Spanish entradas (invasions) into Northeast Tennessee and Southwest Virginia (Holstonia) are documented to have occurred in 1541 and 1567. They predate the foundation of Jamestown by decades and are significant for Virginia history — not just for regional history.

The first entrada gave us the earliest two persons we can name who set foot within the boundary of the future state of Virginia. The second entrada produced the first ever recorded battle in Virginia, gave us the first named town in Virginia, the first woman born in Virginia that we can name, and the earliest recorded marriage between a Christian soldier and an American Indian woman.

This article summarizes the events of the past twenty-five years that have allowed us to tell the story of sixteenth-century Spanish conquistadors in Southwest Virginia and the consequences of their arrival for the American Indians who inhabited the region. It describes and discusses the key publications about the story. The intent of the article is not to rehearse the actual story, but rather to tell how the story developed and cite the relevant references. Only during the past two or three years has the story achieved widespread recognition in popular magazines and newspapers.(2) in a Virginia history textbook.(3) and in the online Library of Virginia state chronology.(4)

Unthinking persons assert that history is fixed and unchanging. However, the discovery of new evidence regularly causes history to be rewritten. With the present story, the recent, new, history-changing evidence has come from three directions: 1. Archeological confirmation of the Spanish presence at Morganton, N.C., in the mid-sixteenth century, at the Berry site. 2. Reconsideration of the Spanish archival records documenting the entradas, and the finding and translation in 1994 of an archival document written by a participant in the second entrada who was seeking a pension from the Spanish king. 3. Recent studies in American Indian artifact collections by this author that offer direct evidence for the presence of the large American Indian populations — in the right place at the right time — that the Spanish documents say were attacked in 1567.

The article begins with a brief description of the Mississippian American Indians who lived in the region before the arrival of Europeans in the New World. It then moves on to a description of the Berry site and its story and connects that site to the de Soto entrada and the many-year studies of the de Soto entrada’s route by Charles Hudson and his collaborators. Next, a brief summary is given of what the Spaniards did in Holstonia. The article concludes by discussing the collapse of American Indian societies in the region and the possible removal of some members of those societies to Sauratown in present-day Stokes County, N.C.

MISSISSIPPIAN AMERICAN INDIANS IN SOUTHWEST VIRGINIA BEFORE 1492

Virginia historians(6) and archeologists(7) (as first pointed out to me by Southwest Virginians Glenn Williams and Lawrence Richardson(8)) have long failed to acknowledge the existence of large settled Mississippian(9)
American Indian populations in Holstonia. In large part, this neglect resulted from the dearth of formal archeological studies in the region. However, while unrecognized and unacknowledged by almost all professional archeologists.(10) Mississippian traits in the region are demonstrated by an abundance of what I have called “improper” archaeological evidence.(11) Most spectacular among the artifacts known through improper archeology are the highly artistic and distinctive engraved marine shell gorgets that shed light on the material culture of those populations and their links to people elsewhere in the Southeast.(12) Two hitherto unpublished engraved gorgets are shown in Figures 1 and 2.

A plausible thesis as to why historians failed to recognize these people perhaps lies in the terms of the 1744 Treaty of Lancaster(13) between the State of Virginia and the Six Nations. One matter the treaty addressed was the travel routes of Iroquois warriors from the New York region up and down the Great Warrior Trail (roughly today’s Route 11/Interstate 81) to make war(14) on the Cherokees. The region had already by 1744 been long depopulated as the result of European diseases. Thus, the notion of western Virginia as a place passed-through but not lived-in lies deep in the collective Virginia subconscious. Neither the warriors nor the colonists knew about the thousands of burials from hundreds of years earlier that lay along the travel routes.

The life of the Mississippian Indians of Holstonia can perhaps be visualized best through two works of fiction that describe nearby contemporaneous people.(15) My own contribution to understanding them was presented in a paper I read in Richmond in 2007.(16) In summary, we can report that from 1200-1600 A.D., Native Americans in the Holston River valleys maintained a cultured society with abundant material goods; they achieved large and settled populations with unclear political arrangements; they exploited a wide range of foods including maize, beans, squashes, fish and game; they exchanged salt, copper, and shell, via trade networks; however, they did not build significant mounds.(17)

By 1450 A.D., they had become a people with a unique and distinctive cultural iconography. The quality and diversity of their shell gorgets are of the first rank and their tribal affiliation was Yuchi.(18) Their culture was one
of the many variants of the broader civilization that is conventionally labeled as Mississippian. It was their fate to have their societies destroyed by conquistadors and the European diseases they brought.

**THE BERRY SITE AT MORGANTON, N.C., AND SPANISH DOCUMENTS**

Part of the charm of this story is the manner in which the archeological and archival evidence combine to enable its telling. At least three elements combined between 1982 and 1994 to bring the story of the Spanish invasion of Virginia into focus:

1. The discovery and interpretation of the Berry site;
2. Publication of a detailed study of the documents of the Juan Pardo entrada; and,
3. The finding and translation of an eye witness account of a battle and its aftermath by a Spaniard who had been in Virginia in 1567.

From these modest beginnings grew a minor revolution in Virginia history — a revolution that has shifted the earliest documented events in the state from Tidewater to Appalachia.

The first element in the minor revolution came from North Carolina archeology. About 1982, near Morganton, N.C., the North Carolina archeologist David Moore visited a “14-year-old kid” who “thought he had some Etowah pottery.” The “kid” was Robin Beck who had been surface hunting on the farm of his aunt and uncle, James and Patsy Berry, about eight miles north of town. Not long after, Beck identified Spanish artifacts from the site and in the summer of 1986 excavations were undertaken at the Berry farm and the nearby McDowell site. (19)

The second element in the minor revolution was the publication in 1990 by Charles Hudson of an analysis of the Juan Pardo entrada accompanied by definitive translations (by Paul Hoffman) of the related documents. (20) This book was an outgrowth of the lifetime work on Southeast American Indians by Charles Hudson. (21) and his collaborators, and in particular of Hudson’s obsession with the route taken by the conquistador Hernando de Soto. (22) Pardo traveled from the South Carolina coast to eastern Tennessee and in part retraced de Soto’s steps. The retraced route included the Berry site — at a place known as Joara to the Indians and Fort St. Juan to the Spanish.

A third element in the minor revolution was the translation (but not publication; it remains to this day unpublished) in 1994 by John Worth of the 1584 account of the pension-seeking request of Domingo de León who fought in Virginia in 1567. (23) The de León account proved to be very signif-

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**Figure 3:** Sixteenth century Spanish routes in the Southeast. The gray line represents the approximate route of the de Soto entrada of 1539-1542. In the spring of 1541, two explorers or marauders from this expedition entered the future Lee County in the westernmost part of present-day Virginia. The dotted line represents the approximate route of the Pardo entrada. In 1567 an armed detachment from the Pardo expedition led by Hernando Moyano marched north from Fort St. Juan into present-day Smyth County, Virginia.
significant as it enabled the somewhat disjointed accounts of the Pardo expedition to be reinterpreted and fitted together in a new and comprehensive way.

Robin Beck, by now fourteen years older and an archeology graduate student, pulled these three elements together and presented them as a coherent story to an archeological conference in Knoxville in November 1995. (24) Beck told in his presentation that in 1567 conquistadors had attacked the future town of Saltville — for the very first time using documentary evidence to put Europeans on the ground in the future Virginia.

Fortuitously, Roanoke-based archeologist Tom Klatka attended this Knoxville conference and was in the audience for Beck’s presentation. After Klatka returned home, he contacted Lawrence Richardson in Smyth County, knowing that Richardson was working on a manuscript based on the thesis that the American Indians of Holstonia had been Yuchi. Richardson was galvanized by what Klatka told him and promptly wrote to Beck. Richardson in his letter told Beck of his conclusion that Saltville had been a Yuchi town and asked Beck for copies of John Worth’s Domingo de León translation and other documents. (25) The following year, in a 1997 issue of Southeastern Archaeology magazine, (26) Beck published the formal paper corresponding to his Knoxville presentation and wrote about the Spanish attack that had occurred in 1567 at the future site of the town of Saltville located on the South [sic] Fork of the Holston River. Saltville is actually on the North Fork and Beck’s misstatement has subsequently confused a number of readers of his 1997 paper.

Berry site excavations have now been going on for almost 25 years and many formal and informal reports of the ongoing studies have been published. An account of the history of the site can be viewed at the Warren Wilson College web pages. (27) The site’s excavators published a detailed formal account of their findings at the site and their analysis of its significance in 2006. (28) At the Berry site are the remains of a large American Indian town (perhaps one of the largest such towns in North America) that was occupied from 1400-1600 A.D. and where Spanish soldiers built a small fort and lived for eighteen months in 1566-67. The Spanish fort was burned in perhaps 1568.

The conclusion is inescapable that the Berry site is indeed Fort St. Juan, built by members of the Pardo expedition at the Indian town of Joara, and described in sixteenth century Spanish documents. One logical outcome of this conclusion has been the rewriting of Virginia history.

THE SPANISH IN HOLSTONIA

The story of early Spanish period of North American history has been described in a fine, popular manner in a well-illustrated article by Joe Judge. (29) Judge’s article includes the story of the early Spanish Jesuit martyrs who
THE FIRST BATTLE OF SALTVILLE

THE FIRST-EVER RECORDED BATTLE ON VIRGINIA SOIL OCCURRED IN MAY 1567 NEAR THE SITE OF PRESENT-DAY NORTHWOOD HIGH SCHOOL. A MARAUDING PARTY OF SPANIARDS AND NATIVE AMERICAN ALLIES LED BY ALFÉREZ HERNANDO MOYANO CAME OVER THE MOUNTAINS FROM THEIR BASE NEAR MORGANTON, NC, AND ATTACKED PALISADED FORTIFICATIONS AT THIS SITE. MORE THAN 1000 NATIVE AMERICANS WERE REPORTED KILLED AND 50 HUTS BURNED.

Figure 5. A conjectural historical marker describing the first documented battle in Virginia history.

Virginia are summarized in the conjectural historical marker shown in Figure 4.

A brief summary of the consequences of the Pardo entrada tells that in 1567, Juan Pardo detached Hernando Moyano, with about 20 men at Fort St. Juan in modern-day Morganton. While there, Moyano received a threat from a “Chisca chief” saying that the chief would come and eat Moyano and his dog. In consequence, Moyano preemptively marched north with Indian allies and attacked Indian towns. He found no gold. Moyano’s attack was described in a pension petition, seventeen years later, by Domingo de León who was present during the attack on Saltville, and wrote about it. Afterwards, the American Indian woman Luisa Menendez from Saltville married Juan Ribas and thirty years later twice testified about her birthplace where salt was made by a “method using fire.” Moyano’s attack and the Luisa Menendez story are summarized in the conjectural historical markers shown in Figures 5 and 6.

The Cherokee scholar Raymond Evans has written that “The control of large salt springs near the present Saltville, Virginia and a knowledge of working copper gave the Yuchis in the Chisca area a tremendous economic advantage in dealing with their neighbors.” Evans added that: “[the Spanish soldier] Ribas had married a Yuchi woman who had been captured in southwestern Virginia by Sergeant Moyano. The woman had the Christian name Luisa Menendez.”

In a significant development since my 2004 article, Charles Hudson has changed his mind to accept that Moyano’s attack occurred in Holstonia, rather than farther south as he originally believed. Hudson wrote: “…the Chiscas [Yuchi] were located on the Holston River or its tributaries,” rather than “…on the upper Nolichucky as I previously thought.” In an end note in the same publication the excavators of the Berry site reinforced that conclusion that the Berry site is “…the First European settlement in what is now the interior of the United States.”

Taking a shot at English Virginia and Walter Raleigh, the Berry site excavators have recently taken to calling Fort
St. Juan “the first Lost Colony.”(38) So doing is not necessarily particularly good history, but it’s great public relations.

**THE COLLAPSE AND DEPARTURE OF THE MISSISSIPPIAN PEOPLE OF HOLSTONIA**

In the wake of the de Soto and Pardo/Moyano entradas the American Indian populations of Holstonia shrunk as a result of disease and departure. Eventually the region became emptied of people. This empty region was what was found by the first English-speakers who arrived in Holstonia beginning around 1735. Sadly, we cannot detail what caused depopulation because neither history nor archeology offer any direct evidence. What has been well-documented is that depopulation was widespread in the Southeast in the years after the Spanish were in the region(39) and that these reduced populations of Southwest Virginia relocated.(40) The evidence of improper archeology suggests that at least some of the American Indians of Southwest Virginia moved to Stokes County, N.C., in the wake of the Moyano attack.(41)

**CONCLUSIONS**

The principal conclusion of this article is that a powerful case has been made that the documentary history of Virginia begins in the Appalachian region of the state, not in the Tidewater region as traditional history asserts. This principal conclusion is supported by documentary evidence but not by direct archeological evidence. It is always possible that a site in Southwest Virginia will produce Spanish artifacts, but none has yet been found.(42) However, such an absence is not surprising, first the Spanish presence in Virginia was at best ephemeral, and second the diggers of the prime sites in the region were persons without formal archeological training, unlikely to recognize or record any of the Spanish artifacts that have been evident to the professional excavators of the Berry site.

An additional conclusion is that recent studies by the author demonstrate that pre-Columbian Southwest Virginia was the home to large settled populations of Americas Indians whose tribal affiliation was Yuchi. This conclusion adds plausibility to the Spanish documentary accounts of the Moyano attack.

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END NOTES


5. Mississippian is a poorly defined term used by archeologists to described the American Indian societies that occupied the Mississippi river watershed and the Deep South in the period 800-1600 AD. They were generally mound builders, relied on maize-based sustenance, had social ranks, engaged in ceremonial activities, produced highly artistic objects with iconic designs from marine shell, copper, pottery, etc., and engaged in long distance trade and exchange. A useful introduction to Mississippian civilization by a historian can be found in the early chapters of R. S. Cotterill's The Southern Indians: The Story of the Civilized Tribes before Removal (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1954). There is a huge archeological literature about Mississippian civilization, some of it very opaque. See for example "Parsing Mississippian Chiefdoms," Chapter 4 in Timothy R. Pauketat's Chiefdoms and Other Archaeological Delusions (Lanham: AltaMira Press, 2007).


7. Prominent Virginia archeologist the late Howard MacCord was adamantly opposed to the notion of large settled Mississippian American Indian Populations in Southwest Virginia. Author's interviews with Glenn Williams, Abingdon, Va., 17 March 2004, and Lawrence Richardson 18 March 2004, Saltville, Va. Around 1982, Richardson heard Howard MacCord say about the Indians of the region that "we don't know who they were, we don't know where they came from, we don't know how long they were here, when they left, and where they went to." Hearing that statement led Richardson on a twenty-year quest for the Yuchi Indians (Lawrence Richardson, The Yuchi Indians, Unpublished manuscript, 2004, copy in author's file).

8. Lawrence Richardson has lived for many years in Adwolfe in Smyth County. Now retired, he was a dairy farmer by vocation and an historian and archaeologist by avocation. He was one of the excavators of the Fox archeological site in Smyth County in 1974. In the author's opinion, he is by far the most important living amateur archeologist of the region and the only one who has understood its significance.

9. Virginia archeologists conventionally call the Mississippian Period the Late Woodland Period and have been reluctant to concede that Mississippian people lived in Southwest Virginia. That situation is finally changing.

10. To my knowledge, the only professional archeologists who have commented on the richness of the Mississippian arti-
facts recovered over the years in Southwest Virginia are Mike Barber and Gene Barfield. See: Michael B. Barber, "Saltville and Environ: The Woodland period," pp. 39-50 in Eugene B. Barfield and Michael B. Barber. eds. Upland Archeology in the East: Symposium Number Five, (Richmond, Virginia: Archeological Society of Virginia, 1996). In this article Barber describes Saltville as the center of a "salt powered chiefdom." Barber at the time of this writing is the State Archeologist of Virginia.


14. One objective of these so-called "mourning" wars was to take captives who could be adopted by the New York tribes to replenish those tribes' ever depletioning populations. Tribal adoption was a common practice; even Europeans would occasionally be adopted.


17. Mound building is usually considered a cultural characteristic of Mississippian people. Holstonian Mississippians did not build mounds and that is one reason that they have been overlooked.

18. Lawrence Richardson (unpublished manuscript, see above) was the first person to make the Yuchi association with Holstonia. I believe this association is correct, but the detailed arguments lie beyond the scope of the present paper.


25. Richardson, Lawrence. Letter written from Marion, Virginia, to Robin Beck, 8 February 1996. It tells that Tom Klatka was in the audience when Beck presented his "From Joara to Chiaha" paper at the Knoxville conference and that Richardson had learned from Klatka about Beck's presentation. Richardson says that he is elated to learn that the Chiscas were living in Saltville in 1567 and comments that they are the Yuchi. Richardson asked for copies of John Worth's translation of the de Leon account and other Spanish archival documents and enclosed a $25 check for Beck's copying expenses, adding that if for any reason Beck found himself unable to do this favor then Beck should "keep the check and treat yourself to a dinner." Beck in fact replied, but later Richardson misplaced Beck's reply and cannot now find it. Copy of Richardson's letter in author's file. Used with permission.


41. Glanville, Jim. Unknown Holstonia. See note 16.

42. The author has been vigilant about pursuing hints of the existence of Spanish artifacts in Holstonia, but to date the only promising object turned out to be of African origin and dated three centuries later than the conquistadors. See: Jim Glanville, "The Blade from Glade" (The Smithfield Review, Volume X: 33-37, 2006).