



# Trove of artifacts in Georgia

CANTON, Ga. (AP) – For 15 years, hordes of shoppers have streamed into the Wal-Mart Supercenter in Canton.

The hilltop along I-575 is a prime commercial location in Cherokee County, a fast-growing community with one foot in metro Atlanta and another in the North Georgia mountains.

What few customers know is they are walking on land that was a hub for Native American life for 10,000 years. At different times, the patch of high ground overlooking the Etowah River has been a village, a fort, a trading center and, finally, home to a cluster of Cherokee families desperately trying to co-exist with the white man.

During the summer of 1995, a large crew of archaeologists and their assistants unearthed a trove of artifacts that told a story of the land's ancient inhabitants. The property, known as the Hickory Log Site, yielded 48 graves and thousands of artifacts that filled 120 boxes. The discovery offered one of the most detailed looks ever at the life of Native Americans in North Georgia.

Local officials hope to exhibit the findings – ranging from 10,000-year-old spear tips to a rifle used by the Cherokees – at The Funk Heritage Center at Reinhardt University.

“It’s a rare chance to educate people (about) what happened,” said Paul Webb, the archaeologist who headed the 1995 dig and returned to Cherokee County recently to finally speak about his findings and lay the groundwork for the artifacts to return home. “It’s one thing to know this is Cherokee County and another thing to have this tangible evidence of Native American and Cherokee life.

“It remains one of the major projects in North Georgia in size and scope and in what we found. Hickory Log has probably seen 10,000 years of occupation,” he said. “You have high ground overlooking Hickory Log Creek and the Etowah River. It had ample water, rich farmland below. It was a good place to live with access to transportation.”

In essence, what made for a good hub for Cherokee County’s Native Americans later made for a perfect Wal-Mart location.

Webb walked the site and pointed to spots where the ancients once roamed. The hill leading to the reservoir pond is where the Cherokees settled. What is now the Wal-Mart gardening department was the site of a fort 1,000 years ago.

Billy Hasty, a Canton attorney whose family owned the land and sold it to the Wal-Mart developers, used to hunt dove there. Hasty had long wondered what happened to the artifacts. About a year ago, he spoke with Joseph Kitchens, director of the Reinhardt museum, which the Legislature named Georgia’s official Frontier and Southeastern Indian Interpretive Center. Museum officials had always hoped to bring the artifacts home to Cherokee County, so Hasty and Kitchens tracked down Webb.

After the dig, Webb had spent a couple of years cataloging and researching the artifacts, but the grant money ran out. So, for the past few years, he had continued the project on his own time in North Carolina.

“I think he was waiting for us to call,” said Hasty, who attended Reinhardt, as did his father, and is the university’s chairman.

*It was a few years before the mass removal in 1838, known as the Trail of Tears.*

Recently, Hasty and Kitchens drove up to Chapel Hill, N.C., and spent an afternoon excitedly digging through the boxes of artifacts.

In a lecture with Cherokee County residents recently Webb ticked off the importance of what was found during the \$500,000 excavation. The items are from four archaeological periods spanning a 2,000-year period and help provide insight into the people who came and went but left no written record.

From 200 B.C. to A.D. 600, Indians of the Woodland period started building a village in what is now Canton. The ruins found in 1995 are the largest such group of structures from that era ever found, Webb said.

Around A.D. 900, farmers tilled the floodplains there. But they feared for their safety and built a log fort, which is “the most completely excavated Woodstock (era) fortification.”

Once again, around 1300, in the Mississippian period, a group of people probably tied to those who lived by the Etowah mounds downstream built a hamlet of wooden post homes. They and their descendants were there for about 100 years.

Finally, in the late 1780s, Cherokees, who had been forced westward, settled along the Etowah River. The inhabitants incorporated many European items into their lifestyle.

“These Cherokees were living a mixture of lifestyles,” said Webb. “They’re using metal tools but also making traditional pottery. Their kids could have been going to the Baptist school down the road.

“They had horses and pigs but were also eating deer, turkey and fish like they had for millennia. It was a real dynamic time,” he said. “Things were changing really quick.”

Ultimately, they left in the early 1830s, no doubt pressured to go. It was a few years before the mass removal in 1838, known as the Trail of Tears.

The site was then taken over by white settlers.

“A lot of the places settled after the American Revolution were settled by Euro-Americans who burned out the Cherokees,” said Tyler Howe, the tribal historic preservation specialist for the Eastern Band of Cherokee, which is based in Cherokee, N.C. “You see that throughout the South.”

Hasty said he was struck by the fact that, through the centuries, people were drawn to the same spot.

“They would come in, hunt and farm the land until it wore out and then would abandon it. And then, years later, another band would come in and start over again. You know it’s a good spot; people keep coming back.”

The excavation found the skeletal remains of at least 48 of the people who lived on the site. One was the full skeleton of a girl who was surrounded by toys and personal items.

The remains, too, were returned home. Two years ago, in a ceremony overseen by Cherokee descendants, they were reburied in the Canton area.

# Construction to start on new Indian casino

DRY PRONG, La. (AP) – The Jena Band of Choctaw Indians has been working toward opening a casino for more than a decade.

B. Cheryl Smith, the tribal chief of the Jena Band of Choctaw Indians, said plans for the casino are finalized, and tribal leaders hope a casino will be open by the end of this year in the Creola community in south Grant Parish.

Smith said the tribe secured all of its federal approvals and signed loan documents last week, allowing the tribe to move forward with its plans.

“It is now official,” Smith said. “The tribe is going to build a casino in Grant Parish. We are elated to be able to provide job opportunities and economic growth to Central Louisiana, especially in Grant. We have looked forward to the day when we could share the benefits of the facility with our neighbors.”

Julie Wilkerson, an attorney for the tribe, said the Jena Band of Choctaw Indians would build a Class II casino on a piece of land off U.S. Highway 167. She said construction is expected to begin next week. A Class II casino can have poker tables and gaming machines, but not gambling tables such as roulette or blackjack that are featured at Class III casinos in Marksville and Kinder.

“The bells and whistles are like Class III,” said Wilkerson, adding that many of the machine games are the same as found in other casinos.

Smith said the casino will be “full service” – including a buffet and sports bar – and will employ approximately 270 people. Many of those likely will be members of the tribe, who sup-

ported building a casino in the Creola area.

The casino, tribal leaders hope, will generate enough revenue to enable the tribe to provide much-needed governmental, health, educational and cultural services for the tribal members. The tribe receives some federal money, but not as much as other tribes that are older and bigger.

Bo Vets of Colfax, the president of the Grant Parish Chamber of Commerce, believes the casino can have a positive impact on the parish.

“It’s probably going to benefit the parish in terms of taxes and getting jobs in the parish,” said Vets, adding his thoughts were his own personal opinions and not an endorsement by the Chamber of Commerce. “It may even attract some people to move into the parish. I can see where it’s beneficial for the parish.”

Vets, who said he doesn’t gamble but also doesn’t believe he should push his beliefs on other people, said the new casino “could have a tremendous impact for Grant Parish.”

“It definitely will attract more people to the area, whether they move to the area or just come to visit,” he said. “Those people will be spending money in Grant Parish, and that’s going to help out local businesses. Those businesses might even be able to hire more people. It could have a lot of potential benefits for the parish.”

Mike Wahlder, a Creola businessman who more than a decade ago donated to the tribe the 40-plus acres of land that will be the home of the casino, said he was happy to see progress with the casino.

# Lumbee council again votes against chairman

LAURINBURG, N.C. (AP) – The Lumbee Tribal Council is continuing its fight with its chairman, again rejecting his choice for administrator.

The council voted 11-10 not to consider a contract for Gervais Oxendine to become administrator because the paperwork was not submitted before the meeting last Thursday and the item wasn’t on the agenda.

It was the second time a vote went against Oxendine, who is the tribal chairman’s candidate for administrator. At a meeting March 6, the council tied on whether to hire Oxendine. The council also voted to tear down walls that Brooks ordered built for office space at the Elders Heritage Group. The council doesn’t want space taken away from the elders group.

# Idaho tribe touts ‘Mrs. Swing’s’ Indian roots

BOISE (AP) – Mildred Rinker Bailey was known to fans as “Mrs. Swing,” whose slight, throaty voice won her acclaim as one of the great white jazz singers of the 1930s and 1940s.

But the Coeur d’Alene Indian Tribe is now hoping to set the record straight once and for all: Bailey, who died impoverished

in Poughkeepsie, New York, in 1951, was an American Indian who spent her childhood on the reservation near DeSmet, Idaho.

This week, the tribe introduced a resolution honoring Bailey in the Idaho Legislature, in part to convince the Jazz at Lincoln Center Hall of Fame in New York City to add her to its

inductees – on grounds she helped blaze a trail for better-known singers like Ella Fitzgerald and Billie Holiday.

“Mildred was a pioneer,” said Coeur d’Alene Tribal Chairman Chief J. Allan. “She paved the way for many other female singers to follow.”

Though Bailey’s Coeur

d’Alene ties may not have been common knowledge among her fans, it clearly wasn’t a secret.

“Part Indian, she was born Mildred Rinker on a farm near Spokane,” reads her Associated Press obituary, dated Dec. 13, 1951. Still, in jazz history books, Bailey has gone down largely as a white female jazz stylist.

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