

AN HISTORIC INDIAN BURIAL FROM COLUMBIA COUNTY, GEORGIA

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In the Savannah River, about five airline miles above Augusta, Georgia, is an island now called Indian Island. According to Claflin,¹ it was once called Stallings Island, and by this name it is well known in archeological literature. The huge shell midden on the island has yielded evidence of occupation during several archeological periods. In recent years a power company built two towers on the midden, carrying transmission lines across the river. During the construction of these towers, the midden was cleared of brush; shell and earth were stripped away from portions of the site not previously investigated by archeologists. On the southeastern side of the midden, a large pocket of red clay was thus disclosed. This contained an Indian burial.

The burial was that of a young child, about five years old, as indicated by the size of the bones and the presence of milk-teeth only. Sex was not determined. The burial was tightly flexed, with the head to the west.

About the neck were a great many beads, of three varieties. Most numerous were seed-beads of light blue glass (Fig. 1, F). These were not counted; they sufficed nearly to fill a pint jar. There were 198 larger beads, made of red glass over a black core, and varying in shape from spherical to oblong (Fig. 1, E). Also in the necklace were ten oblong beads made from perforated pearls (Fig. 1, G); the comparatively large, rude perforations appeared to have been made by some primitive drilling technique. (Pearls occur naturally in Savannah River mussels.) With the beads were eight canine teeth of some medium-sized carnivore, probably raccoon (Fig. 1, H). These were not perforated, but may have been bound into the necklace. Also among the beads, as part of a necklace, were four iron nails, each rectangular in cross-section and tapering gradually from head to point (Fig. 1, A).

At the level of the pelvis was a small, chisel-like blade chipped from a fairly hard slaty material (Fig. 1, D). This object somewhat resembled a gunflint; however, unlike most gunflints it was knapped to an equal extent on both faces. The slaty stone crops out along the Savannah River in the vicinity of the site.

1. Claflin, 1931, p. 1.

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With this blade was a lump of red ocher (Fig. 1, C) and a rudely made cup-shaped object of untempered clay (Fig. 1, B). The latter had a perforation in the base, and suggested the bowl of a toy pipe. In contact with the skull, above and between the orbits, was a subtriangular bit of unworked turtle shell. This could have been part of a head-dress, or merely an accidental inclusion in the burial fill.

The remainder of the clay pocket was troweled out, but nothing else was found except a few mollusk shells, probably included in the clay by accident. Apparently a burial pit had been dug into the shell heap, then filled with clay.

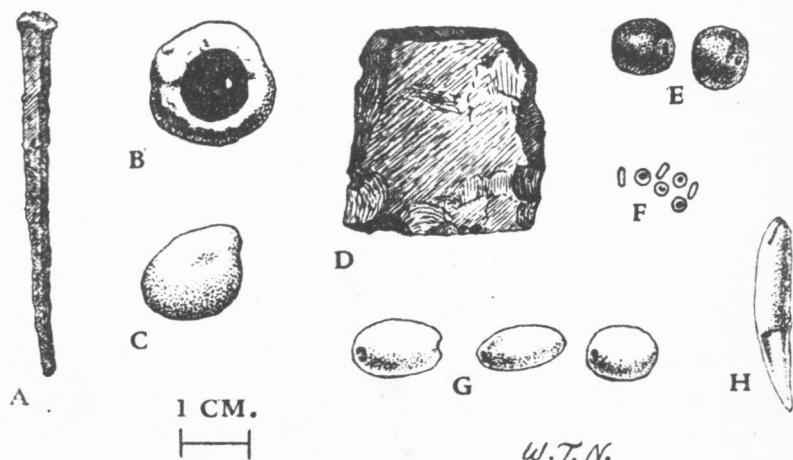


Fig. 1. Artifacts from an historic Indian burial in Georgia. A, Nail; B, object of unfired clay; C, lump of red ocher; D, chisel-like object of chipped stone; E, glass beads; F, glass seed beads; G, pearl beads; H, tooth of a carnivore.

At a depth of four feet below the surface of the midden, Claflin² found a level of red clay, but this probably had nothing to do with the burial pit. Claflin found no historic burials, but he did recover "the neck of one trade bottle, a piece from the neck of another similar bottle, and a piece of glass. Both fragments of trade bottles were of the pre-Revolutionary type. . . . All three pieces were sufficiently below the surface to remove any possibility of their having been left on the island by some

2. *Ibid.*, pp. 4-5.

white man many years after the Indians had left this region . . ."³ The later pottery from Stallings Island included "sherds with a roughly scratched pattern [probably made] by some sort of crude brush."⁴ These, and certain rim sherds illustrated by Claflin, probably date from the historic period also.

Documentary sources aid in identifying the burial. The Augusta area was inhabited by many tribes in historic times. However, most of them dwelt at varying distances below the present-day city, in the low, flat Coastal Plain. This was certainly the case with the Apalachee, Chickasaw, and Shawnee, who were late comers into the area; and probably the case with the earlier Westo and protohistoric Kasihta. The only historic tribe clearly associated with the Stallings Island region, in the rocky Piedmont upland, is the Yuchi.⁵ Euchee Island and Uchee Creek, a few miles above Stallings Island, perpetuate the name of the tribe that dwelt in the vicinity. These place names are not of recent origin, but are mentioned in some fairly early accounts.

The Hogologe band of Yuchi appeared near Stallings Island in 1715 or perhaps a little earlier, and in 1716 presumably removed to the Chattahoochee River. In spite of their brief residence on the Savannah, this band apparently gave their name to Euchee Island and Uchee Creek. About the same time that the Hogologe band departed, other Yuchi moved into the Augusta region. These later settled below the city, according to Hawkins,⁶ but a few of them may have taken up residence in the area freshly abandoned by their kinsmen. The last of the Yuchi left the Savannah in 1751, falling back to the Chattahoochee. (The Yuchi band among the Florida Seminole probably were an offshoot of the Chattahoochee town.)

Thus, the historical burial on Stallings Island may well be a Yuchi interment of the early 18th Century. The grave goods do not contradict this supposition. Blue glass seed-beads are widespread; they appear as early as the 16th Century and are still in use today. Opaque red beads with a black core are a common "early" type.⁷ Pearls were widely used by Savannah River tribes in protohistoric times, but declined in popularity thereafter. There seems to be no dependable reference to pearls in the South-

3. *Ibid.*, p. 40.

4. *Ibid.*, p. 20 and pl. 32.

5. See Milling, 1940, pp. 179-187; also Swanton, 1922, pp. 286-312. and 1946, pp. 212-215.

6. Hawkins, 1848, pp. 61-63, 66-67.

7. Orchard, 1929, p. 87.

east after the early 18th Century. One of the last observations is that of Pénicaut,⁸ who visited the Natchez about 1704. He stated that Natchez children under the age of ten each wore two or three pearls. Welch⁹ mentioned a pearl-ornamented garment among the 19th Century Seminole, but Welch's observations are not considered especially reliable. Hand-forged, square-stemmed nails appear early in historic times and continue well into the 19th Century. Chipped stone implements were in use in Georgia as late as the Ocmulgee Fields Period, *circa* 1690-1776 A.D.¹⁰

Certain previously described historic burials have features in common with that from Stallings Island. Moore¹¹ found three skeletons in a mound at Bayard Point, Clay County, Florida. One of these burials, that of a woman, yielded earrings, glass beads, brass rings, fragments of glass, and a lump of red pigment identified as cinnabar. With the other two burials, those of men, were flintlock guns, musket balls, remnants of a powder horn, and a flint-and-steel. Moore thought that the burials were not intrusive, and that the mound had been erected to cover them. Goggin¹² suggested the possibility that the Bayard Point mound had been constructed by "Yuchi or other Muskogean warriors" during their engagements at Fort Pupo. If so, it may date from about 1740. Goggin *et al.*¹³ described a burial from Alachua County, Florida, doubtless attributable to one of the bands that made up the Seminole. This burial was flexed, with the head to the west; funerary offerings included red pigment and square-stemmed nails as well as weapons and accoutrements, tools, ornaments, and other items. The Alachua County interment may be a bit later than the Clay County one, probably dating from the latter half of the 18th Century.

Archeological remains attributed to the Yuchi have been found in Tennessee. Among them are the "small log town house" sites of the Norris Basin, and the Mouse Creek Focus of the Hiwassee River. However, these remains seem to pertain respectively to the Tamahita and Chisca bands of the Yuchi, and in any event are a good bit earlier than the Stallings Island burial.¹⁴

8. *In Margry*, 1875-86, Vol. 5, p. 452.

9. *Welch*, 1841, p. 56.

10. *Fairbanks*, 1952, p. 298.

11. *Moore*, 1894, pp. 188-189.

12. *Goggin*, 1952, p. 59, footnote 16.

13. *Goggin et al.*, 1949.

14. *Webb*, 1938, pp. 380-382; *Lewis and Kneberg*, 1946, pp. 13-14; *Fairbanks*, *op. cit.*, p. 294.

Therefore they do not afford comparative data in the present case.

Historic times in eastern Georgia are not well known archeologically. Farther west in the state, an historic period, Ocmulgee Fields, has been recognized. The definition of the period is based on the remains of the Lower Creek towns from about 1690 to the American Revolution. Ocmulgee Fields burials were either flexed or extended, and were usually accompanied by abundant grave goods mostly of European origin.¹⁵ The Stallings Island burial is thus quite like some Ocmulgee Fields interments.

Mortuary customs of recent Yuchi include burial with the head to the west, painting of the corpse's face, dressing of the body in good clothes, and the placing of a few objects in the grave.¹⁶ Yuchi graves were bark-lined, as was the case with one (?) burial at Bayard Point. Bark was not observed in the Stallings Island burial; probably it would decay rapidly in the damp, acid clay that filled the grave. (Even the seed-beads were pitted and corroded.) Disturbance was considerable at Stallings Island, and it was impossible to determine whether the burial represented subfloor interment of the sort once practiced by the Yuchi.

To summarize: An historic burial was found at Stallings Island, Columbia County, Georgia. Grave goods reveal that it was an Indian burial, and documentary sources suggest that it may have been a Yuchi interment of the early 18th Century. The mortuary offerings do not negate this supposition. Trade items and certain aboriginal sherds, previously found by Claflin on Stallings Island, may well have been approximately contemporaneous with the aforesaid burial. There is at least a general similarity among the Stallings Island interment, the Bayard Point ones reported by Moore, the Alachua County one described by Goggin *et al.*, and some Ocmulgee Fields burials.

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15. Fairbanks, *op. cit.*, p. 298.

16. Speck, 1909, pp. 97-98.

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