THE TOWNHOUSE AT COWEETA CREEK

Christopher B. Rodning

This article describes patterns of continuity and change in the architectural design and placement of a public structure in a native town, the Coweeta Creek site (31MA34), located in the upper Little Tennessee Valley of North Carolina. Remnants of at least six stages of a townhouse have been identified in the Coweeta Creek mound. European trade goods from the last stage of this townhouse indicate that it stood until the late seventeenth or early eighteenth century. The townhouse construction sequence at this spot within the Coweeta Creek settlement offers valuable clues about the nature of public architecture in southwestern North Carolina during the seventeenth century, and perhaps even earlier.

During the eighteenth century, Cherokee townhouses were circular or octagonal structures, ranging from roughly 50 to 60 ft. in diameter (Chapman 1985:107-115; Dickens 1976:100-101, 1978, 1979; Faulkner 1978; Keel 1976: 214-216; Perdue 1998:34-35; Persico 1979:93-95; Schroedl 1979). Covered arbors or ramadas stood beside doorways to these townhouses. Some townhouses were built on the summits of more ancient pyramidal platform mounds. As centers of public life in native towns, Cherokee townhouses and adjacent plazas were settings for town councils, trade negotiations with Europeans, community rituals such as the Busk, and a variety of other events and activities (Brewer and Baillie 1991:11-13; Hill 1997:68-74; Mereness 1916:110-115, 118-121; Randolph 1973:110-113, 118-121; Waselkov and Braund 1995:84-86; Wetmore 1983:46-47; Williams 1927:58-59, 1928:97-99, 1930: 448-453).

Townhouses served as landmarks for their towns; construction of a townhouse gave a group of households status as a town in its own right within the surrounding landscape of settlements. Townhouses marked public architectural spaces within communities, and they were generally built beside town plazas. Archaeologists have studied Cherokee public architecture dating to the middle and late eighteenth century, but less is known about native townhouses in southwestern North Carolina during the period from the sixteenth through early eighteenth centuries (cf. Schroedl 2001a: 212-216, 2001b:286-289). This article reviews the architecture of historic Cherokee townhouses and their possible antecedents at late prehistoric sites, then describes the

sequence of townhouse construction represented in the Coweeta Creek mound (Rodning 2001a:85-86, 2001b: 242-245; Rodning and VanDerwarker, this volume; Ward and Davis 1999:183-190). I outline patterns of continuity and change in the architectural design and placement of the Coweeta Creek townhouse from its earliest to its latest stage, as reflected in architectural remnants found in the low mound at the site. I then describe European trade goods found in the Coweeta Creek townhouse mound, which help date the late end of its architectural history to the late seventeenth or early eighteenth century. At least five architectural stages predate this last manifestation of the Coweeta Creek townhouse. Continuity in the placement of the townhouse reflects the practice of connecting one generation of the town to its predecessors and successors through public architecture.

Townhouses in Southern Appalachia

Dozens of townhouses dotted the eighteenth-century cultural landscape of southern Appalachia. Archaeologists have identified several eighteenth-century townhouses at sites in southeastern Tennessee. European visitors to the southern Appalachians in the eighteenth century noted the presence of towns only where they found townhouses (Smith 1979:47). Some maps show towns as well as lesser settlements, but the centers of towns were clearly marked by townhouses and plazas. Many kinds of activities took place in these public architectural spaces, ranging from carefully scripted sacred rituals to, presumably, routine social gatherings and mundane daily tasks. European observers tended to note the former, but not the latter, in their journals and reports. Certainly, reconstructing this range of *activities* with reference to archaeological evidence has the potential to yield rich insights into the practice of public life in ancient Cherokee towns. However, this article concentrates on the *architecture* of townhouses in southern Appalachia and the practice of rebuilding and landscaping public space from one generation to another within local communities that recognized themselves as towns.

In an effort to trace their origin, Anderson (1994:302-309) has related the development of townhouses as public architecture in southern Appalachian towns to the emergence of communities that were relatively egalitarian compared to the more hierarchical chiefdoms present along the headwaters of the Savannah River during late

prehistory (Rudolph 1984; Ward and Davis 1999:175-178). Townhouses may have been present at major and lesser towns in southern Appalachia during late prehistory, but public architecture at the most prominent late prehistoric towns also included pyramidal mounds and a variety of structures built on their summits. These forms of late prehistoric public architecture were accessible only to select individuals and groups. Sometimes mound summits were enclosed by log stockades that visually set apart these spaces and restricted access to them.

During the eighteenth century, some Cherokee townhouses were constructed on the summits of late prehistoric platform mounds (although many more were not). Those elevated townhouses were placed on pyramidal mounds built centuries earlier (Ward and Davis 1999:175-176). Moreover, eighteenth-century townhouses served to bring people together as towns rather than to create hierarchical social distance between them, as had been the case with some late prehistoric platform mounds (Ward and Davis 1999:177-178).

Schroedl (1986:217-270) has reviewed archaeological and historical evidence for the architecture of Cherokee townhouses and their roles within Cherokee communities of the eighteenth century. He makes the point that Cherokee townhouses—and the plazas beside them—were built and landscaped as venues for the practice of public life in Cherokee towns. Events and activities in these settings created opportunities for people to differentiate themselves from others in their own town, and from neighboring communities. Furthermore, townhouses and plazas were widely accessible; many if not all members of a Cherokee town had opportunities to participate there in public life and perhaps attain roles of leadership within their community.

Circular and octagonal townhouses have been excavated at several historically known, eighteenth-century Overhill Cherokee towns in the lower Little Tennessee River Valley of southeastern Tennessee, including Chota-Tanasee, Toqua, Mialoquo, and Tomotley (Baden 1983:127-134; Chapman 1985:107-118; Faulkner 1978:91-92; Russ and Chapman 1983:38-56; Schroedl 1986:539-540; Sullivan 1995:104-105). These public structures are represented archaeologically by wall posts, inner roof support posts, centrally placed clay hearths, and doorways whose foundations are recognized as pairs of trenches. Some townhouses were rebuilt in place, as evidenced by overlapping stages of posts and hearths; in some cases, rebuilding was offset slightly from the original placement. Designs of these Overhill Cherokee townhouses contrast in many respects with those of earlier public architectural forms. For instance, a late prehistoric public structure at the Ledford Island site in the lower Hiwassee Valley is rectangular, not circular or octagonal (Schroedl 1998:83-85; Sullivan 1987, 1995:107). Some mounds in the upper Tennessee Valley served

as surfaces for late prehistoric structures, but platform mounds were not built during the historic period (Polhemus 1987, 1990:138; Schroedl 1998:73-83). There undoubtedly are elements of continuity in the designs and uses of public architecture from the late prehistoric through early historic periods, but changes in public architecture and settlement patterns are more evident in the archaeological record (Schroedl 1998:86-87; Sullivan 1995:110, 120-123).

Archaeologists have identified townhouses dating from the sixteenth through early eighteenth centuries at several sites in northeastern Georgia and northwestern South Carolina, including Chauga, Tugalo, Estatoe, and Chattooga (Anderson 1994:205-218; Hally and Kelly 1998:51-54; Smith 1992:70-75; Wynn 1990:53-58). Some eighteenth-century Lower Cherokee townhouses were probably built on the summits of earlier platform mounds, but the best-known case, a series of five stages of a townhouse at the Chattooga site in northwestern South Carolina, was not built on a mound. Each townhouse iteration was square with rounded corners, and had a ramada (Schroedl 2001a:214). Four stages of this townhouse were built and rebuilt in place (Schroedl 2001b:288). A town plaza was present between the townhouse and domestic structures scattered along the bank of the Chattooga River.

A possible precursor to historic Cherokee townhouses is the pair of public structures at the sixteenth-century King site in northern Georgia (Hally 1994:156-157). These structures are clearly differentiated from domestic houses at the King site by their placement within the plaza, and because they are much larger than the dwellings found in the village area, between the plaza and the log stockade surrounding the town.

Another possible precursor to historic Cherokee townhouses is represented by the public structure identified at the late prehistoric Ledford Island site in eastern Tennessee (Sullivan 1987:26-28). The public structure at the north end of the plaza at Ledford Island is comparable in shape and dimensions to the original townhouse at Coweeta Creek; public structures at both sites range from 45 to 50 ft. on a side. Domestic houses at Ledford Island are also similar in architectural design to many of the domestic dwellings at Coweeta Creek—square structures measuring some 20 to 25 ft. on each side. Household architecture at Ledford Island includes pairs of winter and summer structures, with graves surrounding these spaces (Sullivan 1987:24, 1995:109). Such a pairing of winter and summer houses has not yet been identified at Coweeta Creek, but posthole patterns between the plaza and main village area at this site may represent ramadas, and the Coweeta Creek townhouse certainly had a ramada or portico beside it (Rodning and VanDerwarker, this volume, Figure 2).

Similarities with the architecture and layout of sites such as Ledford Island suggest that some structures at

Coweeta Creek may date to the sixteenth century, if not earlier (Schroedl 2001a:213, 2001b:287). However, the presence of European trade goods in the upper levels of the Coweeta Creek mound indicates that the last stage of the townhouse almost certainly dates to the late seventeenth or early eighteenth century. Therefore, the series of townhouse stages represented in the Coweeta Creek mound may offer valuable clues about continuity and change in public architecture in southern Appala-
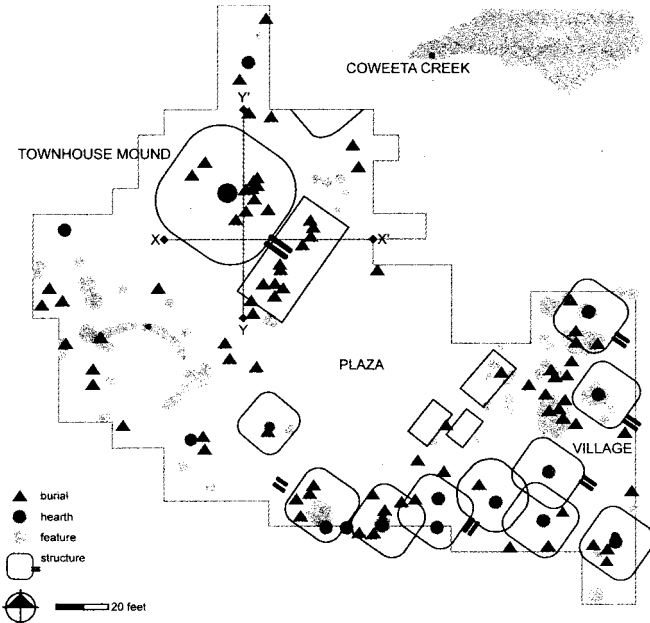

Figure 1. Schematic map of the Coweeta Creek settlement (see Egloff 1971:44). The points marked X-X' and Y-Y' are the endpoints of the mound-profile drawings shown in Figure 2.
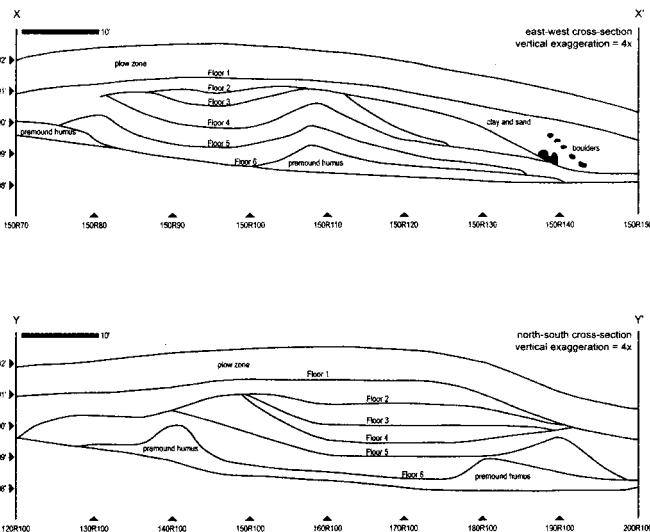

Figure 2. Profiles of the Coweeta Creek mound (see Egloff 1971:57). Note that the vertical scales and horizontal scales in this drawing are different, which exaggerates the height and slope of mound deposits; the endpoints of these profile drawings are shown in the schematic plan-view map in Figure 1.

chia during the period between late prehistory and the beginning of sustained contact and interaction between the Cherokees and European colonists.

There are, however, significant architectural differences between the Coweeta Creek townhouse and the townhouses present at Overhill towns in the lower Little Tennessee River Valley during the middle and late eighteenth century (Baden 1983; Russ and Chapman 1983; Schroedl 1986). Archaeologically known eighteenth-century Overhill Cherokee townhouses were circular or octagonal, in contrast to the townhouse at Coweeta Creek, which was square with rounded corners. Graves were placed in the hearth area and beneath the ramada of the Coweeta Creek townhouse, but archaeologists have found few burials in eighteenth-century Overhill Cherokee townhouses. Sites such as Coweeta Creek are critical for reconstructing the development of public architectural forms at historic Cherokee towns in southern Appalachia from their late prehistoric antecedents. The Coweeta Creek townhouse is one of the few examples of this form of public architecture that has been investigated archaeologically in western North Carolina.

The Townhouse Mound at Coweeta Creek

The mound at Coweeta Creek is composed of remnants of at least six versions of a townhouse, the later stages of which were built on top of the burned and buried remnants of its earlier manifestations (Figure 1). The mound was never built as a substructural platform mound per se, although the sequence of townhouse building and rebuilding did create a low mound (Figure 2). Thus it represents a different form of public architecture than the pyramidal platform mounds built at some late prehistoric towns and settlements in the Southeast, while simultaneously representing one of the latest archaeologically known cases of mound-building in the southern Appalachians.

The townhouse at Coweeta Creek was placed beside a town plaza and a village area occupied by domestic houses (Egloff 1971:70). Townhouse and village conform to a town plan in which entrances to public as well as domestic structures faced southeast. The doorway to the townhouse opened on a path leading between rows of domestic houses, and there is a clearly recognizable plaza between the village area and the townhouse. The series of townhouse stages in the Coweeta Creek mound spans considerable time, although at present I cannot definitively date the earliest stage. The last stage of the townhouse may have been built after the dwellings in the Coweeta Creek village had been abandoned.

Excavations in the Coweeta Creek mound in 1965 and 1966 exposed the last two stages of the main townhouse

and the posthole patterns representing the ramada beside its doorway. Photographs taken in 1965 show the burned remnants of "Structure 1," as the townhouse was identified (Egloff 1971:48). Further excavations the following year uncovered an earlier stage of Structure 1, and squares dug at the edges of the mound revealed the presence of floors and other material from several even earlier stages of the townhouse (Egloff 1971:50, 53). The latest stage of Structure 1 was then designated "Floor 1," and the earliest recognized stage was designated "Floor 6." In 1968 exploratory trenches dug from each corner of the Coweeta Creek mound revealed profile views of mound stratigraphy (Egloff 1971:60), which guided excavators as they peeled back one layer of the mound after another, differentiating between the floors of townhouse stages and the lenses of architectural rubble and other debris spread thinly across the remnants of each burned structure (Egloff 1971:60-61). Interestingly, artifacts were not found in great abundance on townhouse floors, except near the edges where posthole patterns reflect the likely presence of benches (Egloff 1971:61-62). This artifact distribution probably reflects the aboriginal practice of sweeping the townhouse floor, which would have kept the area around the hearth relatively free of artifacts and deposited them under the benches next to the walls.

Excavations in the Coweeta Creek mound from 1967 to 1969 uncovered the four earliest stages of the townhouse. Burned sand and daub, charred wood, and other architectural rubble in layers of the mound indicate that each stage of the townhouse was burned. Later manifestations were then built atop this accumulating mound of buried former townhouses. Recurrent patterns in the way this townhouse was built and rebuilt reveal significant architectural continuity from one generation to another. The general townhouse shape and the placement of the hearth and roof support posts were consistent from one stage to the next, although the location of the doorway and the size of the townhouse did change somewhat from the earliest to latest manifestations.

A surface for initial construction was created by digging a slight depression, which sloped towards the center, where the hearth was built (Figure 3; Egloff 1971:64). This step is reflected archaeologically by the presence of premound humus at the perimeter of the mound, close to the edges of the townhouse. A doorway was then placed in the middle of the southeastern wall, and it opened to the covered ramada built between the plaza and the townhouse itself. Overlapping pairs of entrance trenches show that this doorway was renovated or rebuilt once. Several clusters of graves are present outside the doorway, as well as close to the townhouse hearth. Four interior roof support posts are represented by large postholes around the hearth. The placement of these roof supports was generally consistent through the various stages of townhouse

construction. Although many of the postholes shown in Figure 3 are intrusive from later stages of the townhouse, the pattern does reflect the layout of the earliest stage of this public structure.

A second stage of the townhouse was built atop the burned and buried remnants of its predecessor, preserving its shape and layout but also covering a greater area (Figure 4; Egloff 1971:55). This manifestation of the townhouse measures about 45 by 45 ft., or roughly 2,025 square ft. Some of the graves identified in the townhouse may date to this stage. Many if not most of the graves in the townhouse do seem to date to its first two or three stages. The layer of architectural rubble and other debris lying atop the floor of this stage of the townhouse includes lenses of light and dark sand—an accumulation measuring a little more than 1 ft. deep, thicker than other mound layers.

The third stage of the townhouse was square with rounded corners, roughly 45 by 45 ft. (Figure 5; Egloff 1971:55). Its hearth and roof supports were placed in the same spots as their predecessors. Several charred beams and daub were found lying atop the floor.

The fourth stage of the townhouse was square with rounded corners, roughly 45 by 45 ft. (Figure 6). Its hearth was moved slightly north of the original hearth, yet it remained at the middle of a structure whose walls and entryway were consistent with those of the preceding generations of the townhouse.
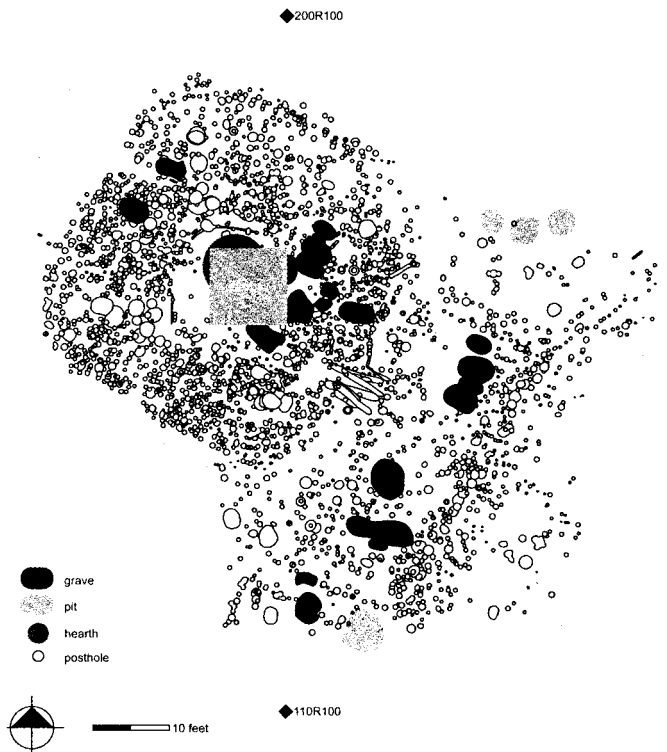

Figure 3. First stage of the Coweeta Creek townhouse, associated with Floor 6 (see Egloff 1971:66).

Burned rubble from the third and fourth stages of the townhouse demonstrate that these structures were built of log posts and daubed walls, with wooden rafters and support posts holding up a roof that included some daub in its construction. Floors were easily recognized during excavations, because trampling had compacted them. Daub found in mound layers between floors derives from the walls, as well as from the areas of the roof between roof support posts and the smoke hole. The roof probably consisted of bark and thatch as well as daub; specimens of all three roof materials have been identified in mound deposits.

The layer between floors of the second and third stages of the townhouse is slightly thicker than other mound layers, apparently because more sand was heaped atop this burned townhouse than was the case in covering earlier or later stages. Nevertheless, the similar content of layers between the hard-packed townhouse floors demonstrates consistency in the way each stage was covered to create a surface for a successor. Every stage was dismantled and burned, as is evident

from the layers of charred wood and burned sands in the mound, and indeed burning was probably the easiest way to dispose of an old townhouse. In the interests of creating a surface for a new townhouse, some sand and other debris was added to form a thin mantle covering the former townhouse. Whatever the origin of this debris, it is rich with artifacts, such as potsherds, stone tools, pipe fragments, and beads. A portion of these artifacts presumably derives from townhouse rebuilding activities, and some if not most of the archaeobotanical and zooarchaeological material in these mound layers is directly related to the construction of townhouses or activities that took place within them.

A ramp was built beside the townhouse doorway, underneath the ramada, and the last addition to this ramp consisted of a layer of white clay and clusters of river boulders. Beneath the white clay were lenses of sand and basketloads of mottled clay. These boulders and clay layers were present only in the southeastern part of the townhouse mound where the ramp was placed.

Figure 4. Second stage of the Coweeta Creek townhouse, associated with Floor 5.

Figure 5. Third stage of the Coweeta Creek townhouse, associated with Floor 4.

Burials found in the townhouse ramada postdate the deposition of some of this clay and sand at the south-eastern edge of the mound, but they all predate the placement of river boulders and the white clay lens across the ramp. These burial pits originate stratigra-phically in the lower levels of clay and sand in the southeastern edge of the mound, so they must date to early or middle stages of the townhouse and the ramada. Similarly, stratigraphic evidence indicates that the burials *inside* the doorway date to the first or second stages of the townhouse, as they only became visible to excavators at these levels of the mound. Perhaps the burials *outside* the doorway postdate the graves inside the townhouse, and were only placed under the town-house ramada when no room was left for them in the space around the hearth. Alternatively, graves inside and outside the doorway to the townhouse could reflect differences in status and roles held by the deceased during their lifetimes. In any case, the clusters of graves in the townhouse ramada seem to form a pathway between the plaza and the original doorway to the town-

house, perhaps indicating that the burials all relate to the earliest stage of this structure.

People clearly were not buried in the latest stages of the townhouse. In its last stages, the townhouse sat slightly higher than the surrounding settlement, neces-sitating a steeper ramp. By then the mound may have reached a height of 4 ft., largely through the accumu-lation of architectural rubble from multiple stages of the townhouse. None of these layers, however, was added as a mantle specifically to create an elevated summit.

The surface of the town plaza east and southeast of the townhouse ramada was covered with sand. Field notes indicate that the surface of the plaza was slightly lower than the floors of domestic houses in the village, a difference probably stemming in part from the effects of trampling in the plaza and partly from sweeping and landscaping of this public space. Artifacts found in the sand covering the plaza probably were deposited during some of the latest activities to occur there.

The last stage of the plaza and the last stage of the townhouse were probably contemporary (Figure 7). Figure 7 shows postholes associated with the fifth stage of the townhouse. The photograph in Figure 8 shows the sixth and last stage of the townhouse, for which a complete plan drawing is not yet compiled; in general shape and dimensions, the fifth and sixth stages of the townhouse are quite similar. These stages were square with corners, somewhat more rounded than was the case
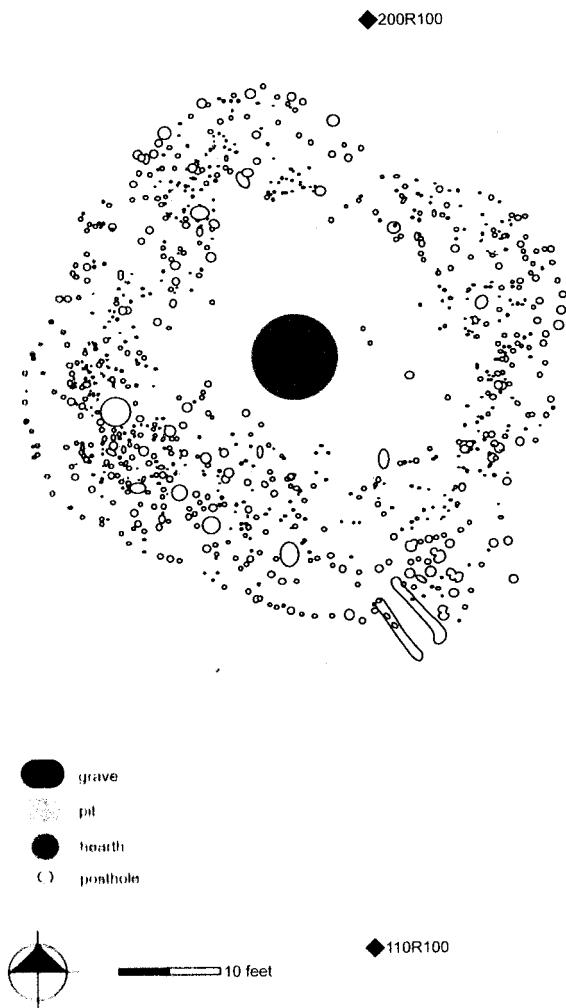

Figure 6. Fourth stage of the Coweeta Creek townhouse, asso-ciated with Floor 3.
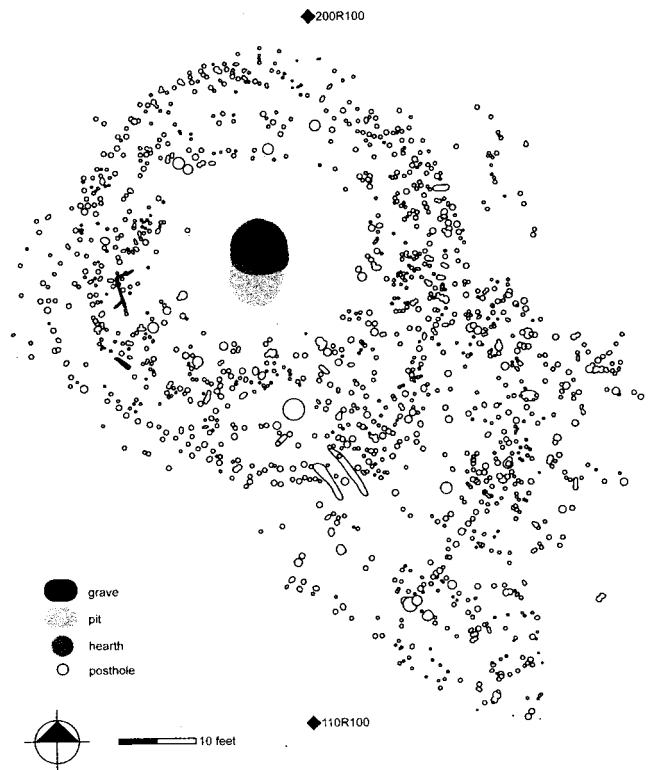

Figure 7. Fifth stage of the Coweeta Creek townhouse, asso-ciated with Floor 2.

earlier. They were also somewhat larger, at 50 to 52 ft. square, covering some 2,500 square ft. In materials, design, and placement of the doorway and hearth, these stages were comparable to earlier manifestations.

Posthole patterns indicate that the ramada was present in every stage of the Coweeta Creek townhouse (see Figure 2), although not shown in each of the maps included here. Stratigraphy at the east edge of the Coweeta Creek mound is less clear than the layering of ruined townhouse stages at the heart of the mound, so it is difficult to attribute postholes specifically to one stage of the ramada or another.

European Trade Goods

European artifacts from the upper levels of the Coweeta Creek mound indicate that the last stage of the townhouse dates to the late seventeenth century or very early eighteenth century (Dickens 1978:124-125, 131; Egloff 1967; Egloff 1971). Forthcoming radiocarbon dates and continuing studies of ceramics from Coweeta Creek should help pinpoint the first stage of townhouse construction. At this point, I speculate that townhouse rebuilding occurred every generation, as the rights and responsibilities of town leadership passed from one generation to another, perhaps once every 15 to 25 years. I therefore estimate that the first townhouse predates its last manifestation by 75 to 125 years. I hasten to add, however, that these estimates require further

consideration. Greater precision in dating the earliest and latest stages of the Coweeta Creek townhouse is necessary to determine the lifespan of each individual stage, or even an accurate average lifespan for them all.

European glass beads and kaolin pipe fragments are presently the most precise clues for dating the last stages of the Coweeta Creek townhouse. The following summary of these categories of European material culture from Coweeta Creek concentrates on the chronological clues they hold, rather than their significance for reconstructing the nature of interaction between European colonists and the native people of southwestern North Carolina.

The sample of glass beads found at Coweeta Creek totals 5,246 specimens, 57% of which were recovered from the burned rubble and debris associated with the last stage of the townhouse. Most of these are small, opaque blue, white, black, or green drawn beads, although there are some "gooseberry" and "cornaline d'Allepo" beads from Coweeta Creek—elements typical of an assemblage dating to the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries (Smith 1987:31-33, 2001:Plate 7b; Brain 1979:96-133, 1988:193-194, 326-327).

Glass beads were present in earlier stages of the mound, but the five beads found on and above the remnants of the first townhouse stand in stark contrast to the number of beads from its last stage. Beads certainly could have trickled down through postholes and the hearth to earlier stages of the townhouse mound. Nevertheless, the several hundred glass beads present

Figure 8. Last stage of the Coweeta Creek townhouse, associated with Floor 1 (courtesy of the University of North Carolina, Research Laboratories of Archaeology).

in the layers of sand placed across the second stage of the mound must indicate that this form of material culture reached the town several generations before the last townhouse was built.

Five hundred sixty-three glass beads (approximately 11% of the total assemblage) were found in nonmound contexts, including 33 in the plaza and 26 from the plow zone in the village area southeast of the townhouse mound. Another 423 glass beads were recovered from pits southwest of the townhouse, and 34 were found in the plow zone in this part of the site. The only European trade goods found in the burials at Coweeta Creek were four opaque blue glass beads interred with a child in the village. Other kinds of European material culture are similarly concentrated in and around the mound, but are virtually absent from the houses and pits in the compact village area southeast of the mound and plaza.

An assemblage of 201 kaolin pipe fragments was found at Coweeta Creek, 63% of which were found in the townhouse mound and in pits and plow zone southwest of the mound, nearly 25% in the plaza, and 13% in the village area. Measurement of the bore diameters of 136 pipestem fragments yields an estimated mean date of 1712, based on a regression formula developed by Lewis Binford (1962, 1972). Four kaolin pipe bowl fragments from Coweeta Creek have heels or spurs at their bases (Ward and Davis 1999:240-241). The shape of these pipes is consistent with the pipestem date estimate, placing the late end of settlement at Coweeta Creek in the late seventeenth or early eighteenth centuries (Ward and Davis 1999:183-187).

Other kinds of European material culture found at Coweeta Creek include an iron axe head, 17 brass artifacts, 15 gunflints, 16 musket balls, three metal blade fragments, and three wrought iron nails, as well as other metal fragments from the plow zone that are not associated with the native settlement at this site. The metal axe head from the plaza and all of the lead musket balls were found in plow zone contexts. Most of the European artifacts associated with the native settlement at Coweeta Creek were found in upper levels of the townhouse mound. One metal blade fragment and two gunflints were found in the last stage of the townhouse. The only European artifacts found in undisturbed context in the nucleated village area southeast of the mound and plaza at the Coweeta Creek site are a wrought iron nail from a domestic hearth and the four glass beads in the child burial.

Charred peach pits are associated with all stages of the Coweeta Creek townhouse mound (VanDerwarker and Detwiler 2000, this volume). These do not necessarily reflect direct or sustained contact with European colonists themselves. Spaniards introduced peaches to the Southeast as early as the sixteenth century (Gremillion 1993). Native people readily and widely adopted them because they fit easily within the traditional range of crops kept in gardens and fields, and quickly distributed peaches to inland areas of the Southeast, far beyond the extent of direct colonization by Europeans (Waselkov 1997).

The small assemblage of European trade goods at Coweeta Creek suggests distant or indirect interaction with European colonists, which is consistent with dates for the late end of settlement in the late seventeenth or (more likely) early eighteenth century. But when was the town founded? And when was the townhouse first built? Both questions demand further consideration, and they may have different answers. It is possible that the Coweeta Creek townhouse was only built after abandonment of the compact village southeast of the plaza. On the other hand, similarities in design and alignment of public and domestic structures at Coweeta Creek suggest that the earliest townhouse was built when households were still occupied in the village area. If the townhouse was rebuilt once every 15 to 25 years, when the mantles of town leadership passed from one generation to another, then I suggest a provisional date in the late sixteenth century for the earliest stage of the Coweeta Creek townhouse.

Forthcoming radiocarbon dates and continuing studies of ceramics from the Coweeta Creek mound and village will help resolve this problem. These data should also clarify the chronological relationship between the Coweeta Creek townhouse and the domestic houses in the village area southeast of the townhouse and plaza.

The concentration of European artifacts in upper levels of the Coweeta Creek mound and the near absence of European material culture in the village may indicate that the last stages of the townhouse were built after domestic houses in the village had been abandoned. This rearrangement of households in the area surrounding the townhouse and plaza may represent a different phenomenon than the broader dispersal of Cherokee and Creek settlements that occurred in the late eighteenth century. But there were undoubted changes in the settlement plan at Coweeta Creek between construction of the earliest and the latest stages of public architecture. There are also differences in the paste characteristics and stamped surface treatments of potsherds from late stages of the Coweeta Creek mound and those of sherds from the village and from early stages of the mound. My current interpretation of these differences is that the last stages of the Coweeta Creek townhouse postdate the major episode of settlement in the nucleated village identified in the area southeast of the mound, although at least some of these domestic houses probably were contemporary with earlier manifestations of the townhouse. This pattern needs further consideration, because it is significant for reconstructing how and when European trade goods were adopted within this community.

Some of the apparently chronological differences between townhouse and village, specifically the concentration of European artifacts in the Coweeta Creek townhouse, may reflect the selective circulation and disposal of European trade goods—still relatively new and relatively rare in this community—in the townhouse. Archaeological evidence of special disposal of early European trade goods has been recognized at protohistoric Creek towns in Alabama (Gregory Waselkov, personal communication 2002), and this model may also be applicable to the distribution of European artifacts at the Coweeta Creek site. These artifacts probably date primarily to the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, when European trade goods would have been relatively rare and relatively new to native people in this region.

Even if the town plan at the late end of the settlement history at Coweeta Creek differed from its earlier forms, the townhouse was kept in its original place. This continuity in placement created a symbolic connection between different generations of the Coweeta Creek community, and these ancestral ties probably formed a major theme in the public life of households within this town.

Conclusions

The continuity in design and placement of the Coweeta Creek townhouse speaks to its role as an architectural form that created symbolic connections between different generations of this community. Each stage of the townhouse referenced those built by earlier generations of the town, as did the activities related to building and rebuilding in the same spot. Fires were kept in the same hearth during each manifestation of the townhouse, perhaps achieving symbolic links between different stages of the townhouse and generations of the community itself. The doorway to each successive stage of the townhouse opened towards the southeast, each probably guiding similar patterns of movement in and out of this architectural space from one generation to the next, even as the doorway was shifted slightly west of its original placement. Beside the townhouse was the town plaza, which was maintained as such as the townhouse was rebuilt.

These public spaces served as venues for the broad range of events and activities that characterized public life in the town situated at Coweeta Creek. While this article has not specifically considered those practices of public life, further study of artifacts and other material from Coweeta Creek promises to yield insights into the nature of public and domestic life and the relationship between them (VanDerwarker and Detwiler, this volume; Wilson and Rodning, this volume). Instead, my atten-

tion has been concentrated on the architectural history of the Coweeta Creek townhouse, relating it to the social history of the surrounding town. A series of at least six townhouse stages were built at the same spot, each placed atop the burned and buried remnants of its predecessor. A low mound gradually formed during this sequence of building and rebuilding episodes, as architectural rubble and other debris was spread thinly across remnants of old townhouses to create surfaces for succeeding generations of the structure. This practice probably had a symbolic effect of renewing social relationships between the people and households that considered themselves a town.

The Coweeta Creek townhouse was first built within a formally planned town and was kept in place even as households rearranged themselves in the area surrounding the plaza and townhouse. This community kept a traditional townhouse as its public center, and a town plaza in the area beside it. The last stage of the townhouse was larger than the original and somewhat more round in shape. A ramp was placed beside the doorway to the townhouse itself. A covered arbor or ramada was built in the area outside the doorway to each stage of the townhouse. These architectural spaces formed settings for the practice of public life in this native town, which was founded in the sixteenth century—if not earlier—and which was still part of the cultural landscape of southwestern North Carolina at the dawn of the eighteenth century. Continuity in the placement of the Coweeta Creek townhouse created a material and symbolic link between different generations of the community, as each manifestation of the townhouse referenced preceding stages of this public structure.

Notes

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