

ARCHAEOLOGICAL INVESTIGATIONS^{of}
OF THE
TELLICO BLOCKHOUSE SITE (40MR50)
A FEDERAL MILITARY AND TRADE COMPLEX

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INTRODUCTION

The Tellico Blockhouse (site 40MR50) is on the north bank of the Little Tennessee River at the confluence of Nine Mile Creek in Monroe County, Tennessee (Plates I and II; Fig. 1). The site is on the fifty foot terrace opposite the site of Fort Loudoun, and consists of an extensive Federal Period military and trade complex underlain by evidence of aboriginal occupation during the Mississippian, Woodland, and Archaic periods.

The significance of the site lies in the brief historic occupation and minimal subsequent disturbance of the archaeological remains as well as in the historically recorded events which took place at the Tellico Blockhouse. Three seasons of excavations sponsored by the Tennessee Valley Authority through the University of Tennessee have resulted in the near total excavation of the Tellico Blockhouse. Although the location of the site was known from test excavations conducted by two dedicated amateur archaeologists in 1963, the extent of the site was not known.

The Tellico Reservoir would affect the Tellico Blockhouse by inundating those portions of the site extending below the pool level (813 contour in Figure 4), leaving much of the site subject to erosion. The first season of excavation in 1972 concentrated upon the determination of site condition, extent, and elevation in regard to the 813.0 AMSL pool level of the Tellico Reservoir. The three week season in 1972 fulfilled these objectives (Fig. 4), and an additional two week extension allowed the recovery of an extensive historic ceramic sample of use in confirmation of the occupation date of the site. The 1972 season excavation was directed by the author with a crew consisting of three local laborers. On the basis of the 1972 season data and historic research the site was nominated to the National Register of Historic Places, and plans were formulated to mitigate the adverse effect of the reservoir on the site. After consultation with the TVA Advisory Committee, John Cotter of the National Park Service and consultant Charlie Steen, a decision was reached by TVA to fully excavate those portions of the site endangered by inundation and necessary to the understanding and interpretation of the site. Such excavation was to be followed by a carefully placed fill over those portions of the site below the maximum pool level, both to protect the delineated features and to provide a ground surface at a higher elevation upon which the buried features could be interpreted for the public. Stone building foundations and other features on the portions of the site not requiring the fill were to be stabilized at ground level to allow interpretation of the site for the visiting public.

The second, 1973 season of excavation concentrated upon obtaining data relevant to three basic research goals as well as data needed for stabilization and interpretation of the Tellico Blockhouse. A primary goal of the 1973 season was the delineation and excavation of activity areas within the site. Such areas might be indicative of different social or cultural groups

utilizing different portions of the fort interior and therefore be suitable for distributional studies. Documentary sources indicated the presence of various social groups, both military and civilian, within the confines of the Tellico Blockhouse Complex. The sampling program conducted during the 1973 season provided a minimum sample of 50% from all known structures and provided the temporal control necessary for such distributional studies. Significant distributions were noted for certain classes of cultural material which may represent different social groups known to have occupied the site.

The recovery of a tightly dated sample of Anglo-American and Overhill Cherokee cultural materials essential to the temporal control and interpretation of other excavated Anglo-American and Overhill Cherokee sites in the region was a second objective of the excavation. A large sample of Anglo-American cultural materials was recovered, but the anticipated Overhill Cherokee cultural material, with the exception of stone pipes, was notably absent.

A third objective of the excavation was to provide data of use in testing the relationship of cultural materials recovered from structures and features to cultural materials recovered from general excavation units over and around such structures and features. A significant correlation between structure and feature content and the content of general excavation units was obtained during the 1973 season.

Sufficient data were obtained during the 1973 season to allow reasonable estimates to be made concerning the extent of stabilization and interpretation possible for the Tellico Blockhouse Complex (Polhemus 1974).

The condition and historical significance of the Tellico Blockhouse as indicated by the 1972-1973 excavations and limited documentary research elicited a continued commitment by the Tennessee Valley Authority in the form of funding for documentary research by consulting historian William Hershey and for a third season of field investigation. The third season of excavation contributed to the research goals as well as delineating the remaining structural elements necessary for historic site stabilization and interpretation. Additional data concerning the temporal position of structures and features within the sequence of construction phases were also obtained during the 1974 season.

Analysis of the cultural material recovered from the Tellico Blockhouse indicates not only that spatial patterning within the site may suggest social or functional differentiations, but that significant change may be detected within a limited time span. The South Ceramic Formula (1972) was utilized as an independent test upon historic ceramics recovered from structures and features for which the sequence had been determined archaeologically. The formula was found to be of use in ordering features within the limited span represented by the historic occupation of the site (12 years). Additionally it indicated that Structure B may have seen limited use shortly after 1807.

The archaeological remains represent tangible evidence of the progressive change in Indian-White relations and in the Indian policy of the

Federal Government at the end of the 18th century. Such remains provide the proper emphasis on the people rather than persons, on trends rather than events. This perspective is frequently absent in the historian's documents. The written documents are artifacts, however, and they provide yet another key for understanding the people, the trends, and the groups making up the past, when examined as a special class of artifacts rather than the last word on a subject. Just as some artifacts are more useful than others in interpreting the past, some documents serve better than others for the same purpose. Vouchers, invoices, and other such documents are more useful in studying the flow of past lifeways than documents such as proclamations, charters, and treaties. The documentary records utilized in the Tellico Blockhouse research place emphasis upon the mass of daily transactions, vouchers, invoices, and routine correspondence, rather than the content of treaties negotiated at the site or historical events occurring at that place and time.

The Tellico Blockhouse was established by William Blount early in the year 1794 at the request of "The Hanging Maw," an important Cherokee headman, to protect his party from white incursions. The Blockhouse thereafter served as a focal point in communicating and stabilizing relations with the Cherokee through an agent resident there. The Blockhouse was later chosen as one of the two places at which the "Factory Act," enacted in 1795 and amended in 1796, was to be tried. The Tellico Factory continued in operation from early in 1796 until its removal to a more convenient location at the Hiwassee Garrison in 1807. The Federal troops stationed at the Tellico Blockhouse expanded the facilities making up the Blockhouse in 1797 and again in 1799. After minor construction or repairs in 1800 the Blockhouse facilities remained stable until, in 1807, the Federal troops and the Factory were moved to the Hiwassee Garrison at the mouth of the Hiwassee River.

Glass Beads (41 Specimens - Structures and Features) (66 Specimens - General Excavation) (Kidd 1970:45-89)

Glass beads recovered from the Tellico Blockhouse include two tube drawn faceted varieties not heretofore found in the Tellico Reservoir area, although they have been collected at Great Tellico town to the south on the Tellico River. Table 43 provides pertinent data concerning the various Bead types. The tube drawn, faceted, red bead may represent a variety listed on contemporary purchase orders as "Garnets" (Appendix F) by the bunch. Black beads and white beads are listed by the pound. Black "wampum" and white "wampum" are listed by the thousand.

The wire wound amber colored dodecahedral bead and the tube drawn white striped onion bead are in contexts suggesting association with the white or enlisted military occupants of the Tellico Blockhouse, rather than the Indian trade (Structure E and Structure C Zone IV). These bead types are earlier varieties most common in the third quarter of the 18th century in the Little Tennessee River Valley.

The majority of the beads are concentrated in the vicinity of the east end of Structure C, just north of Structure D, and in Pit C. Silver brooches and earrings are also clustered in the vicinity of Structure C and Pit C.

Buttons (580 Specimens - Structures and Features) (302 Specimens - General Excavation) (South 1964:113-133) (South 1974:188-194) (Albert 1974)

Buttons make up 71% of the cultural material attributed to the Clothing Group recovered from the Tellico Blockhouse. Buttons serve not only as a temporal control allowing correlation of structures and features throughout the Blockhouse but also as status or class indicators for those deposits. Analysis of the size and decorative relationships, as well as the mode of manufacture, of buttons can provide additional data on the function of buttons (South 1974:188).

Buttons serve not only as a fastening device but also as a class or status indicator in the Anglo-American cultural tradition. Insignia on buttons frequently indicate the association of the primary user with certain groups or professions, as in the case of various military organizations. Other status or class groupings which used marked buttons, or sleeve links, during the 18th and early 19th centuries include Masonic groups, hunt clubs, and political parties.

The material from which buttons are made also serves as a status denominator, even to the present day, for example, sets of gold coat buttons. Pewter, white brass, brass, copper, and glass buttons are represented in the material recovered from the Tellico Blockhouse Site. Brass and copper buttons were frequently plated or gilded to resemble more expensive varieties and to retard corrosion.

Buttons and sleeve links were also an indicator to the form of clothing being worn by the occupants of the site. The diameter of

Table 43
Bead Types

Bead Type	Kidd Classification	Diameter										Total Type	
		2mm	2.5 mm	3mm	3.5mm	4mm	4.5mm	5mm	5.5mm	6mm	6.5mm		7mm
<u>Wire Wound</u>													
Spher. Trans. Red	Wlb							1					1
Dodec. Trans. Amber	Wllc								1				1
Spher. Opaque Black	Wlb						1		1				2
Spher. Opaque White	Wlb					1							1
<u>Tube Drawn</u>													
Spher. Opaque White	11a	2	2	14	2								20
Spher. Opaque Black	11a		5	4			1						10
Spher. Trans. Lt. Blue	11a			1									1
Spher. Opaque Lt. Blue	11a		1										1
Spher. Red w/grn. core	IVa	1		64									65
Spher. Trans. "onion"	11b					1							1
Cane Trans. Blue	1a					1							1
Cane Opaque Lt. Blue	1a					1							1
<u>Tube Drawn Faceted</u>													
Barrel Trans. Red	1f					1							1
Barrel Trans. White	1f									1			1
<u>Total Size</u>													
		3	8	83	-2	5	3	-	2	-	1		107