

IN THE SHADOW OF HOGAN’S MOUNTAIN

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America250 – Historical Snapshot of Western Alexander County

Prologue: The Alexander America250 committee has invited me to present a brief historical overview of our area in November as part of the 250th anniversary celebration. Because presentation time will be limited in November, I'll share more detailed information in my Hogans Mountain columns over the coming months. Some potential topics include the Great Wagon Road, Moravian visits, Daniel Boone, Jonathan Barrett, Samuel Oxford, Civil War conscription, resort hotels, ferries, bridges, the Oxford Dam, early churches, schools, formation of Alexander County, Bethlehem residents in the Revolutionary War, etc. If you have a particular area of interest, please email me at whollar1@gmail.com.

Who were Bethlehem's First Residents?
The earliest known residents of our area were native peoples of the Mississippian period, which lasted roughly from 800 A.D. to 1600 A.D. This culture preceded both the Cherokee and Catawba nations. Mississippian society was marked by intensive maize farming, complex chiefdoms, extensive trade networks, and the construction of large earthen platform mounds topped with civic or religious structures. Artifacts from the Berry site in Burke County and mounds elsewhere in the region help document this early history. As in many periods of migra-

tion and contact, European influence brought major changes to the existing chiefdom structure.
The Spanish Arrive
Hernando De Soto traveled through the region that later became the southeastern United States from 1539 to 1543 with an army of more than 600 men, seeking wealth like that found in Mexico and Peru. Along the way, his forces devastated the chiefdoms of many southeastern American Indian tribes, damaging relations with Native communities that had initially been welcoming. The expedition depended on native guides while also taking food and enslaving people, a strategy often described as a "scorched-earth" approach.
Conquistadors in Our Area

Few people realize that one of the first recorded named towns recorded during De Soto's expedition may have been in our area—possibly near present-day Bethlehem because of its proximity to the northern shore of the Catawba River. In mid-May 1540, De Soto arrived at the Mississippian town of Guaquili during his march through the Southeast. It is striking to imagine the alarm such an arrival would have caused, much as 600-armed conquistadors entering Bethlehem today would create an uproar.
The expedition reached Guaquili on May 18, 1540, during a rapid march through what is now North Carolina. Guaquili was a

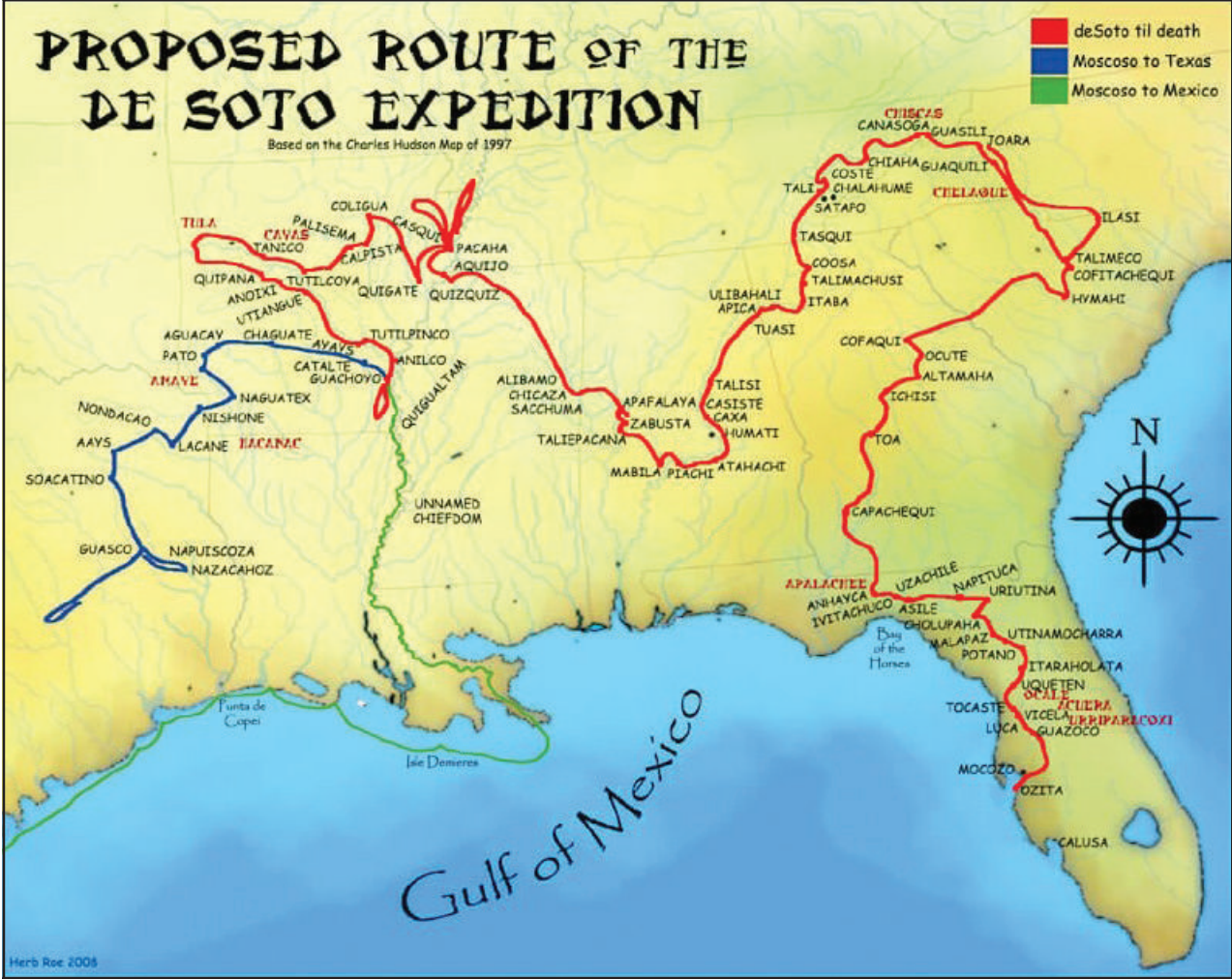


Mississippian settlement in an area with limited surplus maize, so the expedition moved on quickly. The inhabitants supplied De Soto's army with porters and small domestic animals raised for food. Some sources suggest these so-called bark less dogs may actually have been opossums, which De Soto's men

reportedly relished.
Just think, the opossum roadkill we see littering our roads today may possess genes from past generations of the barkless dogs of Quaquili times!
Continued Travel through Southeastern Area
From Guaquili, the explorers journeyed

westward to the principal chiefdom of Joara. Archaeological excavations at the Berry site have provided valuable insights into the subsequent visit by Juan Pardo, approximately 30 years later. While archaeology has illuminated significant aspects of this era, these expeditions stand as the earliest documented evidence of European intrusion into our region. The expedition traversed western North Carolina, passing through present-day Tennessee, Alabama, and Mississippi. Tragically, De Soto succumbed to a severe respiratory illness and was laid to rest in the waters of the Mississippi River.
For more detailed information use the following bibliography:

Moore, David G. "De Soto Expedition." NCPedia. State Library of NC. May 2023. <https://www.ncpedia.org/de-soto-expedition>.
Exploring Joara Foundation, "Archaeology & History in the Community," <https://exploringjoara.org>.
Hudson, Charles, *Knights of Spain, Warriors of the Sun: Hernando de Soto and the South's Ancient Chiefdoms*. University of Georgia Press.
Shepherd, Donald, *Hernando De Soto's 1540 Exploration of the Carolinas Overview*.
Ethridge, Robbie. "The Rise and Fall of Mississippian Ancient Towns and Cities, 1000–1700." <https://doi.org/10.1093/acrefore/9780199329175.013.349>.



BETHLEHEM FIRE LEADERS VISIT RALEIGH — On Wednesday, May 20, 2026, the State Legislature welcomed firefighters from across North Carolina for NC Fire Service Legislative Day to engage with state lawmakers and advocate for issues impacting fire service communities. State Senator Eddie Settle welcomed Chief Ashley Starnes (left) and Assistant Chief Jonathan Fox (right) from Bethlehem Fire & Rescue. Sen. Settle said he thoroughly appreciates their contribution to the community and thanked them -- and all first responders -- for their service to all of District 36 every day.

BBA

**BETHLEHEM
BUSINESS
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MEMBER SPOTLIGHT

Campbell's Berry Farm

Campbell's Berry Farm is a local blueberry farm located at 27 Tracy Bolick Lane in the Bethlehem Community. The farm has over 3,000 blueberry bushes made up of six different Rabbit-eye varieties. The owners of the farm and Tracy and Holly Campbell. They offer a U-pick experience, but have pre-picked berries available for sale as well. There are never any chemicals used on their berries.
There is a quaint country store on the property where they sell a variety of fresh vegetables that are grown on site, as well as ice cream, jellies, jams, blueberry cookbooks, and other items. Families are encouraged to bring picnic lunches and enjoy a day at Campbell's Berry Farm in the beautiful setting with a fun tractor swing and picnic

shelter. Summer field trips are welcome as well during berry season.
The estimated date for their opening season is June 19. Interested blueberry lovers should email campbells-berryfarm@gmail.com to be added to an email list to receive updates or call 828-598-0707.
There are some exciting events coming up on the farm this Summer. Mindful Mondays will begin June 22 and run through July 27 from 5-6 p.m.. Participants will immerse themselves in the fresh country air and the calming sights of ripening blueberries as they learn techniques to reduce stress and enhance well-being. Classes cost \$15 per person and include a quart of U-pick blueberries.
Campbell's Berry Farm will also be offering "Blueberry Buddies Kids Kamp 2026," an interactive farming experience. This will begin in late June (depending on the blueberry season) on Mondays or Fridays. Participants will explore the work and special care that goes into growing blueberries, pick their own blueberries, explore the farm with a scavenger hunt, and cool off with some delicious ice cream. For pricing and to secure a spot, call Holly Campbell at 828-598-0707.



BBA

**BETHLEHEM
BUSINESS
ASSOCIATION**

The Bethlehem Business Association is dedicated to promoting businesses in the Bethlehem Community, and to achieve goals to help the community thrive.

Please Join Us ...

Next Meeting:

Thursday, July 16th

6:00 PM

Campbell's Berry Farm

27 Tracy Bolick Lane,

Hickory, NC 28601

Current and potential Bethlehem Business Association members are welcome to attend.

**BETHLEHEM
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349 Rink Dam Road
Hickory, NC 28681

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