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Plights

Traces of the Indian in  
Piedmont N.C.

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**TRACES OF THE INDIAN IN  
PIEDMONT NORTH CAROLINA**

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By

Douglas L. Rights





# TRACES OF THE INDIAN IN PIEDMONT NORTH CAROLINA

Paper Read By Rev. Douglas L. Rights Before the Annual  
Meeting of the North Carolina Historical Society,  
in Raleigh, December 7, 1923

The bold pioneers who colonized the Carolinas, truly makers of history, were not, with few exceptions, especially interested in writing history. Not only did most of them neglect to record scrupulously their own achievements, but they failed also to reveal to future generations much that they learned of their aboriginal predecessors, the red men.

We have, in a general way, learned of the traits of the Indian in the Carolinas. There are a few detailed accounts on record. The natives of Eastern Carolina early came in contact with the whites, and the history of the two races was interwoven from the beginning of the settlement.

It was not thus with Piedmont and Western Carolina. We learn about the Indian wars, but there is little to study which will throw an intimate light upon these men, their habits, customs, and manner of living, except the scattered traces which they have left behind.

## Territory.

The territory considered in this paper is the piedmont section. The study includes the counties from Orange and Chatham in the east to Wilkes in the west; from Cabarrus in the south to the Virginia line in the north. The level country of the east passes gradually into the hill country of the west. Before the Indians were driven across the mountains or departed, as some did, to the north, this section was mainly forest land with pleasant valleys, well watered and suitable for hunting and fishing. The fertility of the meadow land adjacent to streams afforded advantages for the crude attempts at primeval agriculture.

## Tribes.

An estimate of the number of aboriginal inhabitants east of the Mississippi at the beginning of colonization by the whites is placed at about 280,000. Many tribes, speaking different languages and dialects, occupied this territory. They were engaged in continual warfare.

The Algonquin and Iroquois groups, each composed of various tribes speaking similar dialects though each differed from the others, were the most numerous.

The Indians encountered by the members of Sir Walter Raleigh's expeditions to our coast and were of the Algonquin group. The Tuscarora and the Cherokee were tribes belonging to the Iroquois linguistic group. Bishop Spangenberg in 1752 passed thru a Tuscarora town on the Roanoke River. Indians of this tribe may have roamed the piedmont country, but doubtless did not have permanent settlements there, as they were at war with and feared the Indians of that region. The Cherokees held to the mountains of Western Carolina. Early reports give account of great numbers passing thru Piedmont Carolina, but their stronghold was in the mountain country. The Senecas, also of the Iroquois, came this far south on hunting expeditions.

The Siouan tribes, we know, had strongholds in the piedmont section. These included the Catawba, Cheraw, Saponi, Tutelo and Manocan. Of these, the Catawba is considered the most important. The Saponi and Tutelo ranged from Piedmont Virginia into Carolina, but the Catawba was a strong tribe of the piedmont region.

Some small tribes had disappeared before the coming of the whites, as is reported of the Sawra Indians.

Bishop Spangenberg's diary, written at Edenton in 1752, records the following:

"The Indians in North Carolina are in a bad way. The Chowan Indians are reduced to a few families. The Tuscarora lived 35 miles from here, and are still in possession of a pretty piece of land. They are the remnant of that tribe with which Carolina was formerly at war, and part of them went to the Five Nations, and united with them. The Meherrin Indians, living further

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west, are also reduced to a mere handful. Still further west live the Catawbas, who will probably be our neighbors. They are still at war with the Six Nations (Iroquo's). Southwest from here, behind South Carolina, are the Cherokees, a great Nation."

In a study of the aboriginal traces left by this vanishing people, it is difficult to assign to what tribe the relics and remains belong. Some may have been left by hunting parties and temporary sojourners. However, the Siouan group should claim the majority. This was their home.

#### The Survey.

The trail of the Indian is easy to discover, namely, follow the watercourses. The Yadkin and Catawba rivers, largest streams of the section, reveal most clearly traces of the Indian. Though the land adjoining the streams has been tilled for years, the mark of the red man is still there. Camp and village sites are difficult to obliterate. Occasionally an overflow from the river performs the work of an archaeologist and excavates with a nicety that reveals the secrets of the hidden burial grounds.

However, the smaller streams bear witness also. Choose almost any creek of considerable size, and ere long you will find the evidence of former habitation by the red man. A stream only ten miles in length, known as South Fork Creek, is situated five miles directly south of Winston-Salem and flows west. At no point is the creek more than knee deep. A careful survey reveals nineteen camp or village sites. A thousand artifacts of flint have been gathered in the survey. These fields have been cultivated for over a century.

Following the watercourses up into branches and even to large springs reveals traces of the Indian.

If calculations from these surveys are correct, the Indians in choosing camps preferred the north bank of a stream flowing west, the west bank of a stream flowing south, thus securing advantages of weather.

A partiality for sandy loam soil is noted, evidencing no aboriginal desire to become a "stick in the mud."

Scenes of natural beauty and grandeur are often marked as haunts of the Indian. Peculiar rock formations, cliffs, river bends, escarpments and other more or less spectacular natural scenes made their appeal.

It is disappointing, therefore, to record only faint traces of the Indian in the immediate vicinity of picturesque Pilot Mountain. However, there were large camps at no great distance. The same may be

said of the Sawratown Mountains, reputed to be named after a native tribe. But altho traces in the mountains themselves are not so numerous, or are more difficult to disclose, yet the longest and most beautiful fashioned spear head yet exhibited from the Piedmont section comes from the slopes of the Sawratown range.

It may be noted that traces reveal that the Indian did not camp directly on the brink of streams unless on a high bank. The usual camp or village site was located on the second bottom or rise from the valley.

#### Aniquities.

About 7000 specimens of stone implements gathered in the Piedmont section have been examined during the preparation of this paper. In addition, pottery formed from baked mud, nearly all now found only in fragments, has been discovered in abundance throughout the region. Ornaments of shell, stone, baked mud and bone have been observed. A few ornaments of metal have been reported.

These various relics may be classed in general with the type found along the Atlantic seaboard east of the Alleghenies extending from Maine to Georgia.

The search reveals no sign of great age. Traces of a so-called "primitive man" do not appear, except in graves or caches, where artificial deposit is apparent, no sign of very ancient human life is in evidence. One report showed that an arrowhead was found seven feet below the surface, but further investigation revealed that it lay in the bed of a running stream, where it had undoubtedly been carried by the water. Paleolithic traces are not expected.

However, quantities of these specimens of the neolithic age may rightly be called pre-historic. Many of the artifacts have been shaped long before the advent of the historians. For instance, the lonely white hunter's cabin, which served as the first abode of the pioneers who began the Wachovia settlement, has entirely disappeared. Not a trace of the colonists' work remains today on the spot marked by a plain granite monument. But the plow has revealed within a few yards of this granite block distinct traces of a former Indian camp. Several arrowheads, arrowheads broken in the making, a crude tomahawk, and fragments of pottery reveal an ancient camp site occupied before the coming of the whites. Thus some remains may be called pre-historic, though none of great age. \*

### Handicaps.

The deplorable lack of public museums or repositories involves serious handicaps for the student of Indian life in this region. There are a number of private collections hardly accessible, and no large, adequate display for the public. Thousands and thousands of specimens have been gathered and lost. Many of the most interesting have passed out of the state. Such collections as we find are generally poorly classified, described or displayed.

Within a radius of 25 miles of Winston-Salem there were thousands of whole specimens of mud-baked pottery left by the Indians. Today there is only one complete specimen on exhibit to show the ceramic art. This is in the Wachovia Historical Society, and though cracked, is otherwise well preserved, and happily possesses a record of the camp site where found.

Many farmers, whose fields were examined during the past few years, had been plowing amid Indian relics for years, and knew not what these odd bits of stone might be.

It is interesting to note that this lack of acquaintance with Indian relics leads some minds to exaggeration of their value. It is reported that a soapstone pot, which the large museums of the country exhibit in abundance, is being held by a certain man for \$100.00. At this rate for relics our National Museum will soon rival the United States Treasury. The South Carolina collector, who is reputed to have gathered twenty bushels of arrowheads in a single county, is certainly a well-to-do person.

The writer of this paper has several hundred very good specimens of arrowheads, spear points, drills and knives from the Chapel Hill neighborhood, which were fashioned long before the savage sophomore yell brought terror to the campus. He is ready to present these to the University whenever that institution provides adequate museum facilities. At present, the only exhibition of aboriginal remains at the University is confined to the new dormitories recently erected, the mortar of which was mixed with sand from an Indian burying ground.

### Relics.

Of what do these relics consist? By far the most numerous are the flint chipped implements. Among these, arrow points, knives, and spear heads rank first in number. Then come scrapers, drills or punches, oddly shaped stones, roughly formed axes, celts, gouges and other rude tools.

Less plentiful are the pecked and polished smooth implements, axes, gouges, celts, etc. The axe, or toma-

hawk, is usually grooved, sometimes in the center, sometimes toward one end, thus making a snug fit for the handle, which embraced the body of the weapon. These vary in length from four to eight inches, in weight from one to three pounds. The heavier ones require a strong arm for manipulation. Production of these artifacts required much time and labor.

Hammer stones abound. These were of a size to fit into the hand, some larger for the heavier work, nearly all having two small pits, one in the center of each flat side. They are made of quartzite, "nigger-head rock" or flint, with preference for river washed stones.

Fragments of pottery are found widespread throuth the section. There are two classes; baked mud and steatite or soapstone. The first appears to have been moulded in baskets of woven grass or reeds, usually conical in shape, then burned. Most of it shows gravel and even small pebbles intermingled with the clay. It is quite enduring and stands weathering as well as the average brick. Decorations sometimes appear, mostly near the rim, in the form of incised lines, small pits apparently impressed with bone or twig, impressions of thumb nail at regular intervals, and some scrolls or tracings well rounded. These mud pots are ordinarily one-fourth to one-half inch thick. The color ranges from brick red to dark brown and even black. Often holes were punched near the rim for fitting handle. A gallon or less was the capacity of the majority of these pots.

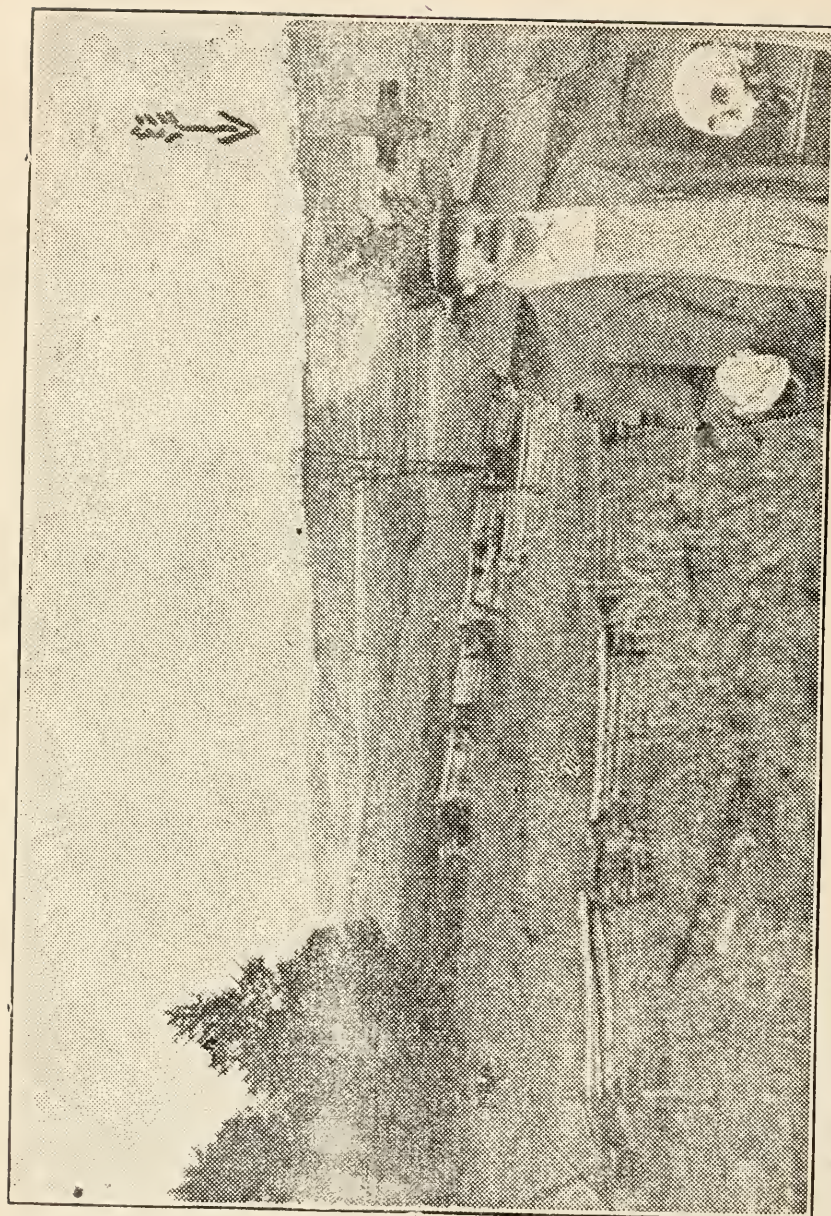
Soapstone vessels, of which numbers have been preserved intact, were made from material found abundantly in the piedmont area. Some are blocks of stone with shallow basin scooped out. Others are as large as half-bushel measures with walls more than an inch thick. Some have two knobs to serve as handles. More delicate specimens resemble the modern deep dish, and one specimen, probably a burial urn, is beautifully cut down to the size of a pint cup, with walls about one-fourth inch thick, having small holes pierced near the rim for insertion of handle the size of a cord.

There are several soapstone pestles and mortars for pounding grain.

### Pipes and Ornaments.

Traces show plainly that the Piedmont Indian was addicted to the use of tobacco. Pipes were made of baked mud, but more often of stone, principally soapstone. A few small metal pipes are in existence. Mud pipes range in shape from the straight tubular to the "L" shaped.





Photograph of site of one of many Indian villages in this section of Piedmont North Carolina. Site of village where scores of arrow heads, pottery and other Indian relics have been found is marked by X. In foreground is the owner of the farm, holding an Aboriginal skull found in a cut by road bulldoze; several feet below the surface of the ground at a point near this village.



The stone pipes are smoothly finished. At least four different styles have been discovered in this region; tubular, Southern mound type, monitor and bowl or vase shaped.

The ornaments are usually of shell or stone, some of baked mud and bone. Bits of mica have been discovered and a few metal ornaments.

Many shells have been found on camp sites along rivers, mostly in kitchen middens, where sometimes a bed two feet thick, mingled with animal bones, charcoal and broken implements, mark a former feasting place. Some of the larger mussel shells, still lustrous and colorful were found. They may have served as spoons or as ornaments. Some elongated shells resembling the conch were brought to light. These were pierced at the end to be strung for necklace. Some shells are cut round like a coin with a small hole drilled near the edge. Shells resembling snail shells, only much smaller, are found in quantities, some pierced for stringing. Wampum, or Indian money, has been found, shell beads about one-half inch long, half the thickness of a lead pencil, all pierced.

Perforated mud beads the size of a marble have been found, also a few bone beads.

Ornamental stones vary in shape and size. Some are crescent shaped with hole drilled thru center. Others are square, oval, elliptical and circular. On some there are scratches or markings, most of them with one or two perforations. A few objects resemble tiny saucers or bowls.

Some few copper beads, and discs have been found.

### Indian Warfare.

Graphic accounts of warfare between Indians and white settlers have been preserved. The following extracts from "The Records of the Moravians in North Carolina," cited by Miss Adelaide Fries, gives vivid picture of the stirring times in the piedmont section in 1760, when the Indians were on the warpath:

"This was a year of fierce Indian war, and on the 10th of February the first whites were killed by the Cherokees in North Carolina. On the 13th of March many Indians were in our neighborhood; eight miles away, on the Yadkin, houses were burned; two men were killed at the bridge over the Wach (Salem Creek); two persons were killed on the Town Fork. They had one large camp six miles from Bethania, and a smaller one less than three miles. Here at the mill, and at Bethania, there were Indian spies every night. March 16th, a beautiful snow fell,

lying for several days, and then we could see the smoke from their camps. Among our neighbors more than fifteen people were slain. The Indians said later that they had tried to make prisoners here, but failed; that several times they had been stopped by the sound of the watchman's horn and the ringing of the bell for morning and evening services.

"On the 9th a man came, pierced thru and thru with an arrow. He related that 24 hours before William Fish and his son had asked him to go with them to their farm to get provisions for the families gathered at a certain place on the Yadkin. Some miles up the river they happened upon a party of Indians, who fired at them and shot many arrows. Fish and his son fell, but this man, longing to reach Bethabara, for his soul's sake rode into the river to escape them. On the further side he found more Indians, but they paid no attention to him and he re-crossed the river, plunged into the woods, where in the darkness and rain he soon lost his way, and wounded by two arrows, wandered for many hours, but finally reached the Moravian town where Dr. Bonn took out the arrow and saved his life."

### Arrows.

The arrows, such as this account mentions, were an important factor both in hunting and in warfare. They are the most numerous of all the implements still preserved and afford an interesting study. The site of a camp or lodge may be discovered by the scattered flint chips, broken from these implements in manufacture.

Whether a flint weapon was an arrow, spear or knife, we can only conjecture from its size. Sometimes the shape shows distinctly that the implement in question is a knife and has been made for hafting. A large arrow or spear could serve also as a knife.

All grades of workmanship are found. Some of the arrow points are so crudely fashioned that we wonder if they were not so made to provoke a smile from some stolid savage. Others so delicately wrought, with long thin blade, symmetrical barbs, or so finely notched, that we marvel how aboriginal tools could accomplish the feat.

The flint projectiles examined vary in length from one-half inch to seven inches.

### Material.

The material from which they are made is largely flint of the varying grades. Some pure quartz arrows, which are transparent, are preserved. Beautiful white quartz arrowheads have been found throughout this section. This is a native stone easily

procured. Many tinted flints, gray, brown, blue, black, with streaked and spotted hues, form a multi-colored variety pleasing to the eye. Practically all are made of flint material, which represents quartz in different degrees of purity. Throughout the world this has been discovered by savages as a tractable stone, readily shaped by chipping. It breaks with a conchoidal fracture, that is, when struck a sharp blow with another hard stone, fragments break off leaving shallow, shell-shaped cavities. Attempts to use other grades of stone met with little success.

Most of the flint was quarried at considerable distance from camp sites and was carried by the Indians in pieces as large as the hand and of the same shape. These were kept in supply for future use in arrow making. Piles of these have been unearthed.

Some of the arrowheads studied were apparently made of material brought many miles from the quarry. Some of the piedmont flint chips and implements of the finer grade, it is quite probable, were brought from across the mountains, possibly some from the famous Flint Ridge quarries of Ohio, from which material has been traced six hundred miles.

#### Classification.

A report issued a number of years ago by the National Museum included a careful classification of the different shapes of Indian arrowheads as follows:

"Division I—Leaf-shaped—In this classification the leaf-shaped is placed at the head as being the oldest implement of its kind. The division includes all kinds, elliptical, oval, oblong, or lanceolate forms, bearing any relation to the shape of a leaf, and without stem, shoulder or barb.

Division II—Triangular—All specimens in the form of a triangle, whether bases or edges be convex, concave or straight.

Division III—Stemmed—All varieties of stems, whether straight, pointed, expanding, round or flat, and whether bases or edges are convex, straight or concave.

Division IV—Peculiar Forms, such as have beveled edges, serrated edges, bifurcated stems, perforators, etc."

Following this classification, the Piedmont Indian made a good showing. From a single camp site in Forsyth county, 400 arrowheads were gathered. Of the many possible shapes enumerated in this classification, every shape mentioned in the list was found included in the 400, except the long thin arrow ascribed to the California Indians, and some peculiar forms found only in distant portions of our country.

#### Arrow Making.

The making of an Indian arrowhead with primitive tools is, to many people, a mystery. It has been called a lost art. However, traces in Piedmont Carolina reveal nearly every stage in the process of manufacture. While there were numerous methods employed, in a general way we may trace the implement from quarry to quiver.

First, large chunks of flint were broken off at the quarry by means of striking with weighty boulders. These were reduced by blows to large, leaf-shaped pieces. These could be transported and finished elsewhere at leisure. Hidden stores of these have been uncovered in the piedmont region.

When ready for fashioning, the flint was laid on a flat stone which served as anvil. We are told that strips of buckskin or other soft material were placed between flint and anvil to reserve force of blows for the desired portion of the flint.

The work of striking was done with a hammer stone, shaped like a large biscuit, which fitted well into the hand. Nearly every hammer stone found has two small pits, one worn in the center of each side. When the flint is worked down to a size easily managed, it can be held in the hand. Buckskin strings were doubtless used also to protect the hand. The leaf-shaped implement is now ready to receive the finishing touches, to be pointed, trimmed down, stemmed and barbed. The many specimens broken in the making and discarded show that the Indian was not always successful in his efforts.

The renowned Captain John Smith left a valuable light upon the subject of arrowmaking when he wrote about the Indian of Virginia, "His arrowhead he quickly maketh with a little bone, which he ever weareth at his bracer, of any splint of a stone, or glass in the form of a heart, and these they giew to the end of their Arrowes."

These smaller tools for the finishing touches have come to light in our sect on. One of these little deer horn tools was cut down for hafting, and showed signs of use.

Holding the flint in one hand, the Indian, with pressure and dexterous turn of the hard bone or horn tool, soon had the small chips flying and presented a deftly formed weapon ready for attaching to arrow shaft.

Different methods were resorted to, but this may be considered the general process.

On village and camp sites the location of the arrowmaker's lodge may be discovered. Hammer stones, anvils, partly finished implements, arrowheads broken in process and thickly scattered flint chips reveal an ancient workshop.

### An Indian Grave.

Although traces of the Indian are abundant, after the lapse of one or two centuries, it is difficult to restore in imagination a camp or village as it actually appeared, peopled with its inhabitants. However, the overflow of the rivers during seasons of high water, have revealed quite clearly methods of Indian burial. Such articles as deerskin and feathered ornaments have long since disappeared, but the remains left by the receding waters present an interesting assembly of articles.

Modes of burial differed among the various tribes, and in the same tribe more elaborate ceremonials were observed for more distinguished personages. Practically all, however, instead of following our custom in which personal effects of the deceased are bequeathed to descendants, sought rather to entomb such possessions and in addition to add gifts from kinsmen and friends of the departed. Perhaps a typical grave of an important member of a tribe may be noted in the following disclosure:

The water of the stream had carried away the soil to a depth of four feet. Here a layer of stones was loosened. Directly underneath were numerous implements and ornamental articles. The disintegrated bones showed that the remains had been deposited lying horizontally with head to the east, the body flexed in a sitting posture. The following articles were scattered in the enclosure which was nine by twelve feet square:

Six conch shells, size of thumb, pierced to form a necklace.  
One large, lustrous muscad shell.

One shell cut to size of five cent piece, pierced with smooth hole.

Five wampum beads of shell.

A handful of small shells, some pierced.

One mud-baked bead, pierced.

One bone bead, pierced.

One smooth, thin stone ornament, pierced at top.

A dozen or more small colored pebbles of attractive shape.

One tomahawk and another fragment.

One fragment of smooth celt.

Three portions of soapstone pipes and one portion of a mud pipe.

Four bone needles, broken from leg bone of some animal and smoothed down to a point, in length from one to four inches.

Six hammer stones, all bearing marks of usage.

One deer or goat horn, cut for hauling, an arrowmaker's tool.

Quantities of muscad shells.

Bones of deer, opossum, dog and other animals and a tortoise shell.

Large fragments of mud-baked pottery lining the grave.

Two hundred twenty-five arrowheads, rather small, and as many more fragments.

From this we judge that the departed member of the tribe was plentifully supplied for his journey to the spirit land.

### Conclusion.

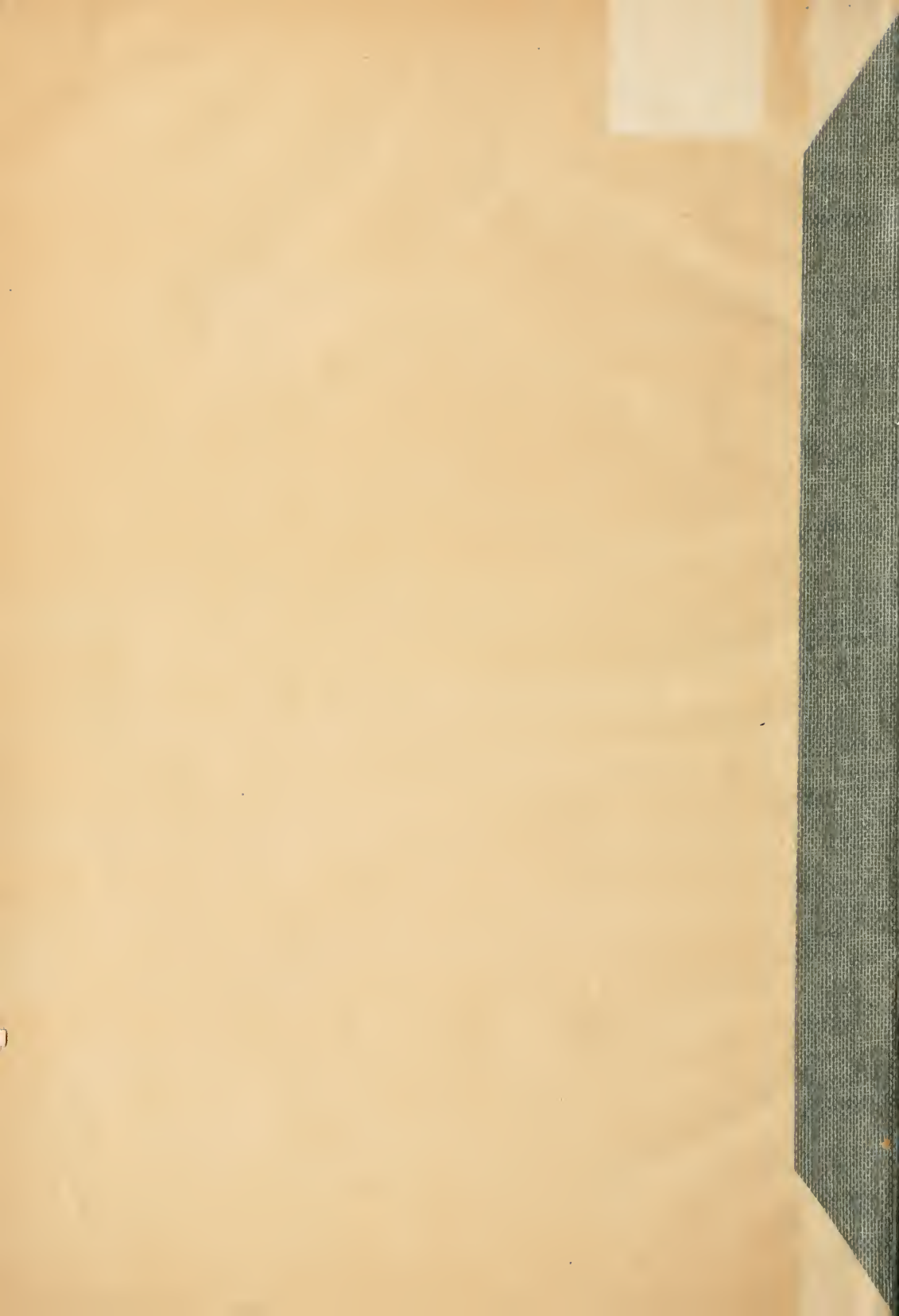
Today the Indian has disappeared from Piedmont Carolina. The old folks remember when roving bands passed thru and would skillfully shoot their arrows with sure aim to strike down coins placed many feet away by the wondering white men. But today the Indian here is a memory. Only the traces remain to tell of his departed glory.













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