

SEARCHING FOR *ROANOAC*

Archaeology in the Elizabethan Gardens 1953-2022



Eric Klingelhofer and Eric Deetz

First Colony Report,

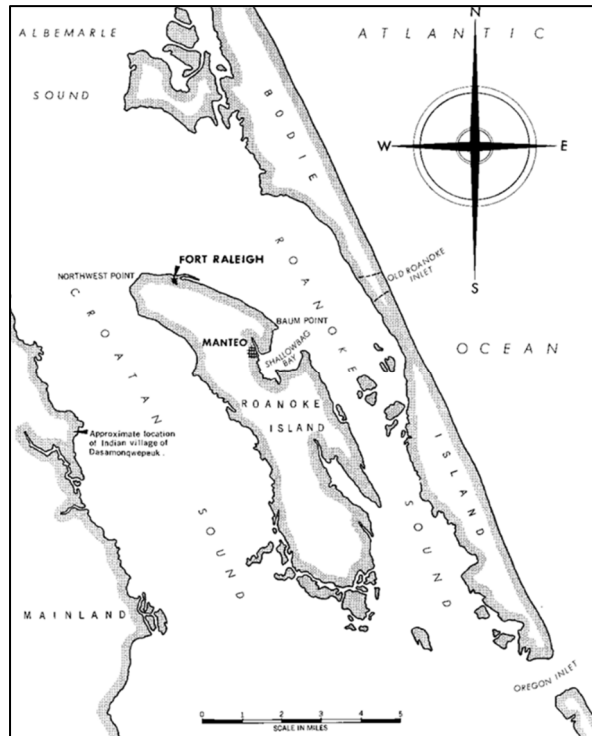
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Searching for *Roanoac*:
Archaeology at the Elizabethan Gardens
Eric Klingelhofer and Eric Deetz, First Colony Foundation

In 1584, Walter Raleigh sent two small ships, under captains Amadas and Barlow, to discover what lay west of the narrow sand banks that jut out the mid-Atlantic coastline. They came ashore, claiming the unexplored country for Queen Elizabeth, and were soon met by leaders of the indigenous people, exchanging gifts of food and clothing on the beach. Soon the English took a ships' boat to venture westward into the sound.



They reported: *We came to an island, which they call Roanoak... and at the North end thereof, was a village of nine houses, built of Cedar, and fortified round about with sharpe trees, to keep out their enemies...*



Town of Pomeiok, drawn by John White.

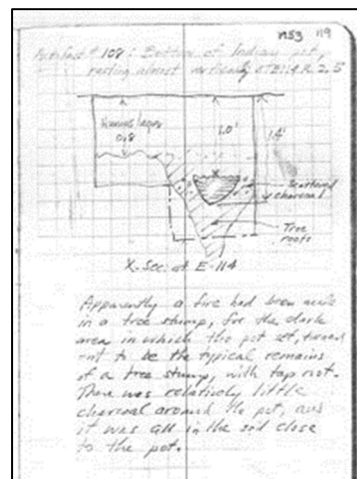
...when we came towards it, standing neere unto the waters side, the wife of Granganimo, the King's brother, came running out to meete us very cheerfully, and friendly...



The sister-in-law of Granganeo, drawn by John White.

Excavations at Fort Raleigh by the NPS archaeologist Jean C. Harrington began in 1947 and continued with interruptions until 1965. In 1953 he examined the tract of land owned by the Roanoke Island Historical Association (RIHA), since 1953 the site of the Garden Club of North Carolina's "Elizabethan Gardens." Harrington's few trenches unearthed few artifacts.

An important exception, however, was the intact bottom third of a dark grey Colington Ware pot, shell-tempered and fabric impressed, with a pointed base. Likely from the 1500s, this vessel lacked its upper portion, presumably removed by more recent plowing, because it was found sitting vertically one foot below ground surface in the taproot mold of a burnt-out tree. The relative lack of other finds suggests that the local workmen who dug those trenches were unobservant. At Fort Raleigh, later excavations recovered a large number of artifacts from Harrington's backfilled trenches, suggesting that much had been also missed at the Gardens in 1953.



Complete example of fabric-impressed Colington Ware and Harrington's field notes.

William Haag of Louisiana State University, studied the coastal prehistoric archaeology of North Carolina in 1954 and 55. Haag identified the locality of Fort Raleigh and adjacent RIHA properties as an Indian site that lacked a known settlement; reporting that "nothing was found that suggested a

concentrated village midden [garbage dump].” In addition to items unearthed in Harrington’s test excavations in the Gardens, Haag noted that workmen later found part of an Indian clay tobacco pipe in a soil layer buried six feet beneath a sand dune. Harrington’s trenches had not reached that depth.

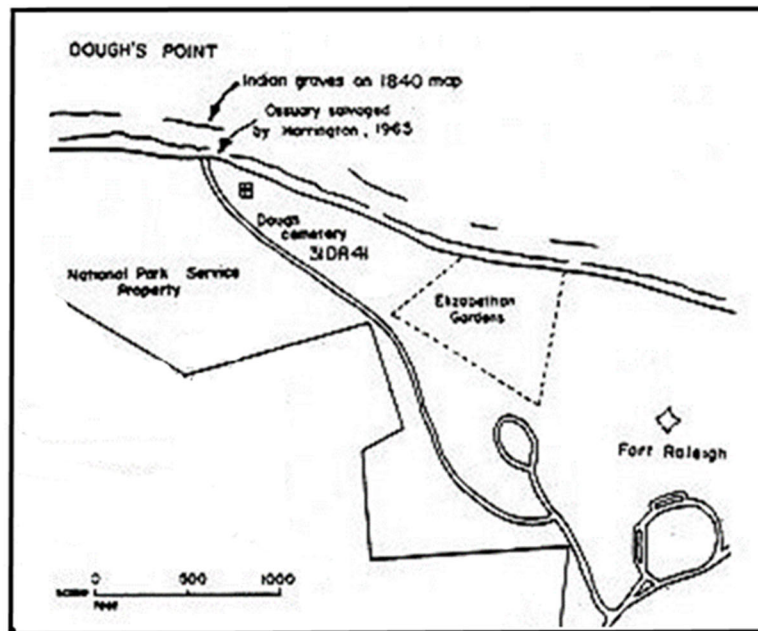
Haag’s collection of artifacts from the Gardens was later reviewed by David Phelps of East Carolina University, who ascribed the pottery to the latest Native culture at Roanoke, the Late Woodland period Colington Ware. Phelps noted that Haag retrieved from the Sunken Garden 10 plain, 79 fabric-impressed, 6 simple stamped, and 60 residual Colington sherds. As the Sunken Garden alone yielded 155 Late Woodland sherds (plus 42 sherds of earlier types), then the entire Gardens had more Algonquian archaeology than has been discovered at Fort Raleigh itself.

Ten years after Haas’s report, in 1995, *The Coastland Times* reported that:

An East Carolina University archaeology class, led by David Phelps, uncovered pieces of Indian pottery, animal bone and shell on the southern point of the Elizabethan Gardens property, indicating what Phelps believes to be an Indian refuse pit. The site was being prepared to have a warehouse built upon it for the Elizabethan Gardens by the Roanoke Island Historical Association.



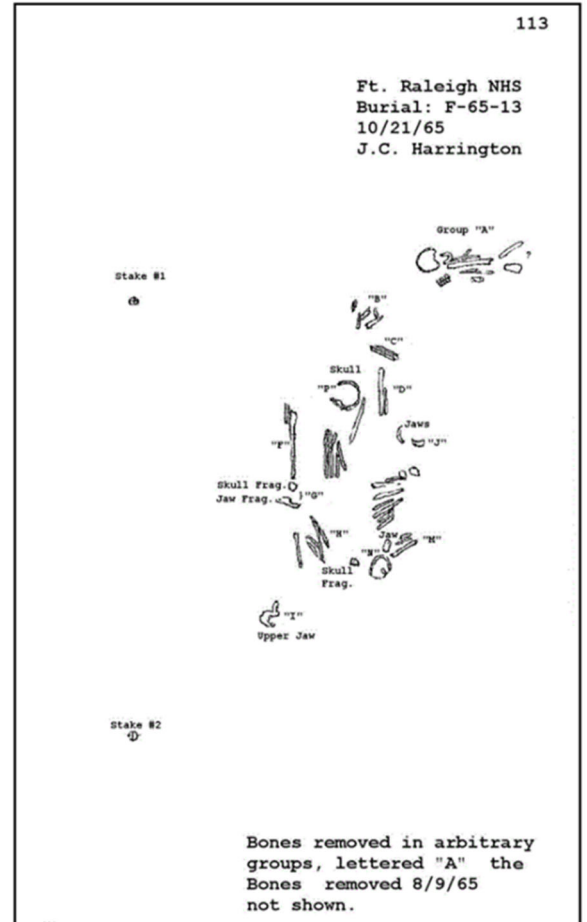
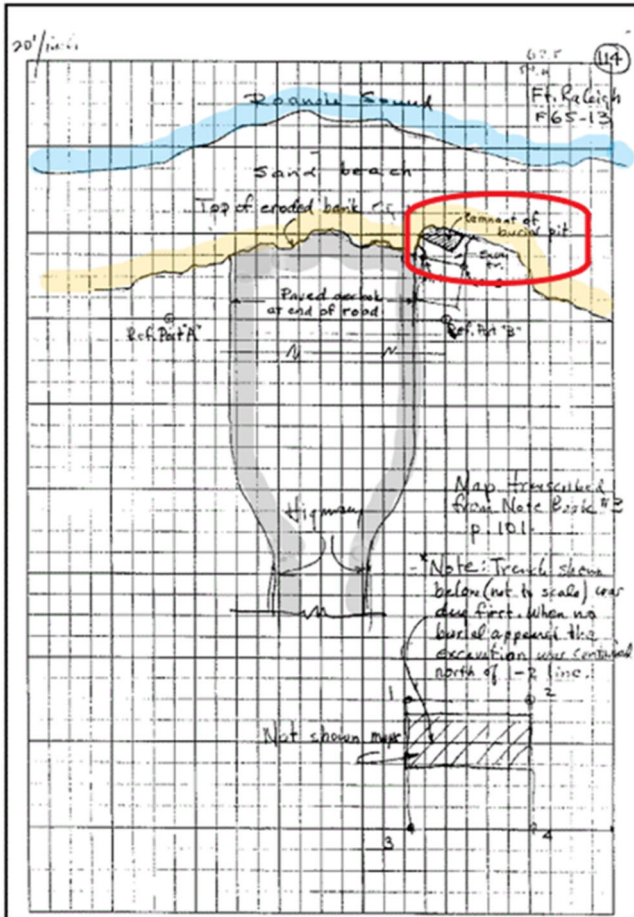
Phelps said the site had been disturbed by the Elizabethan Gardens' use of the area for storage, but that the class dug trenches, which allow depth control when trying to get to the undisturbed zone of earth. The broken bits of pottery, bird and animal bone and shell represent food remains which led Phelps to conclude that the site was used as an outlying refuse pit for an Indian village.



Phelps said he has always believed an Indian Village was located on Dough's Point because of finds along the beach there. He was at first surprised to find Indian artifacts at the southern end of the Elizabethan Gardens. "I don't know why it's here," he said. "If we do find more here it may turn out to be an outlying village."

This news report is important because it reveals what has not entered the literature on Raleigh's colonies - the amount of material recovered in 1995, its identification as an Algonquian midden (kitchen dump),

and the archaeologist's fixed idea of the location of the *Roanoke* village. Phelps described the site as a midden, which was typically close to the edge of a settlement, but he was eager to look for the village at Dough's Point, where indeed NPS archaeologist Harrington had located some burials washing out into the Sound.



J.C. Harrington's 1965 field notes of ossuary and skeleton remains.

Phelps' class records identify the pottery they found in the gardens as solely Late Woodland Colington Ware, along with the food refuse mentioned in the article. Phelps and others have found much less evidence of an Indian presence on the eastern portion of the Gardens, including the site of Odom Hall conference center, which suggests that its archaeological potential lies to the west.



Site location and exposed surface of 2018 fieldwork.

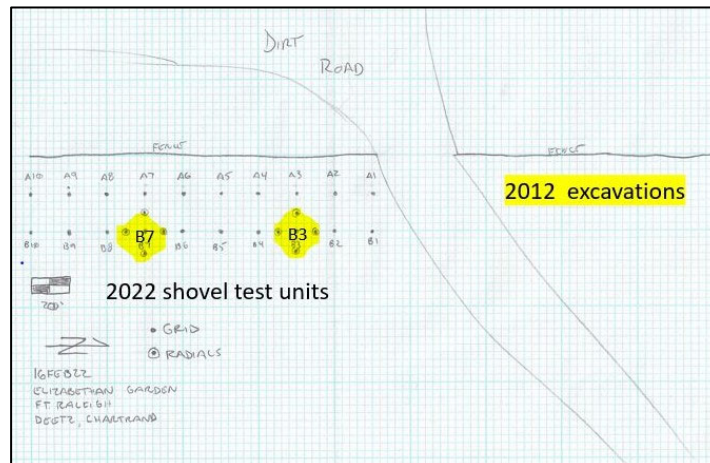
This conclusion appears to have been corroborated by fieldwork undertaken in 2018 by the North Carolina Office of State Archaeology. Just east of the Phelps's dig, testing in advance of the Butterfly House construction located no aboriginal artifacts.

Previously, in October 2012, a First Colony Foundation archaeological project supervised by Eric Deetz of the University of North Carolina, examined the bluff at the western end of the property fence. Under the remains of an eroded sand dune, test pits revealed an old topsoil layer containing sherds of Late Woodland Colington Ware. The southernmost test pit, placed close to the fence's access gate, exposed not only sherds, but kitchen debris of ash, shells, animal bone fragments, and the edge of a feature cut into the soil, perhaps a pit. First Colony Foundation prehistoric expert, Clay Swindell, concluded that this area had been on the edge of an Algonquian settlement.



Location of 2012 FCF fieldwork along western boundary fence.

Ten years later, in February 2022, FCF had the opportunity to return to the Elizabethan Gardens to resume testing the property's western edge. Archaeologists Eric Deetz and Robert Chartrand carried out the fieldwork, which consisted of two 200' lines of shovel test holes, 20' apart. The western line yielded no artifacts, which suggests that any settlement there did not spread into the National Park tract.



Fieldnotes of 2022 FCF shovel test survey.



Location and find from STP 2022.B3.



Location and finds from STP 2022.B7.

Two shovel test holes (2022B3 and 7) on the eastern line, however, produced aboriginal pottery. Both were dated to the Middle Woodland period, long before Elizabethan First Contact. They did, however, match the 1955 recovery of Middle Woodland pottery at the Sunken Garden. This locality, therefore, had for centuries attracted prehistoric settlement, which overlooked the Sound and must have had a source of fresh water. Since the 1800s, the shoreline here has receded more than a hundred yards, with numerous Indian artifacts found in the water and beach. It must be watched carefully for archaeological artifacts and features being destroyed by coastal erosion.



Eroding bluff of the Elizabethan Gardens.

Conclusions. The fieldwork of 1953, 1955, 1995, 2012, 2018, and 2022 are sufficient to gauge the archaeological potential of the Elizabeth Gardens. The western portion of the Gardens has proven to contain significant deposits of Late Woodland artifacts. It must be assumed that they derive from the nine-house Algonquian village of *Roanoac*, much of which has been lost to coastal erosion.

The experienced methods and advanced technologies of First Colony Foundation archaeologists should be able to recover what remains of this First Contact site, where Captains Amadas and Barlow were guests of Lady Granganimo in the summer of 1584. The next step should be the non-intrusive use of Ground Penetrating Radar to determine if any physical remains of the prehistoric settlement lie buried beneath the lawn at the north end of the Gardens, while maintaining a careful watch on the eroding shore. The landowners, the Roanoke Island Historical Association could ask for no more important historic site on this property. The Elizabethan Gardens are already dedicated to the memory of Sir Walter Raleigh's colony; it could also commemorate the Algonquian people on the very site where they first welcomed strangers into their home, *Roanoac*, over four centuries ago.