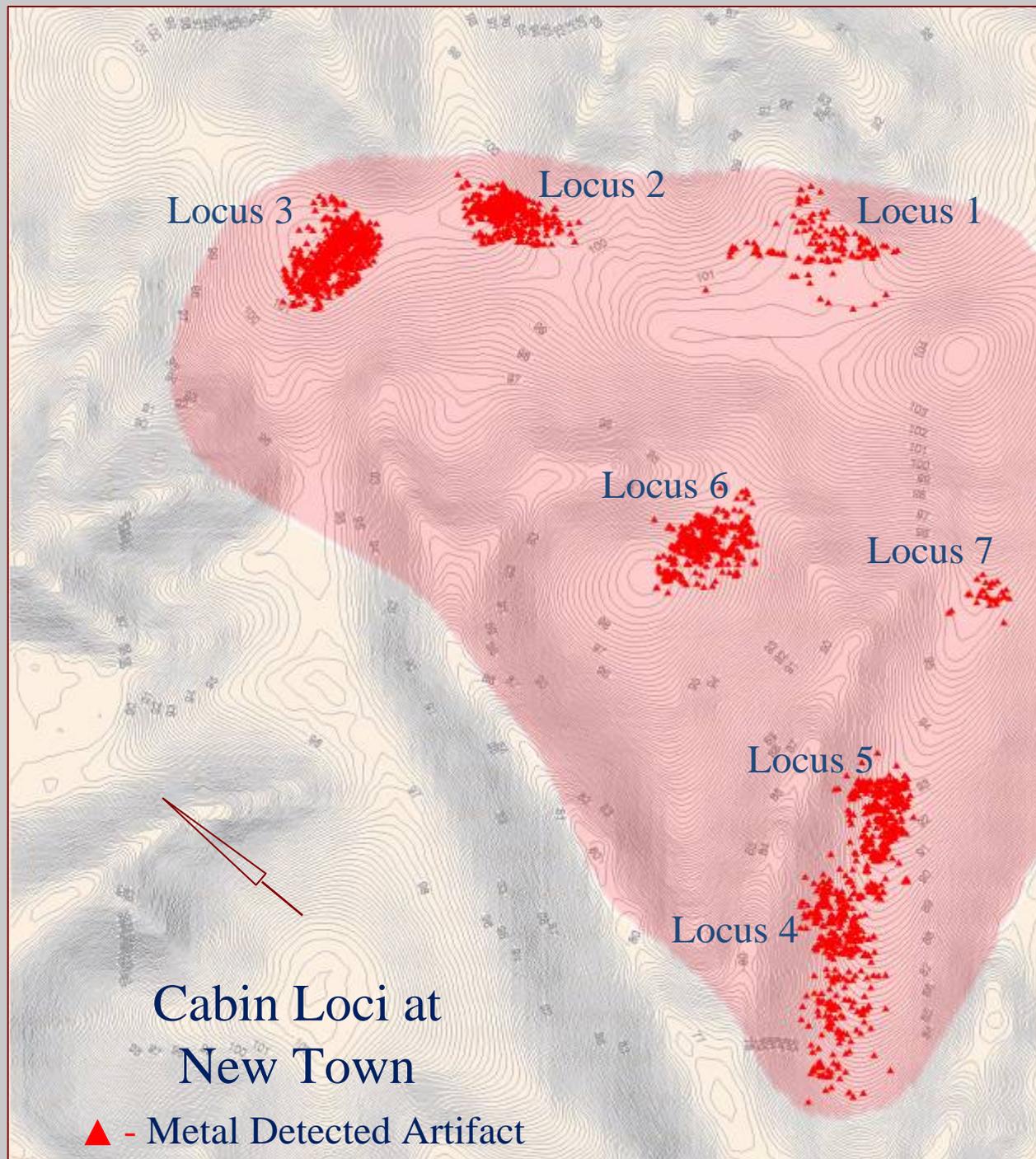
“These lands are almost all leased out to white settlers, for 99 years, renewable, at the rate of from 15 to \$20 per annum for each plantation, of about 300 acres.”

Robert Mills 1826



Plats of Leased Lands in the Catawba Nation

Systematic metal detection surveys at New Town identified seven clusters of Federal period metal artifacts that correspond to the locations of individual cabins or small groups of cabins. This pattern of dispersed cabins corresponds to Calvin Jones' 1815 account of New Town as "6 or 8 houses facing an oblong square," along with the nearby homes of Sally New River and Col. Jacob Ayres



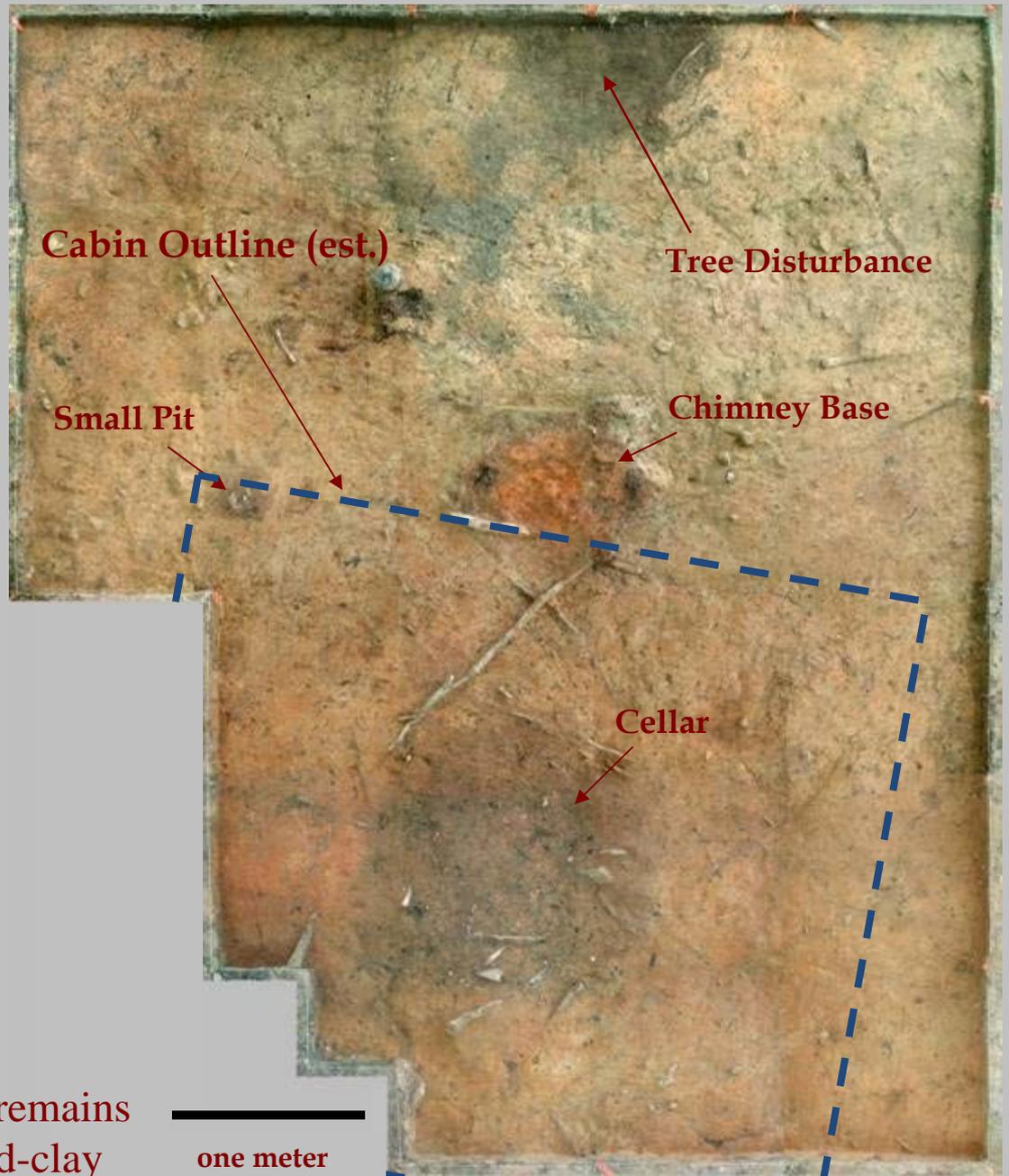


Troweling Top of Subsoil



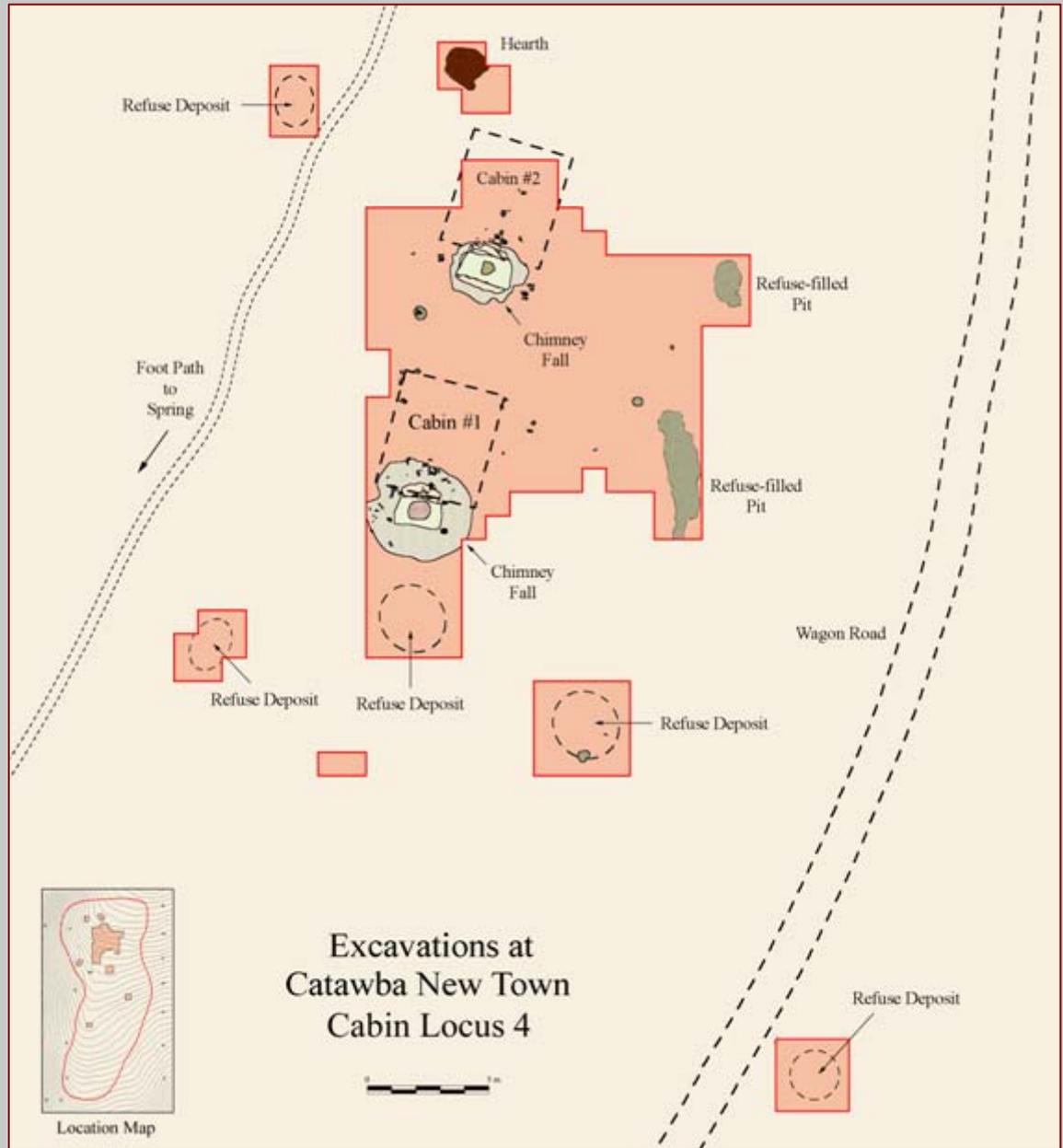
Cellar (partly excavated)

Excavations at Locus 2 revealed the remains of a dirt-floored cabin with a stick-and-clay chimney and a subfloor cellar.



Photographic Mosaic of Excavation

Excavations at Loci 4 and 5 revealed remnants of cabins with pierstones and elevated hearths, indicating raised floors. In 1815, Calvin Jones observed that “[Sally] New Rivers and [Jacob] Airs (Ayers) houses had floors - all have chimneys.” Locus 4 is provisionally identified as the home of Sally New River, the first house that Jones encountered as he approached New Town from the Waxhaws area. This area included two cabin seats marked by chimney mounds, associated refuse deposits, and features such as a wagon road and foot path that date to the New Town occupation.

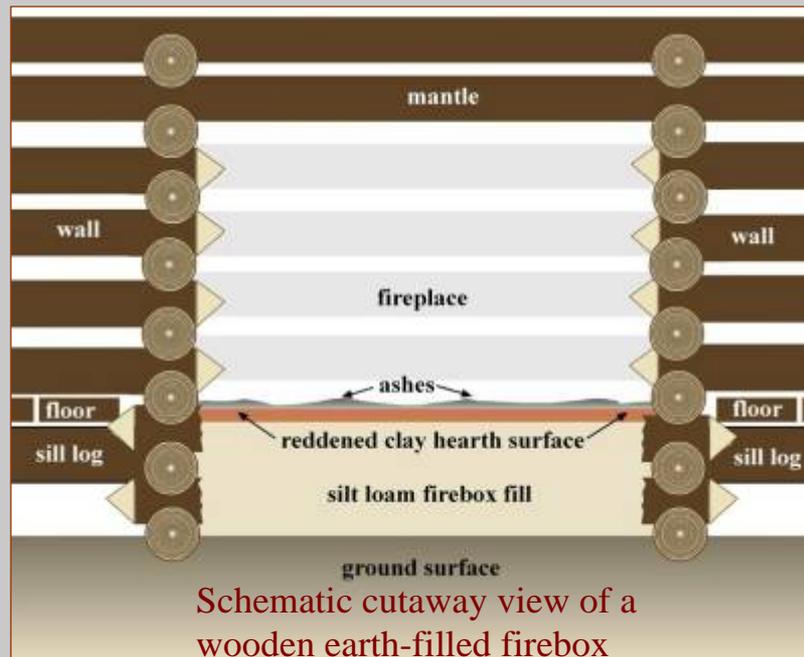


Elevated chimney bases at Loci 4 and 5 are the remains of earth-filled fireboxes with elevated hearths at the level of raised wooden cabin floors. These cabins probably resembled the housing of many of the Catawbas' white neighbors. Other dirt floored cabins at New Town were like the homes that Catawba informants describe to Frank Speck:

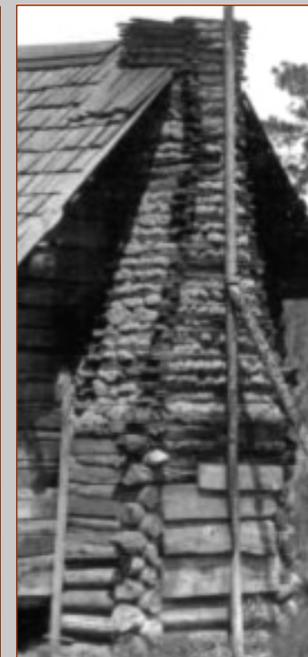
The Catawba house, of as early a type as could be remembered by any of the older people in their childhood, was a small structure of either plain unbarked, or of peeled and roughly squared logs. From the smallest of these houses twelve by eighteen feet in dimension intended for one small family, they ranged to those seldom more than six feet larger in mean measurements. Lacking windows, having only a door at the leeward end, with hard trodden dirt floors, they had a fireplace at one end, of stone construction, and slat bedsteads on the long sides to accommodate the sleepers. Such homes were to be seen until lately.



Locus 4 (Sally New River Cabin(?)) chimney base



Schematic cutaway view of a wooden earth-filled firebox





Snaffle Bits



Horseshoe



Singletree Clips & Chain



Stirrup



Harness Ring



Harness Buckle



Riding and draft hardware is especially prominent at New Town, consistent with the importance of horses as the Catawbas' primary form of wealth, and the role of horses as transportation as the Catawbas pursued the itinerant pottery trade.



pistol lock

gunflints



brass escutcheon



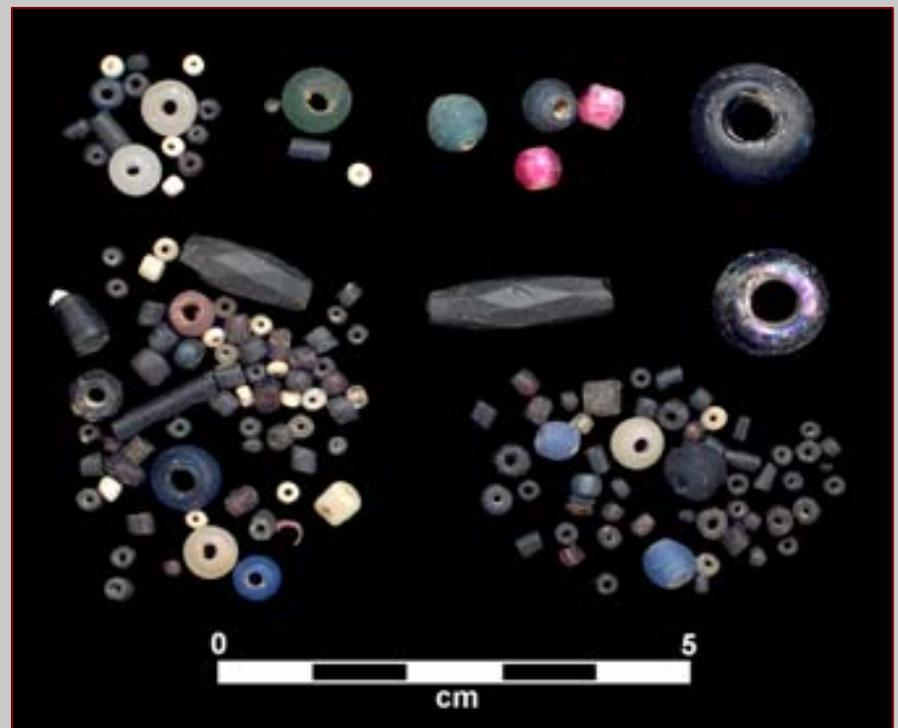
lead ball



brass buttplate



Gun parts and ammunition are much less common at New Town than at Nassaw or Old Town, a pattern that reflects the reduced roles of hunting and warfare for Catawbans in the early 19th century.

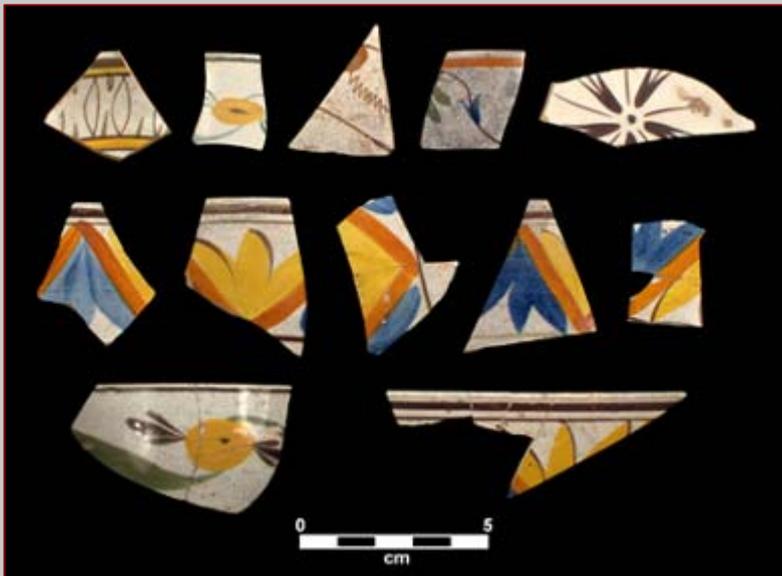


Almost all the men and women wore silver nose-rings, hanging from the middle gristle of the nose; and some of them had little silver hearts hanging from the rings.... In general they dressed like the white people. But a few of the men were quite luxurious in their dress, even wearing ruffles, and very showy suits of clothes made of cotton.

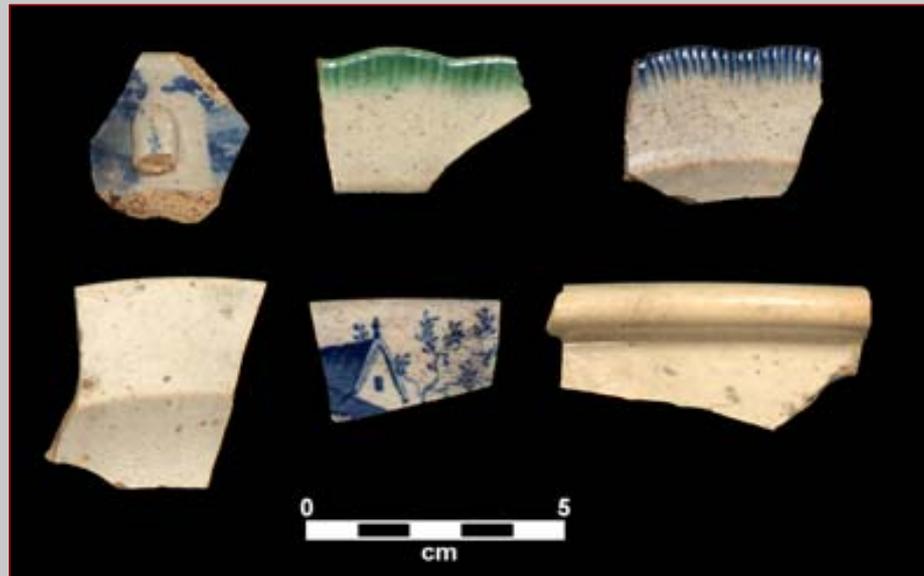
Thomas Coke, 1791

Coke's account of western dress mixed with native ornamentation among the Catawbas is born out by numerous brass buttons and other clothing hardware found alongside silver earbobs, nose bangles, and glass beads.





English hand-painted pearlware



English shell-edged pearlware, transfer- printed pearlware, and creamware

New Town kitchens and tables were well stocked with commercial goods purchased from local stores. These wares may reflect adoption of western foodways and dining practice by Catawba families.



Glass stoppers and container fragments



Cast iron kettle fragment



Sally New River's
milkpan, New Town

Fragments of Catawba-made ceramic vessels are the most prevalent artifacts at New Town. The potters of New Town made wares for their own use, but also built thousands of vessels for sale or trade on South Carolina's plantations. When Jones visited New Town in 1815, he saw: *“Women making pans - Clay from the river - shape them with their hands and burn them with bark which makes the exposed side a glossy black. A pitcher a quarter of a dollar. Sell pans frequently for the full [measure] of meal. Saw some sitting on their beds and making pans.”*



Contexts at New Town yielded more than 62,000 ceramic fragments that represent a wide range of vessel forms. These wares are plain or burnished; some are decorated with highlights of red sealing wax.



New Town vessels include flat-bottomed milkpan, cups and bowls with footrings, soup plates, jars, and pipkins. With the exception of cooking jars with thickened rims, these forms derive from European vessels, and reflect Catawba potters' efforts to meet market demands.

Catawba potters traveled from New Town to build and sell their wares on plantations and in towns throughout South Carolina. This itinerant trade supplied much needed income for Catawba families, and regularly renewed the Catawbas' political ties with Carolina's elites.

"... it was the custom of the Catawba Indians ... to come down, at certain seasons, from their far homes in the interior, to the seaboard, bringing to Charleston a little stock of earthen pots and pans ... which they bartered in the city

They did not, however, bring their pots and pans from the nation, but descending to the Lowcountry empty handed, in groups or families, they squatted down on the rich clay lands along the Edisto, ... there established themselves in a temporary abiding place, until their simple potteries had yielded them a sufficient supply of wares with which to throw themselves into the market."

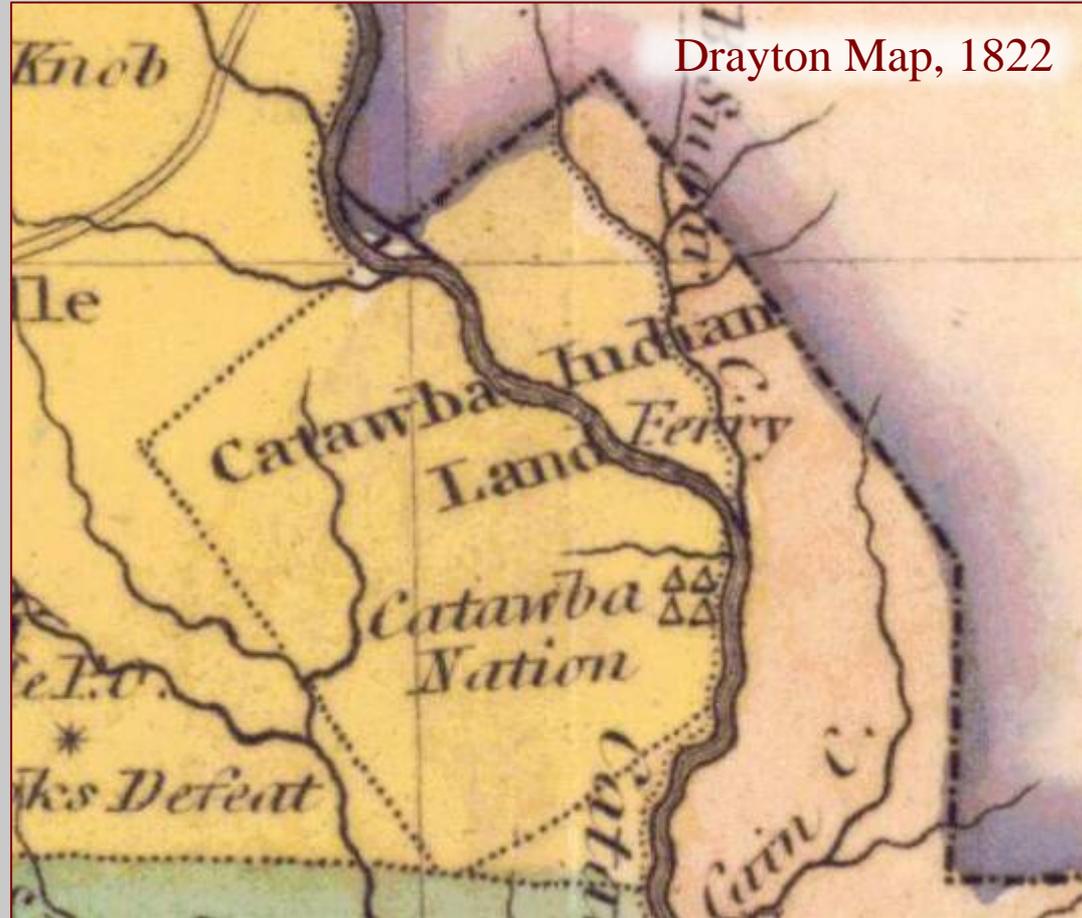
William Gilmore Simms, 1841



Rachael Brown
Catawba potter,
1907

Late Reservation Period (1821–1840)

Catawba families abandoned New Town after the death of Sally New River (ca. 1820) and moved across to the river to join the remainder of the Catawba community. The Catawba Nation maintained its reserve until 1840, when leaders signed the Treaty of Nation Ford and ceded the tribe's lands to the state of South Carolina. Most of the community then moved to join the Eastern Band Cherokees in North Carolina, but returned in the late 1840s to the old Catawba homelands



Strategies that enabled the Catawba Nation to survive and adapt to the rapidly changing political, economic, and social conditions in the post-contact era from 1700 to 1840 include:

- **multi-ethnic coalescence**
- **militarization**
- **territorial management**
- **cottage industries**
- **itinerancy to access economic & political resources**



Catawba children screening Nassaw feature soils,
2007



Today, the Catawba Nation still thrives within its ancient territory. The UNC Catawba Project, in cooperation with the Catawba Indian Nation cultural preservation program, is committed to bringing to light evidence of the nation's rich history for the benefit of present and future generations of Catawba people.

Unfortunately, this rich heritage is imminently threatened by rapid commercial and residential development in the Fort Mill and Indian Land areas. Private development that is not subject to federal review and compliance has already destroyed a number of important Catawba sites.



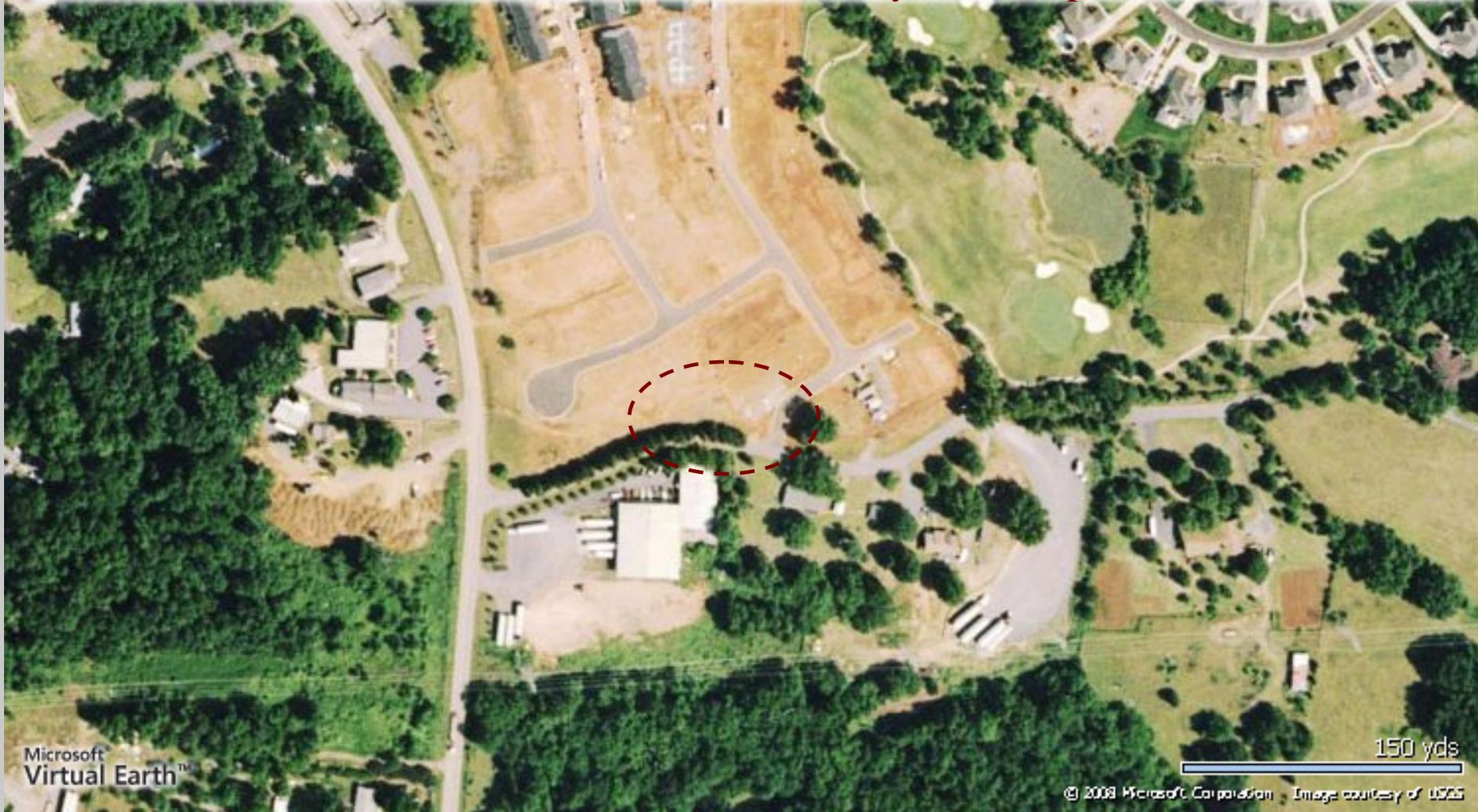
The Bowers Site (38La483), an early 19th-Century Catawba cabin. Surrounding cabin seats were recently destroyed by development of a subdivision and golf course.

Each site that is destroyed is like a one-of-a-kind rare book of irreplaceable information taken from the library—and gone forever.



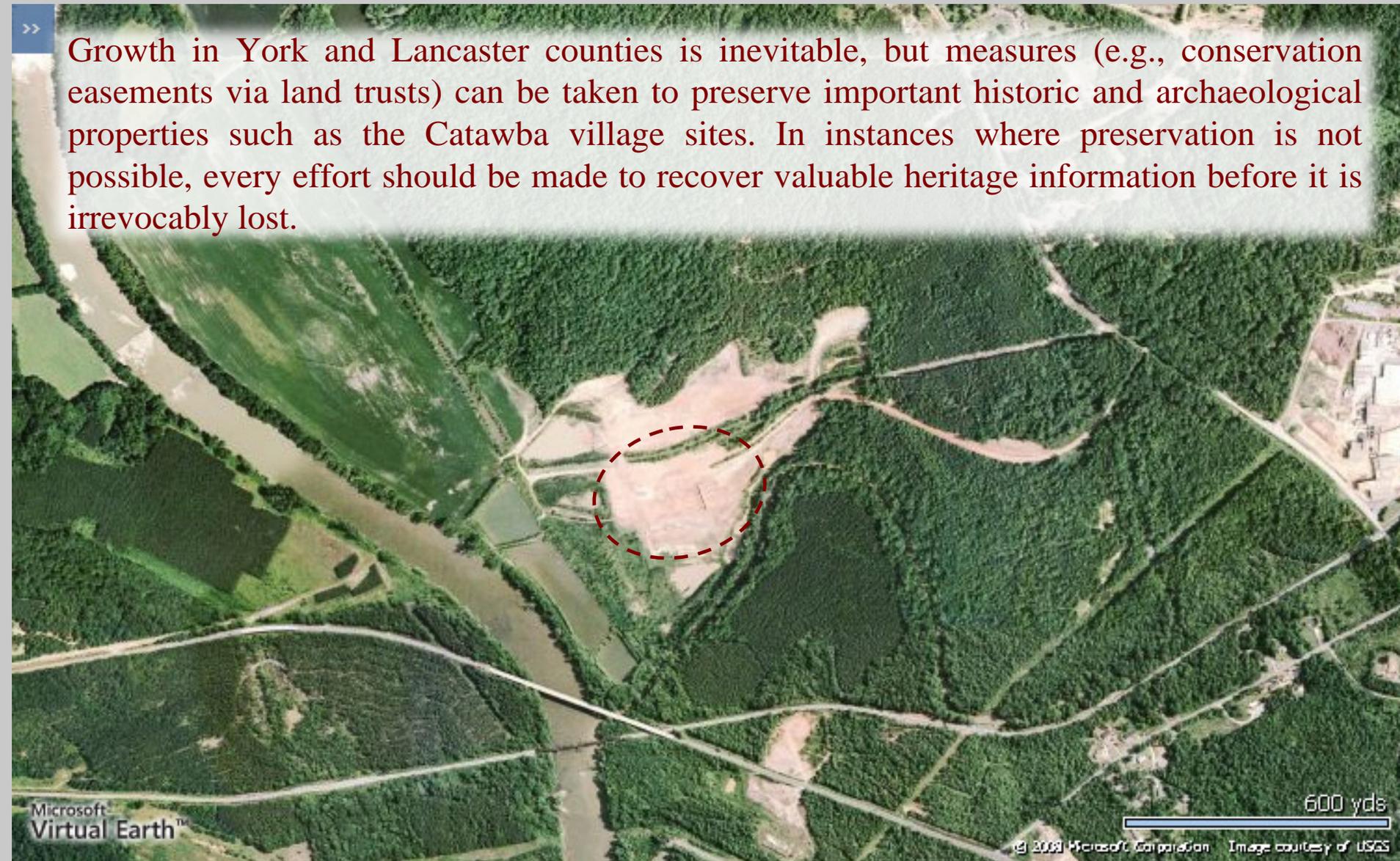
Early 18th-century Catawba sites along Sugar Creek destroyed by cut-and-fill for a housing development.

The problem of site destruction is exacerbated by the phenomenal expansion of the Charlotte Metro area. Catawba sites of the 18th and 19th centuries are a finite set, and more than one-third of these sites have been destroyed in the past decade.



Site 38Yk435, an early 18th-Century Village along the Trading Path, largely obliterated by recent development.

>> Growth in York and Lancaster counties is inevitable, but measures (e.g., conservation easements via land trusts) can be taken to preserve important historic and archaeological properties such as the Catawba village sites. In instances where preservation is not possible, every effort should be made to recover valuable heritage information before it is irrevocably lost.



Site 38La125, vicinity of one (of two) Catawba towns and South Carolina fort depicted on 1763 Samuel Wyly Map, has been heavily damaged by clay digging operations to produce bricks for the building boom.