

# **The Lost Village of the Waccamaw Indians**

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## **INTRODUCTION**

The Waccamaw Indian tribe was one of the many smaller tribes located in SC and NC. They lived along the Waccamaw and Pee Dee Rivers in NC and SC. Historical records estimate their population at around 900 people at the start of the 16<sup>th</sup> century. However, after the European diseases impacted the tribe, their numbers fell remarkably. The Waccamaw are said to have participated in the Tuscarora War in 1711 and the Yamasee War of 1715. A census recorded their population down to 610 in 1715 with 210 men. By 1720, the census recorded only 100 warriors with the tribe having lost 60 men, woman, and children in a battle with the SC colony. Another report stated that some Waccamaw were killed by the Cherokee and Natchez Indians in 1755.

Many tribes were divided into clans. No written records have been found as yet to indicate the Waccamaw had clans. However, a study in 1987, Julian T. Pierce, Cynthia Hunt-Locklear, Jack Campisi, Wesley White, *The Lumbee Petition*, 3 vols. (Pembroke, NC: Lumbee River Legal Services, 1987), pp.1-79, provided a listing of surnames of the Waccamaw Indians. These names were: Campbell, Baldwin, Freeman, Jacobs, Patrick, Graham, Hammonds, Blanks, Hunt, Locklear, Moore, Strickland, Young, Bowen, Godwin, Lacewell, Bryant, Daniels, and Spaulding. One report indicated the Waccamaw lived in six villages in the SC area but the names of the villages were never recorded. They may have been grouped by family names with several families making up a particular village.

Some historians believed the Waccamaw, because of their small tribal size, joined with the Catawba and became extinct as a tribe in the mid to late 1700's. Some did but not all. One village, who may have been concerned about the encroachment of settlers on their village and its impact left SC probably following known Indian trails to the west and searched for a place of peace where they could settle down. It is believed this village included the surnames of Freeman, Locklear, Bryant and Godwin.

## **The Waccamaw Village in Eastern TN**

A group of Waccamaw Indians representing 13 families and possibly about 40-45 people are believed to have left SC somewhere about the summer of 1773 and arrived in eastern TN probably in the fall of that same year. The distance of their trip was around 365 miles. The Waccamaw warriors may have known about the area of TN from previous hunting trips. This would have been a difficult trip for the tribe which had spent their entire life in the coastal plains of SC and NC and were unaccustomed to moving their members and their possessions particularly into a mountainous area. Further, moving away from the rest of the tribe must have been a traumatic event for them.

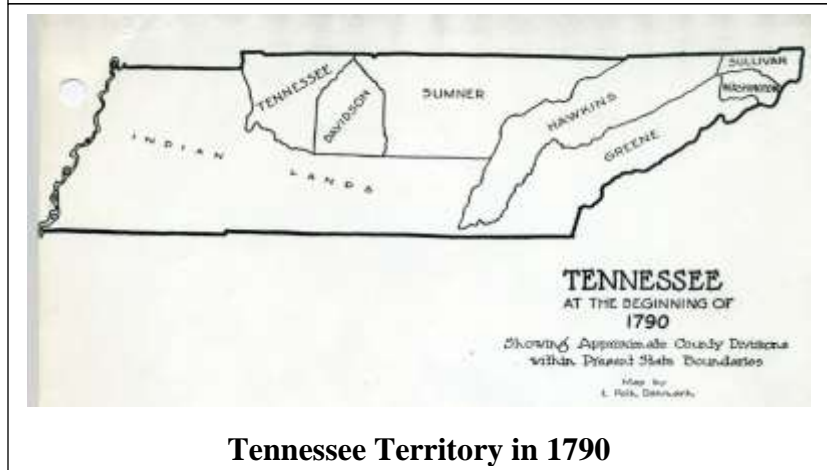
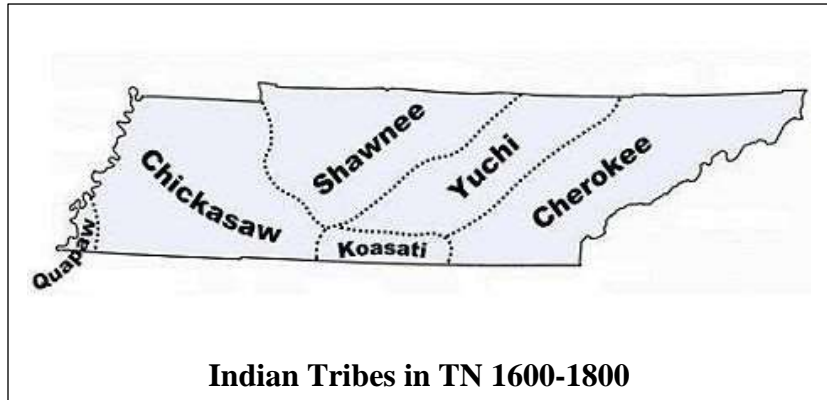
The area of TN that they eventually settled is located about 11 miles NE from current Jamestown, TN and 60+ miles NW of Knoxville, TN. Today, that area is the Pickett Civilian Conservation Corps State Park and the Big South Fork National River and Recreational Area. The area is a very

rugged terrain with wild rivers and large sandstone cliffs and arches carved by the rivers a millennium ago. The area was claimed by the Cherokee and Uchee Indians.

For Indians moving into a new area, it is customary to seek permission from the tribe that claims that area before settling down. The Waccamaw may not have known the tribe that occupied the area and thus, created a situation that resulted in serious harm to the tribe.

### ***Uchee Indians of TN***

The figure to the right shows a map of the Indian tribes that occupied TN before it became a state. The Cherokee lost control of their land in eastern TN after the Revolutionary War. The Uchee Indians are said to have left TN in the 1600's to early 1700's and moved south to GA and FL. For the most part, the Uchee did leave but small villages of Uchee probably remained or came back to TN when conditions of the area to which they had moved were intolerable. So, in 1770, the Uchee Indians were still living in parts of eastern TN where Pickett CCC State Park is located today.



By the late 1770's, the TN territory which was claimed by NC was being divided into counties beginning in 1777 as shown on the map to the left. TN became a state in 1796 but settlers had been occupying the area for over twenty years before it became a state.

So, the Waccamaw Indians who arrived in the fall of 1773, probably could not have chosen a worst place to settle down considering they were looking for a place to settle their tribe for a long time of peaceful occupation.

### ***A Uchee Sacred Site***

Our report, *The Common Tribal Culture of Principle Towns* published in 2019, provides a detail account of the common sacred ceremonial sites that usually are found with principle Indian towns and villages. Mostly, these sacred sites are commonly found within the boundaries of the town or village. However, on occasion, there may be a very sacred site located away from the village that has special meaning to the tribe and is a place that is protected from outsider interference. For the

Uchee who lived near where Pickett CCC State Park is located today, the site of the Indian Rock House formation was believed to be one of their most sacred sites.

The Rock House site is approximately 0.7 miles SW from the southernmost Uchee village. This sandstone formation created a millennium ago is in the form of a half circle and massive in its vertical reach from the ground to the top of the carved formation. In the center of the formation is a spring fed by an underground stream of water that follows the curvature of the sandstone formation. In the center of the spring are two Earth Energy lines at about 90 degrees to each other. One energy line is approximately perpendicular to the sandstone formation. This line intercepts a carved-out



**Indian Rock House, Pickett CCC State Park**

dome in the formation where two more energy lines intersect. This dome is thought to be a portal location where the Uchee's believed their Supreme Being came to earth to communicate with them. Thus, the site was probably considered so sacred that only select members of the tribe came here to conduct ceremonies. The ceremonies were likely led by the tribal medicine man or shaman. When you are in the location of the portal and spring, you can feel the large amount of energy associated with this site.

### ***The Tragic Loss of the Waccamaw Village***

The elders of the Waccamaw tribe that arrived in TN could have located their people anywhere in eastern TN. Unfortunately, they chose a site within a half mile of a very important Uchee sacred site, now called the Rock House, and less than a mile from another Uchee sacred site, now called

Hazard's Cave. Probably the Waccamaw didn't even know about these sites. One group of Uchee, however, considered them trespassers who violated their sacred places. They vowed retribution.

Having endured a long and dangerous journey on their trek to TN, the Waccamaw probably needed to replenish their food supplies. It seems that the men, having settled their small group in a seemingly safe place, left on an extended hunting trip.

***Uchee Warriors***

There were estimated to be three Uchee Villages located on Watson Branch Creek east and northeast of where the Waccamaw set up their village. These villages were at least one or more miles from the Waccamaw village site. One of these villages was a principle village with the principle chief whose leadership commanded the activities of the tribe. It is believed that the people of the Uchee village closest to the Waccamaw were most angered by the presence of the other Indians. Probably without permission from their Principle Chief, they scouted the Waccamaw



**Spring at Indian Rockhouse**



**Indian Rock House Portal Site**

village and when the men left on their hunting trip, the Uchee warriors attacked the unguarded women and children

It is estimated that the women and the children of each family scattered in all directions to save themselves from the Uchee warriors. Four women and their ten children ran to the east uphill to the ridgeline before they were overrun and slaughtered by the Uchee warriors. The other nine women and their children scattered in other directions. It is unknown what happened to them but it is believed they never made it back to the village.



**Marker Tree for Women and Children**

When the Waccamaw men returned several weeks later, they

found the bodies of their women and children laying on the ridge above their camp. This tragic loss of family members was so painful to them, that they bent/broke a tree in four places representing the anguish they felt. The men created a pointer on the end of the tree that indicated the area where the women and children were killed. Standing in the presence of the tree today, one can continue to feel the pain of their loss. Some are even brought to tears.

Marker Trees are not often bent to represent such pain but this tree is special and one can feel the pain of their loss when you are close to the tree.

### **Epilogue**

A plethora of written and verbal accounts of intolerable actions of one culture against another span the centuries of historical records. Among those accounts are records of savagery within a culture with brothers against brothers. There is no written account of the actions of the Uchee against the Waccamaw. However, as long as it lives, this Marker tree, this sentinel, will tell the story of what happened there to those who have ears that hear and listen as the story is coaxed from the tree. The remains of the women and children eventually disappeared, but their spirits still roam the site.

The tree today stands near the beginning of the Indian Rock House trail. It is easily seen, but the story could never have been told had it not been for the keen observation powers of Rita Curley who found the tree on a hike to the Indian Rock House. For almost 80 years that the park had been opened, hundreds, if not thousands, of people have passed by the tree but never took the time to stop and investigate the tree and report its existence. Its story is now preserved and recorded.