

## **Wampee, Ophir and the Tumuli ~**

Situated within the confines of Wampee and Ophir Plantations in Berkeley County, S.C., there are to be found two tumuli, or clusters of Indian burial mounds, the history of which is very interesting.

In this brief sketch, there is no space allowed, nor is there any desire to enter into the controversial question about the origin of the American Indians. There is a theory that, because of their resemblance, in ideas, customs, and institutions to the ancient Hebrews, they are the descendants of the Lost Tribe of Israel; also, that they drifted here from other countries of the world, as evidenced by their many dialects, often mutually unintelligible, representing fifty-five linguistic and twenty-one recognizable different physical types.

This sketch concerns chiefly the history of that group of Indians, the Etiwans, which once inhabited this particular locality in lower South Carolina. Our information is gained from records of the white people on the Carolina Coast at Charleston in 1670, and from whatever tradition prior to this that the whites obtained from the natives whose unwritten dialects, though melodious and vocalic, consisted partly of words, assisted by contortions of the body and gesticulations of the hands.

Shortly after this first settlement was made at the mouth of the Etiwan (later called the Cooper) River, a colony of French Huguenot emigrants arrived and established themselves at a point up the Etiwan about twenty miles, as the crow flies. This settlement, which they named French Quarter, was on the waters of the eastern branch of the Etiwan about one mile from the junction of the two branches, known later as the "Tee".

At this time, rivers were important factors and boats were the only means of transportation between settlers and native Indians in the hinterland.

By rowing up the western branch of the Etiwan, a placid and winding stream walled in on both sides by the original cypress and giant oaks whose boughs at intervals extend across and met, forming a perfect arch of waving grey moss, these brave and hardy emigrants eventually reached the terminus of navigability and tidewater at a point now known as Wadboo, ten miles north of French Quarter. Here, they established a Wampee, or trading post, where they and the Indians might gather and bargain their wares.

Soon, the customary European money fell into disuse and Wampum, or shell money, composed of necklaces and other trinkets, became the medium of exchange.

Here at Wadboo, the Indians from the interior, where they had accumulated a supply of furs, skins, corn, and other native products, would gather with their families and pitch their wigwams, there to await the arrival of the white men's boats loaded with merchandise for exchange.

In the interim of waiting, the chief and squaws busied themselves sorting and arranging bales of hides and other wares, and there are stories to the effect that many interesting occurrences took place around the campfires; children played and enjoyed their ceremonial games and dances of Buffalo, Crow, Snake, and Ghost, their elders joining in on the night chant.

Imagine this scene of charm and blissful romances; a moonlit atmosphere envelopes Wadboo camp; there are laughing, ruddy young Indian girls arrayed in the yellow skins of the fawn; they have gentle features, soft velvety skins, beautiful white teeth shining through almost purple lips, and dark eyes full of appeal. Some join in the dances and others sit apart listening to the birdlike notes of the flageolet or flute rendered by their swains who pass their evening with music and with angling for the fresh and succulent redbreast, which brings succors to this happy group.

After a more or less lengthy interval, the white man's boats arrived and amid much excitement, the bartering took place.

Not only did the colonists profit by this trading in a material way, but by contact they acquired other things of value. Countless ideas and methods as to food, clothing, and medicine; also, diplomacy and statecraft in the conduct of life, and many geographical names they adopted as their own such as Etiwan, Pooshee, Santee, Wappoola, Wampee, Wando, Pocotaligo, Wassamassaw, Wedboo, Whiskinboo, Woodboo, Wyboo, and many common terms of speech.

The pleasant and friendly relations existing between the whites and the Etiwans as depicted by the happy picture above unfortunately did not continue.

A gap in the historical sequence occurs here, and when next we hear of them through traditions, the atmosphere of harmony has changed to one of hostility and war. Instead of the peaceful night-chant, there were now sounds of the scalp dance and the Indians had fortified themselves at a strategic point four miles northwest of Wadboo, at a place later known as Simpson. There is no definite recorded data as to what happened during this period of time, but from information handed down throughout the generation, we must accept the following causes as a reasonable explanation for this change of relations.

After the whites had used Wadboo for some time as a trading post, they began to spread out and radiate in all directions, pushing the native red man further back. They began erecting permanent homes and churches. One of their churches was constructed about 1700 on an elevated spot of land, now known as Simpson's crossing, on the A.C.L. Railroad, three miles north of Wadboo, and was later absorbed by Biggin Church, erected in 1712, two miles nearer to Wadboo.

As the number of colonists increased, they continued moving their frontiers westward, dislodging the Indians, driving them ever onward, and whether this displacement was accomplished by friendly treaty or threatening gun seems to have been immaterial to the whites.

The Etiwans soon realized that their lands were being taken from them, and added to this injury was, to them no doubt, the insult of having the whites attempt to take away their religion also.

These emigrants, composed chiefly of French Huguenots who had suffered bitter hardships and persecutions in the old country for the sake of their conception of religious and political freedom, seem to have embedded much of the tyrannical attitude of their oppressors, for as soon as they became firmly established in the new world, they in turn began imposing their faith upon the uncivilized natives. Their attempts at Christianizing the red man appears to have been not by the peaceful means of precept and example, but by the more forceful and direct method of sacrament in one hand and brandishing sword in the other. Dissatisfaction and resentment came across among the Etiwans who realized that they were gradually becoming vassals to an alien race. This soon deepened into active enmity and presently they and the colonists were arrayed in hostile camps, one against the other.

It was at this juncture that the latter found that the red man's desire for vengeance never sleeps.

The Indian camp at Simpson was located within the sides of an acute angle found by the junction of Biggin and Simpson branches, both of which, due to thick brush and trees, were barriers of approach from the east, south, and west; towards the north, forming the base of a triangle and protecting the camp from a surprise attack in that direction were the tents of the warriors, which extended in a row across from one branch to the other; the Chief's teepee was pitched upon an elevated knoll at the apex.

Becoming restless for want of action and revenge, the chief called his braves into council and resolved to take the offensive.

Hanging loosely over his shoulders was a throng of deerskin from which was suspended the leather case containing his bunch of arrows, and drawing close about him his wide belt in which was thrust the tomahawk and long knife, testing carefully the string of his hickory bow in order to make sure that it was in good condition and could be relied upon, the chief made ready to go forth on the war path. His warriors too, eager for the fray, similarly armed themselves and all slipped noiselessly out of Simpson camp.

Whether the colonists were warned in time to adequately prepare for the attack or just when and where the skirmish occurred, we do not know. Probably some of the whites lost their lives, but evidently the Etiwans were defeated, for at only two miles southwest from the Indian camp, and on the western fringe of Fanny Branch, we find a tumulus or cluster of burial mounds where their dead were gathered for interment. These mounds are not of the same character as those usually found in places near a quiet Indian village, but have the appearance of those hastily made while the warriors were on retreat during the time of war. The theory that this tumulus on Wampee Plantation is the grave of Indians who fell in battle is further substantiated by the fact that when, some years ago, certain parties for the purpose of investigation, dug into them, they found charred bones and possibly arrowheads and broken pottery. It is well known that it was an Indian custom to cremate bodies of those who died in battle, and in this instance, probably the charred skeletons were placed in the hurriedly constructed mounds.

In this warfare between whites and red men, neither of the belligerents, while taking aim, seem to have been painstaking in ascertaining the sex of the fleeing adversary and it is possible that the remains of several squaws may have been included among the dead in this tumulus.

With no unreasonable stretch of the imagination, we may visualize a picture of the melancholy scene at the final ceremonial rites at the mound. The braves who have survived squat frog-like in a circle about the mounds, while sandwiched between them are the women standing, holding in their hands flaring torches of rich gummy pine, and these they wave with evolutions. They accompany each evolution with a fearful cry, which at intervals is chorused by the chant of the assembled group.

Within a few hundred yards and directly south of this Indian tumulus, across a very thick growth of trees and underbrush, is the old long-vacant Wampee

Plantation dwelling which has the distinction of being listed among the haunted houses within the Pinopolis area.

Shall we, like some of the inhabitants of the neighborhood, believe that the following ghost story is evidence of the reincarnation of one of the young squaws who followed her mate into battle and met the sad fate as described above?

Legend tells us that on rainy nights just before low twelve, when the bats become vigilant in the attic, when the owls begin to hoot in the ancient oaks around and the snakes leave their bed of concealment to crawl about, then the ghost appears upon the front steps of the Wampee building, clad, not in the yellow skin of the fawn, but in a more ethereal garb, a flowing robe resembling blue silk chiffon with Cinderella-like slippers on her feet and a complexion as exquisite and delicate as a blush of early dawn upon the morning dew; it makes its usual visits to all the rooms of the house and to the surrounding premises; then the ghost vanishes as mysteriously as it appeared.

The story is known and repeated by many of the older and most highly respected citizens in this vicinity, and there has never been a question as to its reality by anyone who claims to have seen the apparition.

From the tumulus at Wampee, we trace the retreat of the red man in a northwesterly direction to another tumulus five miles away at or near Indian Corner on Ophir Plantation at the south side of Ferguson Swamp. In appearance, these mounds seem to have the same general characteristics and probably the same history as the ones at Wampee.

Situated about one-half mile northwest of this tumulus is the well-preserved Ophir dwelling which came very near being included among the haunted houses within the Pinopolis Basin but escaped by the following amusing incident:

Old Sandy, servant and caretaker of the place, who had inherited the night prowling habits of his African ancestors, was on one occasion making his usual nocturnal ramblings about the grounds. Suddenly he noticed on the front piazza, which had an elevation of something like twelve feet and was reached by a wide and easy flight of brick steps, two white objects moving back and forth. He could see no heads, but there was a peculiar rattle of feet.

Sandy immediately thought of ghosts. To his superstitious and highly religious nature, the sight and sound suggested to him the scene of Jacob wrestling with the Angel. So terrified was Sandy that the natural kinks of his hair began to

straighten out and his hat seemed to rise on his head, while a mental storm raged fast and furious within, - - should he stand by and make use of Cap'n Henry's old gun which he had in hand or should he seek refuge in flight. Just at that moment his eye caught a glimpse of several milk cows browsing on the lawn nearby and the idea came to his almost overtaxed mind that there might be some connection between these animals and the objects on the piazza above. With the cows as possible protection against spirits and haunts, he bravely made a few steps forward and to his great relief discovered that the white objects were two calves frolicking about. Sandy walked calmly away, proud of his knowledge that he, in this predicament, like Daniel in the lion's den, had come off victorious.

Sandy, the iconoclast (a person who attacks cherished beliefs or institutions), was still living at Ophir (at this writing) and took much delight in reciting this harrowing experience to all who cared to listen.

From Ophir Plantation, the Etiwans evidently continued their retreat westward and established a new frontier across the Wassamassaw, which goes beyond the confines of the Pinopolis reservoir. Eventually, the Etiwans, as well as practically all other Indian tribes in the low country, were driven out, or exterminated.

We in America who now condemn aggressor nations across the sea should remember that our forebearers also were aggressors when they ruthlessly drove out and destroyed this native people.

What a pity there is left among the race of Hiawatha no hand to lay a wreath upon these graves. There is no indication that there will ever be erected a shaft perpetuating the memory of the Etiwans who fought and died to save their own homeland.

“So, the poor Indian,  
whose untutored mind,  
sees God in the clouds, and  
hears him in the wind.”

Peter G. Gourdin (1940)

To elucidate parts of the preceding, I was one of the parties consisting of a high school chemistry class of 1939 or 1940 who dug into the tumulus at Wampee.

We split up in groups of four or five and each group dug into a mound. I had heard that it was the custom of the Indians to bury their dead in a sitting position with their knees drawn up to their chest, and then covered with dirt, thrown by the handful as the mourning Indians danced in a circle around the body.

As we dug into these mounds, which at the time were about two feet high, we found proof of this as we first came to the skull, and as we carefully dug deeper, found other bones of the body in a position that would indicate a squatting or sitting burial position. Along with these small fragments of bone, there were also pieces of pottery and broken arrowheads, etc.

As for the Simpson camp, property owned by my mother, Vivian H. Wiley, until 1940, when the South Carolina Public Service Authority began construction, I can well remember plowing through this area, which had a very large mound; apparently that of a chief, because of its high size. We plowed up a tomahawk, an axe, three pieces of stone foreign to this part of the country, which have round indentations as though they were used for grinding the ends of handles, etc., along with numerous pipe stems, pipes, arrowheads, and pieces of pottery.

So, from all evidence found, this camp at Simpson was very large and active for a number of years before our forefathers drove them out into new, unknown land.

Wm. H. Wiley (1955)  
Pinopolis, S.C.

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