

'Buried conquistador' article drawing interest

(EDITOR'S NOTE: this is follow-up to the story in last week's paper about the buried conquistador found near Saltville.)

By JIM GLANVILLE

The story of the buried conquistador that I published in last week's issue of the *Saltville Progress* has drawn much interest.

Since then, I have been granted permission to name the people who found and sent me the story. I have received much positive comment in email messages from professional historians and other readers. Incidentally, I have learned that my original 2004 article about the conquistadors being in Maniatique in 1567 has found a permanent place in Florida history. I have been given a very gloomy assessment of the chances of ever finding the actual burial mound again. Finally, I have concluded that the burial mound is a few miles farther from Saltville than I first judged.

The person who first read and understood the potential implications of the name "De Soto" in the 31 December 1869 microfilm edition of the *Bristol News* was Ms. Amy Wright Fuller. She called the find to the attention of my friend and regular email correspondent Ms. Wilma Smith of Bristol. Ms. Smith sent me the critical alerting email message on 13 March 2013. From that lead, I was able to locate both articles on line in the digitized edition of the *Bristol News* at the Library of Congress.

I wish to express my great gratitude to both these ladies. Without them, this remarkable story would have re-

mained hidden in the archives as it has been for 144 years.

One element of last week's story is that easy access to online and searchable digital materials is revolutionizing our ability to study history via original documents. It would have taken weeks for me to develop the story relying on only microfilm.

Here a selection of some of the emailed comments I have received in response to the article include "The tale grows ever more intricate, complex, confirmed" (Virginia Tech history professor Peter Wallenstein); "The story just gets better and better" (former Archeological Society of Virginia President Dan Kegley of Chilhowie); "By Jove! Good find. (Brent Tarter, historian Library of Virginia); "Congratulations on finding this new evidence" (Louisiana State University historian Paul Hoffman); "This surely is an interesting article" (Sylvia Nickels, Appalachian Authors Guild). I have responded to a couple of correspondents saying that the story is very strong and is both easy to tell and easy to grasp.

Paul Hoffman of LSU is the dean of historians of Spanish-period Florida history — the sixteenth century, when the future state of Virginia was part of what the Spanish called La Florida. Hoffman's many books include: *Spain and the Roanoke Voyages* (Raleigh: North Carolina Department of Cultural Resources, 1987); *New Andalusia and a Way to the Orient: The American Southeast During the Sixteenth*

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Century (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1990; reissued 2004 with a new introduction); *Florida's Frontiers* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2002). Of importance for Saltville, it was Hoffman who made the Spanish to English translations of all the documents published in Charles Hudson's *The Juan Pardo Expeditions: Exploration of the Carolinas and Tennessee, 1566-1568* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2006).

Hoffman's most recent work is titled "The Historiography of Sixteenth-Century La Florida" and was published in a special issue of the *Florida Historical Quarterly* in December 2012 — an issue that Hoffman himself edited. Historiography is the study of writings about history. My 2004 article about the conquistadors is cited in footnote 94 of Hoffman's article and thereby earns Saltville a permanent place in Florida history. Much to my delight and pleasure, Professor Hoffman sent me an inscribed copy of the volume which most appropriately arrived last Friday in Blacksburg, on the very same day that my copy of last week's *Saltville Progress* arrived.

The gloomy news about the poor prospects for ever locating the conquistador's burial tumulus comes from Wilma Smith. She writes: "In looking at the topo map [that I had prepared for her from Google], I think it unlikely that the mound can be found. Much of that area was used for the Camp Evan Shelby Civilian Conservation Camp forestry division. Camp Tom Howard was a Scout camp and thoroughly explored. More recently, the Jacobs Creek Job Corps taught underprivileged people how to use heavy equipment. Many

local hunters and campers regularly tramp through the area." That there was heavy equipment training conducted in the vicinity is very discouraging.

In a correction, I would now amend last week's headline from "Less than Twenty Miles from Saltville" to "About 25 miles from Saltville. Last Friday evening my good friend and coauthor Ryan Mays and I together examined the gazetteer map of Virginia and I realized that the distance was slightly greater than I stated last week.

During our discussions Ryan made the fascinating suggestion that the conquistador had been interred by the Indians. He observed that Spaniards would not have constructed a burial mound, nor would they have deposited in it "implements of war," whereas the Indians built mounds and buried high-status dead persons with valuable grave goods.

Finally, I have with pleasure accepted an invitation to speak about the conquistadors story at the Museum of the Middle Appalachians on Sunday August 11.