

OPINION

The Yuchi Indians of Southwest Virginia

The Yuchi Indians are described in the book titled "Virginia's Montgomery County," edited by Mary Elizabeth Lindon, and published in Christiansburg in 2009 under the auspices of the Montgomery Museum and Lewis Miller Regional Art Center.

Lindon's book discusses the Yuchi of Montgomery County at length in the article "Prehistory: The Earliest Inhabitants" written by the late Jeffrey C. Weaver on pages 11-18 with endnotes on pages 670-671.

Weaver says that, immediately prior to the arrival of Europeans, southwest Virginia Indians belonged to the Mississippian culture.

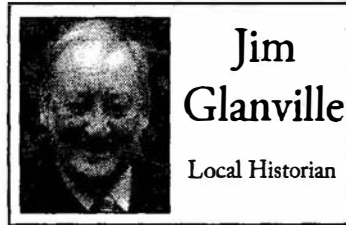
Mississippian is a poorly defined term used to describe the American Indian societies that occupied the Mississippi river watershed and the Deep South during the period 800-1,600 A.D. The people of these societies were generally mound builders, relied on maize-based sustenance, had social ranks, engaged in ceremo-

nal activities, produced highly artistic objects with iconic designs from marine shell, copper, pottery, etc., and engaged in long distance trade and exchange.

Many highly artistic marine shell gorgets with iconic engraved designs have been found in American Indian burials in southwest Virginia. During life, their owners wore these ornaments suspended on their chests.

Weaver wrote that the late "amateur archeologist Lawrence D. Richardson of Smyth County, Virginia, (was) perhaps the world expert on the Yuchi tribe in Appalachia" and that Richardson "has provided much useful information on the question of who the Indians were in Montgomery County."

Weaver, who interviewed Richardson several times at the Chilhowie library in 2004, claimed that the "specific characteristics of Yuchi culture have been discovered at the Trigg and Shannon archeological sites in Montgomery County," while not-



ing that the "official reports on those two sites, however, relate that these were Tutelo occupations."

The Trigg site is located beside the New River in Radford. The Shannon site is located at the Blackburg Country Club Valley. Weaver notes that while the archeological chronology of these sites is confused, Trigg and Shannon were apparently occupied in the late fifteenth or early sixteenth century.

Collateral evidence for a Yuchi presence in southwest Virginia comes from studies of Spanish archival documents relating to the Juan Pardo expedition into the interior of North Carolina in the 1560s.

Spanish records from the six-

teenth century tell that in 1567 a party of Spanish soldiers from the Pardo expedition under the leadership of ensign Hernando Moyano marched four days north from their base at Fort San Juan, near Morganton, North Carolina, to attack a fortified place named Maniatique where salt was made.

Weaver writes: "This almost certainly had to be Saltville. No other location completely fits the description. The Spanish also name the group of people then seated at Saltville, and it was the Yuchi."

A critical document that confirms the Spanish presence in southwest Virginia in 1567 is the soldier Domingo de León's 1584 pension application to the Spanish king. An English transcription by John Worth of this pension application was finally published last year in the book "Fort San Juan and the Limits of Empire" (University Press of Florida, 2016)

Worth's essay is chapter three of this book and titled "Recollections

of the Juan Pardo Expeditions: The 1584 Domingo de León Account." The essay provides for the first time a published English transcription of de León's recollections of being with Moyano when he attacked Maniatique.

In 2004, when I wrote my first account of the Spanish history of southwest Virginia, I was fortunate to have in hand a copy of a draft transcription of the Domingo de León pension application that John Worth had personally sent me.

Today, the sixteenth century Spanish period of southwest Virginia and Yuchi Indian history is slowly becoming better understood and appreciated. It is a pity that my friend Lawrence Richardson did not live to see this resurgence.

Jim Glanville is a retired chemist living in Blacksburg. He has been publishing and lecturing for more than a decade about the history of Southwest Virginia.