

BOOK REVIEW

William Bartram on the Southeastern Indians, edited by Gregory A. Waselkov and Kathryn E. Holland Braund. Lincoln, University of Nebraska Press, Lincoln, 1995. xviii + 341 pp., illus., biblio., index. \$46.50 (cloth).

Reviewed by Christopher B. Rodning

The journals and essays of William Bartram are a window upon native landscapes of the American South during the late eighteenth century. His descriptions of native Southeastern communities and environments have contributed considerably to understanding the archaeology of the late eighteenth and earlier centuries. Bartram traveled across the coastal plain of Georgia and Florida, through the river valleys and mountains of western Carolina, across the Piedmont of Georgia and Alabama, and even up the Lower Mississippi Valley. His writings represent major contributions to the fields of anthropology, botany, geography, and natural history of the Southeast, and to the ethnology of Creeks, Seminoles, and Cherokees. His travel journal has helped archaeologists establish the locations of different native groups and towns, and an essay reflecting on the traditions of native people Bartram met distills some comparative insights about native architecture, foodways, social organization, political institutions, and the relationship between the eighteenth-century Southeastern Indians and earlier archaeological sites then visible across the landscape. Recently, Gregory Waselkov and Kathryn Holland Braund have edited and annotated Bartram's writings and have presented them in a book that adeptly relates his comments from the late eighteenth century to archaeological and ethnohistorical investigations of the twentieth century.

The book excerpts sections of Bartram's writings that speak specifically about Native Americans and their environments. The introductory chapter gives a biographical sketch of William Bartram, a Quaker gardener, philosopher, and natural historian. The second chapter draws from Bartram's *Travels Through North and South Carolina, Georgia, East and West Florida*, originally published in 1791 as the memoirs of his journey from 1773 to 1776 across much of the American South. The third chapter reprints Bartram's essay, *Observations on the Creek and Cherokee Indians*, written in 1789 as a response to a set of

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questions from Benjamin Smith Barton about native peoples of the South and published in 1853 by the American Ethnological Society. The fourth chapter includes Bartram's essay, *Some Hints and Observations, Concerning the Civilization of the Indians, or Aborigines of America*, written sometime after 1787 to outline a model for European interaction with Native American communities, for whom Bartram was an inveterate advocate. The original Bartram passages are complemented by his own sketches of native artifacts and architecture, and with copious notes by Waselkov and Braund that direct the reader to related books and essays in the literature on Southeastern archaeology, ethnohistory, and ecology. The editors introduce each chapter by reviewing the circumstances and motivations underlying the publication of the original manuscripts. These essays, and the commentary well interspersed throughout the book, add a valuable dimension to the raw material of the original writing. A fitting concluding chapter considers Bartram's place in the annals of Southeastern archaeology and ethnohistory, crediting him with perspectives that have gained considerable momentum in anthropology since his lifetime, a point to which I shall return later.

The first chapter of the book is an essay by the editors about Bartram's biography as a gardener, traveler, author, and correspondent. William was not the only Bartram to write about the eighteenth-century Southeast, as his father John published a journal of his own journey through Florida, Georgia, and the Carolinas from 1765 to 1766 as a botanist appointed by the king of England. William himself traveled with his father on that expedition, met several prominent colonial statesmen and cartographers, secured himself an estate in Florida in 1766, and then abandoned his failed farm to participate in a survey of Florida as a draftsman. William returned home to Philadelphia in 1767 and began a correspondence with a prominent London horticulturalist named John Fothergill. Fothergill became his patron in 1772 for another botanical survey of the South, contracting the artistically talented William to send him drawings of southern plants. Against the advice of his sponsor to narrow the breadth of his travels, Bartram chose to tour a broad swath of the Southeastern colonial frontier. Drawing from his travels, Bartram not only described and illustrated plant communities but commented upon native Southeastern farming, foodways, government, architecture, and gender roles, and the participation of native communities in the deerskin trade.

The second chapter introduces Bartram's *Travels*, which is a notebook about natural history, an ethnographic study, and an editorial

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advocating the rights of Native American peoples. The excerpts from his journal reprinted in this chapter are those which concentrate specifically on native communities and their living spaces. For a variety of reasons, the dates noted in his published diary are not always accurate, and the editors clarify these discrepancies through annotations and endnotes. After sailing from Charleston to Savannah, Bartram began his overland travels and visited ancient and contemporary native settlements, and colonial trading posts, along the Altamaha, Ogeechee, Ocmulgee, and St. Marys rivers. Then Bartram sailed to Florida, noting shell mounds and sand mounds along the coast, and journeyed up the St. Johns River. From a trading post on the St. Johns owned by James Spalding, Bartram traveled overland to visit native settlements along the Cuscowilla and Suwanee rivers. Later Bartram returned to Charleston and visited a trading post along the Savannah River. Along the Savannah, as along other Southeastern rivers, he saw abundant evidence of old mounds, old fields, and abandoned villages. From forts James and Charlotte near the confluence of the Savannah and Broad rivers, he launched his overland travels to the Cherokee towns in the southern Appalachians and to the Muskogean towns along the Chattahoochee, Tallapoosa, Coosa, and Alabama rivers. After traveling through Alabama, Bartram rested at Mobile. From there he traveled north to explore the Tensaw River by canoe and to tour the Tombigbee River. He stayed for awhile at Pensacola in the Florida panhandle and then sailed along the gulf coast and up the Mississippi River to Manchac and the former homeland of the Natchez. Bartram returned to Mobile and crossed Creek territory in Alabama again, revisited some parts of Georgia, and then returned to his Philadelphia home.

His descriptions of native lifeways are vivid portraits of Seminole, Creek, and Cherokee communities, and his lists of Cherokee and Creek towns are valuable resources for archaeologists and other scholars. It is likely that Bartram visited the Rembert, Shinholser, Shoulderbone, and other archaeological sites in Georgia; sites near Mount Royal, Lake George, Tick Island, and Lake Beresford in Florida; several Upper Creek towns represented by sites in Alabama; and several Cherokee sites in the Carolinas. Besides his journal, Bartram's *Travels* includes essays about: native habits and personalities; forms of government; clothing, feasting, and sports; farming, hunting, architecture, and crafts; marital and mortuary rituals; and language.

The third chapter introduces and reprints Bartram's *Observations*, a topical essay about Native American traditions responding to inquiries

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from his friend and correspondent, Benjamin Smith Barton. The physician and professor Barton had put forth a series of questions about the origins, aesthetics, language, religion, ceremonialism, government, gender relations, notions of property, health and healing, foodways, and other dimensions of native Southeastern cultures. In his essay, Bartram responds to these questions with comparative reflections upon the diversity of native Southeastern communities whom Bartram visited. As a postscript, Bartram adds several illustrations, plan views, and descriptions of the architecture of the Creeks and Cherokees. Although it was published in the nineteenth century and is widely known to Southeastern archaeologists, this essay has not been readily accessible to readers until now. Like his travel journal, Bartram's *Observations* demonstrates some keen anthropological insights, including comments about the multilingual and multiethnic nature of many Native American communities, the nature of native leadership roles, and the changes in native cultures attributable to interaction with Europeans through the deerskin trade.

The fourth chapter presents Bartram's *Hints*, an essay advocating that American policymakers negotiate peaceably and fairly with Native American peoples. The tone of this essay clearly reflects his Quaker background. Bartram wrote in *Travels* that enlightened people should be stationed among Native American communities not only as agents of European American culture but as students of native languages and lifeways. Bartram further noted in *Travels* that Native American peoples did not need to adopt a European model of civilization, as their concepts of civilization and aesthetics were well developed already. Citing the value of preserving Native American culture and community, Bartram's *Hints* argues that the newly formed United States should fully embrace Native American people who, like the American colonists during the revolutionary period, had weathered dramatic changes.

In the fifth chapter, Waselkov and Braund reflect upon the contributions of William Bartram to our knowledge about Southeastern environments and native cultures of the eighteenth century. The last section of the chapter makes some insightful points about his place in the intellectual development of natural history and American anthropology. As an eighteenth-century natural historian, Bartram developed a broad perspective on Southeastern landscapes that included not only the natural environment but also the people native to its many ecological and cultural provinces. His perspective on ecology resembles that of current anthropological thinking. Furthermore, Bartram was not trapped by the ethnographic present but rather recognized a variety of archaeological and

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ethnographic evidence for cultural change among native Southeastern peoples. This insight led Bartram to acknowledge both the differences and continuities between ancient mounds and contemporary settlements of native Southeastern groups, and it has granted him a prominent place in the history of American archaeology.

This book is best read by consistently consulting the endnotes and a map. The endnotes are a compendium of bibliographic references and comments that indicate what archaeological sites Bartram visited and give additional details about these sites. Some endnotes comment upon the ethnographic evidence of such topics as native Southeastern foodways, rituals, languages, gardening, and practices of burning pine and mast woodlands to enhance habitats for foraging and farming. Many endnotes link the Bartram journey to known archaeological sites and geographic placenames. Since Bartram covered such a broad swath of the Southeast, readers might want to follow along with a map. The second chapter, which contains portions of his travel journal, is accompanied by a series of modern maps that illustrate his path relative to settlements, waterways, and other landmarks, and a pair of maps that Bartram drew himself.

Anyone interested in the archaeology of the past millennium in the Carolinas and elsewhere in the Southeast should read this book. Scholars interested in the archaeology and ethnohistory of Creeks and Cherokees will find the book a valuable guide not only to what Bartram himself wrote but also to subsequent archaeological investigations that have shed light on his experiences. Archaeologists studying native Southeastern peoples in general will find much helpful material for reconstructing past lifeways from archaeological evidence. Not only have the notes and commentaries by Waselkov and Braund built valuable connections between Bartram's original writings and recent scholarship by American archaeologists and ethnohistorians, but, perhaps more importantly, this book makes Bartram's journal and essays vividly accessible to readers interested in Southeastern Indians.