

A Study of the Cultural Significance of a  
Dugout Canoe to People of the Past and Present

By

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**ABSTRACT**

The purpose of this thesis is to examine the significance of canoe No.SOR0001 and the impacts that it has on the Coharie Tribe of North Carolina. This involved compiling a belonging biography of the canoe including its creation, use, abandonment, recovery, preservation, adoption into the Coharie Tribe, and its final curation. There is a special focus on the more contemporary period from the canoe's recovery to the present to fully understand how a belonging such as this can help preserve the spiritual connection between modern people and their ancestors.

Key Words: Dugout canoe, Coharie Tribe, Late Woodland Period, radiocarbon dating, repatriation



A STUDY OF THE CULTURAL SIGNIFICANCE OF A DUGOUT CANOE  
TO PEOPLE OF THE PAST AND PRESENT

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## **ECU Land Acknowledgement**

“We acknowledge the Tuscarora people, who are the traditional custodians of the land on which we work and live, and recognize their continuing connection to the land, water, and air that Greenville consumes. We pay respect to the eight state-recognized tribes of North Carolina; Coharie, Eastern Band of Cherokee, Haliwa-Saponi, Lumbee, Meherrin, Occaneechi Band of Saponi, Sappony, and Waccamaw-Siouan, all Nations, and their elders past, present, and emerging.”

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I crost unto the other side [of the river]

In such a shining odd invention.

I scarce can give it due Dimention.

The Indians call this Watry Waggon

Canoo, a Vessel none can brag on;

Cut from the Poplar-tree or Pine

And fashion'd like a Trough for Swine;

In this most Noble Fishing Boat

I boldly put myself a-float

Standing Erect with Legs stretch'd wide

We paddled to the other side;

Wher being Landed safe by hap,

As Sol fell into Thetis Lap.

-Ebenezer Cook, 1708

(Brewington 1963:4)

## **Chapter One: Introduction**

The sound of rhythmic drumming and singing, and the smell of hot, fried food permeated the air at the Coharie Intra-Tribal Center on the weekend of September 11<sup>th</sup>-12<sup>th</sup>, 2021. Hundreds of people milled around the outdoor arena waiting for the festivities to begin. The master of ceremonies (MC), standing on the stage, announced that the 51<sup>st</sup> Annual Cultural Coharie Powwow would begin with a procession around the grassy arena.

Leading the procession were four tribal members carrying the American flag, the North Carolina State flag, the POW MIA flag, and the Eagle Staff. Following them were the male and female head dancers, Ronnie Brewington and Jessica Newton. After them came the Coharie Chief, Ammie Gordon “Silver Eagle” Jacobs. And finally, came the dancers who were competing throughout the weekend, all wearing their traditional regalia.

As the procession began, the sound of jingle cones and bells joined in time with the drumming. Performers of every age and every style entered the arena to dance while the six drumming groups performed in turn, sharing their styles, and letting the dancers express themselves. The beadwork, embroidery, and jewelry dazzled in the sunlight as not a single cloud dared to shadow such a celebratory event.

The researcher for this thesis was offered a front row seat, sitting with the Coharie Tribal Administrator, Greg Jacobs, and his family. Over the weekend, the researcher got to learn about the traditions of the dances, songs, food, and artisan’s wares that were all present at the event. The powwow created a space where the past and present met in a colorful, joyful venue. Most importantly, however, the researcher also got to see the Coharie canoe in person for the first time. It is housed at the Coharie Intra-Tribal Center and the room where it is on display was open to visitors for the duration of the three-day powwow.

The researcher had already done extensive research on the canoe and spoken to tribal members before the powwow but seeing it in person was an experience of its own. People filed into the room to look at it, contemplate its age, and wondered who may have created it. Many people had questions about its origin, how old it is, how it ended up where it did in the South River, and more.

A powwow is a time of celebration. It offers a chance for all of the Native Americans present to celebrate their culture, meet up with friends and family who they do not get to see very often, remember their ancestors, and teach others about their beliefs and traditions. It is a time of healing and cleansing the soul of all negativities. It offers a chance to give thanks to their Creator and those who came before, and to think of those who will come after.

### *The Coharie Canoe*

Though dates are debated, there is proof that Native American communities have been occupying the same land as the Coharie Tribe since 12,000-8,000 BC. This is evident by the discovery of several fluted projectile points being found in Harnett County, North Carolina. Harnett County is one of the two counties where the Coharie Tribe currently reside, the other county being Sampson County (Hargrove 1990:6). When it comes to these Native American sites, there is very little organic matter that survives to be found in the archaeological record. The organic material that does survive tends to be either charred or preserved in anaerobic environments such as swamps, rivers, coasts, and other aquatic areas. Even when this organic matter is preserved it is often greatly deteriorated from hundreds or thousands of years of residing in those unstable environments. One of the largest of these organic artifacts that survives in the archaeological record are dugout canoes.

The history of a single canoe can span thousands of years and can grant insights into the lives of the people who lived all those years ago. However, dugout canoes can also influence people in the present. The descendants of the people who built dugout canoes thousands of years ago are still around today and still hold onto those cultural connections (Coharie Tribe 2021). The goal of this thesis is to examine that connection between the Coharie people and dugout canoe, No.SOR0001. The more common name for canoe No.SOR0001 is “the Coharie canoe” because it has been repatriated to the Coharie Tribe, and for the purposes of this thesis that is how it will be referred to. This thesis serves as a belonging biography focusing on the Coharie canoe and tells the history of the canoe through the history of the Coharie people up to the modern day.

As stated earlier, the Coharie Tribe is located in Harnett and Sampson Counties in southeastern North Carolina. They came to that location between 1729 and 1746 after years of Inter-Tribal tensions as well as White-Indian conflicts (Coharie Tribe 2021). The survivors of these conflicts coalesced into a new community, finding commonality in each other (Danny Bell, interview by author, Dec. 2, 2021, virtual). It was not until 1971 that the Coharie Tribe was officially recognized by the State of North Carolina. Now, they stand as one of eight such tribal nations within the state. The current tribal roll (as of 2021) has 3,032 members listed. About eighty percent of those members reside within four tribal communities: Holly Grove, New Bethel, Shiloh, and Antioch (Coharie Tribe 2021).

Keeping their history and culture alive in the eyes of all the members is very important to the Coharies. The 2019 tribal adoption of canoe No.SOR0001 was a big step for them in obtaining that goal. It made their past tangible in a very real way. The Coharie tribal member, Philip Bell, said during an interview for a local newspaper that

[c]ustody and display of the canoe is paramount in the eyes and hearts of the Coharie people. This canoe represents another relic of the past validating existence of Native American residents who, following colonization, immigration and encumbered trials, have weathered the test of time. This canoe is important to sharing the story of the Coharie people's past, culture and resilience. Possession of a prestigious historical object like this canoe that points back to one's heritage is a significant find for elders of the tribe and a great teaching tool for generations to come (Berendt 2018).

By looking at the life of this belonging, a lot can be learned about the people that have interacted with it. Archaeologists have studied the construction techniques and uses of canoes as they were hundreds of years ago but rarely have looked at the impacts that they have on modern people. This thesis will help expand that view to include modern tribal members and learn about how the canoe helps to connect them to their ancestors who lived 640 +/- 30 BP (Hood 2018:2), when the Coharie canoe was new.

In addition, this study may also remind people that Native Americans are not simply members of an intangible past. To many Americans, Native Americans and their way of life have all but fallen into legend (Newcombe 2019:201). Stories such as the history of the Coharie canoe will help to reiterate that Native Americans are active members of today's society. They are not a people who have been lost to time, but rather a lively and spiritual community who deserve to be acknowledged.



FIGURE 1. Canoe No.SOR0001 after dehydration. Photo supplied by Dr. Nathan Henry, Assistant State Archaeologist, North Carolina Office of State Archaeology Underwater Archaeology Branch.

Dugout canoes have an interesting and important part to play in the telling of the history of the land that is now called America. Their remains have been found in rivers, lakes, estuaries, and other waterways all around the United States for hundreds of years. Dugout canoes helped facilitate trade and economy between many different indigenous nations long before Europeans set foot on Native American soil. The earliest canoes in North Carolina date as far back as 11,000 years ago (Phelps 1989). They acted as one of the main modes of transportation until European settlers made their way across the Atlantic Ocean and introduced other forms of transportation, including ships and carriages (Wetmore 1977:24). Additionally, canoes also offered means of subsistence as many types of fishing were important to the indigenous ways of life (Perdue, Oakley 2010:20).

A belonging biography allows researchers to look at the entire life cycle of a single canoe. Additionally, researchers can look at the culture and lifeways of the people who interacted with the canoe at any given time during its existence. By working alongside tribal members and learning about their experiences with these canoes, a much deeper, spiritual understanding can be obtained. Specifically, this study will aid in looking at the impacts of dugout canoes in the North Carolina Coastal Plains region on Native communities. Studies such as this one on the Coharie canoe offer a wider understanding of how the cultural connection between a single artifact and a people can be understood.



### *Research Questions*

This thesis analyzes the life cycle of the Coharie canoe and examines the cultural impacts it has on people of different time periods. The entire life cycle of the canoe was considered for this study with a focused analysis on the more contemporary time period. This thesis examines how it was constructed, used, came to be in the South River, recovered, preserved, adopted into the Coharie Tribe, and curated for the general public. While looking at these aspects of the existence of the Coharie canoe, the following questions will be considered:

#### *Primary Questions*

1. What does the existence and ownership of the canoe mean to members of the Coharie Tribe today?
2. How does the Coharie canoe connect modern people to their ancestors?
3. What else can be learned about the history of Native Americans in the area in which the canoe was recovered?

#### *Secondary Questions*

1. How will this impact decisions on canoe conservation and repatriation going forward?
2. What can learning about a single belonging's existence tell us about the people that interacted with it throughout that existence?

This research is important because, currently, it is one of the only studies of its kind. There is only one other case, in the State of North Carolina, of an ancient canoe being repatriated back to the descendants of the tribe who created it (John Mintz, Interview by author, Nov. 5, 2021, North Carolina Maritime Museum, Southport, North Carolina). There have been 54 dugout

canoes identified in North Carolina, and the Coharie canoe is the only one that has been successfully repatriated back to a tribe. There is one other canoe that the North Carolina Office of State Archaeology Underwater Archaeology Branch is hoping to repatriate. It was located in Lake Waccamaw and is in the process of being treated with the intention of repatriating it to the Waccamaw Siouan Tribal Nation once its treatment is completed (John Mintz, Interview by author, Nov. 5, 2021, North Carolina Maritime Museum, Southport, North Carolina). It is important that stories such as this are shared for a number of reasons.

First and foremost, there have been no works published on the Coharie canoe or the Coharie Tribe. Other than a few unpublished reports and newspaper articles, there is very little to be learned about them from written documents. Consequently, much of the work conducted on this thesis is primary research. Additionally, working with both the Office of State Archaeology and tribal members is something that was rarely done in the past, though it is starting to become more common. Since cases of repatriation such as this are so rare, especially within the State of North Carolina, tribal members are not often included in the research of the materials. With so few written documents offering information on the canoe, the stories that have been passed down for generations within their tribe act as a major resource for obtaining a greater understanding of the lives of their ancestors and their connection to them.

The Coharie canoe impacts thousands of lives and not just within the Coharie Community. It impacts researchers, scholars, and visitors of the Coharie Intra-Tribal Center both native and non-native alike. It is more than an artifact that can be seen in a museum. It is a part of a modern people who cherish it. To the Coharies, it is another member of their tribe. It offers a way for the Coharie people to connect with their past and share their culture with younger members as well as the world at large. None of this information can be drawn from other

archaeological studies because there are no other studies like it that exist within the State of North Carolina.

### *Research Methods*

There are several methods of research that were used for this thesis as it is very multidisciplinary in its approaches. The first was to use a historical approach and consult other researcher's works that have focused on dugout canoes identified in North Carolina Coastal Plains and Piedmont Regions. Primary among these is work conducted on the dugout canoes identified in Lake Phelps. Of the 54 dugout canoes identified in North Carolina, 26 of them were identified in Lake Phelps (John Mintz, Interview by author, Nov. 5, 2021, North Carolina Maritime Museum, Southport, North Carolina). This research focused on the lives of the people during those time periods, the construction methods of the canoes, and the uses of the canoes before they came to rest on the lake floor.

The second method was an archaeological approach to consult the archaeologists at the Office of State Archaeology Underwater Archaeology Branch. This included John Mintz, the State Archaeologist, Chris Southerly, the Deputy State Archaeologist, and Nathan Henry, the Assistant State Archaeologist. Each of these state archaeologists have been deeply involved in the preservation, repatriation, and exhibition of the canoe. They have been very open with the processes that have taken place and the work that continues to be done with the Coharie canoe.

The best way to understand an individual or a group of people is to spend time with them and that is exactly what the third research method was for this thesis which utilized a more anthropological approach. Visiting the Coharie Intra-Tribal Center, attending cultural events, and getting to know and interview tribal members was the best way to learn more about the tribe's history, their culture, their views, and their goals for the future.

As stated previously, the Coharie canoe is currently being housed in the Coharie Intra-Tribal Center near Clinton, North Carolina. The Center was repurposed from the East Carolina Indian School (ECI) building that was established in 1943. It was one of the first organized schools for native children in the Coharie community as well as for Native Americans in the surrounding communities, many of whom are still alive today (Coharie Tribe 2021). The building itself holds cultural significance and now that the canoe is being housed there, that significance has only grown.

Witnessing and taking part in cultural events was a very important part of the researching process because it offered a more intimate view of Coharie spirituality. The Coharie Tribe's Annual Cultural Powwow is held at the Coharie Intra-tribal Center. Attending the Coharie Tribe's 51st Annual Cultural Powwow in September of 2021 granted an amazing opportunity to understand the importance of such events in indigenous communities. Powwows are celebrations full of honor and remembrance. They offer an opportunity to share traditional dances and music, food, and artisan's wares. Attending cultural events such as these allowed the researcher to get a unique and special view into the lives of the Coharie people.

The researcher was also invited to join in a talking circle held at the Coharie Intra-tribal Center. This event allowed the researcher to learn more about that tribal community. Everyone present sat in a circle and a talking stick was passed around and everyone, including the researcher, was invited to share some personal experiences. Everyone listened to what each other person had to say and even when discussing difficult topics, everyone was calm and thoughtful. The experience allowed the researcher to learn much more about the traditional daily practices of the Coharie people and how they keep those practices alive today.

Interviewing specific members of the tribe and hearing firsthand accounts of the importance that the Coharie canoe plays in their lives and what it means to the tribe as a whole is probably the most direct research method used for this thesis. Interviews with three different members of the Coharie Tribe were conducted to learn more about their relationship with the canoe. Each of the members interviewed had been involved in the repatriation process and the blessing of the canoe, and they are working towards creating an exhibit about the Coharie with the canoe being the focal point. For the purposes of this study and for the Coharie to use in their exhibit, a photogrammetry model and a 3D model of the canoe were made and sent to tribal leaders.

This thesis is not only the study of a belonging and the Coharie people who lived hundreds of years ago but also a study of how they live today. This study tells the story of the canoe while also telling the story of the tribe and explores how they impact and influence each other. This thesis analyzes the biography of the Coharie canoe while also looking at the history of the Coharie people to assess the cultural impacts that the canoe has had on the tribe both in the modern day and before. The author argues that the repatriation of the canoe to the Coharie people has had numerous positive impacts on their self-identification, political visibility, and connections with their ancestors. There are many studies of Native American belongings that have been conducted by archaeologists through time. This study is different because it brings the tribal members to the forefront of the narrative of the canoe. It will add a new layer of understanding to the significance of belongings such as the Coharie canoe.

## Chapter Two: Theory Literary Review

### *Introduction*

The theory being utilized for this thesis is object biography, also called artifact biography. Object biography is the process of researching material culture by creating personal biographies about each item or a group of items. This theory was first put forward by Igor Kopytoff in 1986 who applied this theory while researching slaves (Joy 2009:540). They were humans but were sold as a commodity. Kopytoff believed that the same questions that someone would ask to create a biography about a person could be asked to create a biography of an object (Kopytoff 1986:66). He posed questions such as: Where does it come from? Who made it? What is it used for/what is its career? What are the significant “ages” during its life? Kopytoff got the idea from W. H. Rivers’ 1910 article, “The Genealogical Method of Anthropological Inquiry,” which acted as a guide to anthropological fieldwork in its day (Kopytoff 1986:66). Within Rivers’ article, he discussed having examined plots of land, their change in ownership, and use over time. Kopytoff realized that by creating a biography for each plot of land, much more could be clearly learned about them (Kopytoff 1986:66).

When applying this theory to the Coharie canoe, several considerations had to be made. In recent scholarship, the term “object” is considered a colonizing and impersonal term and when working with indigenous communities, it is important to decolonize language as much as possible. A more accepted term to use is “belonging.” The material culture that is often being examined once belonged to someone or still belongs to someone. Using the term “object” isolates the item in question and removes it from any human interaction. Calling it a “belonging”

reminds people that it was and is connected to people. It adds a human element back into the belonging's story. It belonged/belongs to someone, and they are part of its history. The Coharie canoe is no exception to that, it is a belonging. It is connected to the Coharie people in more ways than one.

This thesis is a belonging biography, not an object or artifact biography. Kopytoff first utilized this theory nearly forty years ago, however, decolonizing language is something that takes constant effort, and everyone must be conscious of it. It is to be expected that most people will not start calling this theory “belonging biography” because that term is new and unfamiliar. In this chapter, when referring to how others have used this theory previously, it will be called “object biography” because that is the theory they used. However, for the rest of this thesis, the theory that is used is “belonging biography” and when referring to the processes of this thesis, that is how it will be termed.

### *Historiography of Object Biography*

Object biography is a system of research that comes from the study of material culture and helps researchers understand the impacts of object agency (Schamberger et. al. 2008:276). This system looks at how social interactions between objects and people grow to create meaning. This includes the objects' production, use, alteration, movement, position, exchange, all the way through to its destruction. This theory also examines how objects can reflect a sense of self. When people are emotionally attached to an item, they see themselves in that item and vice versa. This is how artifacts can be viewed as more dynamic and active agents within a society (Schamberger et. al. 2008:277).

Igor Kopytoff may have been the first to define object biography as a theory when working with material culture but there were many who followed in his footsteps and utilized this theory. Chris Gosden and Yvonne Marshall discuss how they used object biography in their 1999 article, "The Cultural Biography of Objects." They begin their article by outlining the origin of studying artifacts. Traditionally, within the social sciences (anthropology, sociology, and history) objects have been viewed as functional items that are a part of social processes but never as influencers of those processes. Some archaeologists have taken a different view. They look at the ways that people and objects impact each other. As time goes on, the two change together and become intertwined (Gosden and Marshall 1999: 169). However, not all archaeologists view material culture in this way.

Archaeologists can usually be divided into two groups, processualists and post-processualists. Processualists view material culture in the manner in which they can be utilized. They see it as inert and events may happen around it or happen to it, but it will not impact those events. This is called "use-life" (Gosden and Marshall 1999: 169). The post-processualist archaeologist looks at how the object creates meaning (Gosden and Marshall 1999: 169). Many post-processualists see that objects create meaning through the social interactions that they are involved in. Objects change through their existence. They accumulate history that impacts their significance to the people that they are interacting with (Gosden and Marshall 1999: 170).

To expand on the difference between these two theoretical ways of thinking Gosden and Marshall looked at a single item and wrote biographies of it in the processualist manner and in the post-processualist manner. For their study, they chose to look at a neck ornament from Fiji made of sperm whale teeth and coconut fibers. The processualist narrative tells the general history of the neck ornament, who gifted it to whom and when (Gosden and Marshall 1999: 170-



172). The post-proseccualist narrative includes the bonds between the neck ornament and the people that it came into contact with (Gosden and Marshall 1999:172-174). Gosden and Marshall emphasize that not all objects can be analyzed the same way. They all have different histories that create various social circumstances that must be considered individually (Gosden and Marshall 1999:174).

One note to make about the way that Gosden and Marshall used object biography is that they seem to think that objects only carry enough significance and impact if they are used within a certain capacity (gift giving or ceremonial). That may be because of the nature of the specific object that they were analyzing (the neck ornament), as it had been gifted several times in its life and had ceremonial significance. However, it seemed that they did not give as much attention to everyday objects, only those that appeared to have more outward importance (Gosden and Marshall 1999:174).

Sergei Tret'ikov also used the theory of object biography and wrote about it in his 2006 article, "The Biography of an Object." Using the post-processual method, he actively reinserted the human into the narrative of the object. Tret'ikov's object biographies unpacked the many acts that came together to create the history of the object. He believes that it is not the object itself but the actions behind the object and the manner in which it was utilized that give it its significance (Tret'ikov 2006:58).

To help make his point, Tret'ikov compared the object biography to novels. He compared the hero in the story to the use-life of the object. Without the hero, there is no story (Tret'ikov 2006:58). Everything revolves around the hero, or in this case, the use-life of the object (Tret'ikov 2006:59). In his article, he stresses that the object narrative must go beyond the

boundaries of the novel's narrative. Other characters and storylines must be brought into it (Tret'ikov 2006:60).

Tret'ikov makes another analogy and describes the object as being on a conveyer belt. Every new section of the conveyer belt introduces a new group of people. The object can interact with any number of people or groups and continue on its trajectory. Every person is impactful and adds to the narrative of the object. Imagine there are people on both sides of the conveyer belt, people of different backgrounds and human experiences interacting with this object in organic moments of contact all throughout its existence. Each of those moments adds to the object's history (Tret'ikov 2006:61). Tret'ikov states that it is not a person moving through a system of objects, but rather, an object moving through a system of people (Tret'ikov 2006:62).

Another example of this was done by The National Museum of Australia in 2008 when they used artifact biography in an exhibit they put on display. The process of creating the exhibit is outlined in the article, "Living in a Material World" by Karen Schamberger et. al. The exhibit was centered around Guna Kinne, her Latvian national dress and the historical agency that the dress held (Schamberger et. al. 2008:275-276).

Guna Kinne said that her history was literally woven into her dress. Not only because she worked on sewing it at different points in her life, but she also wore it for many memorable moments. The dress is heavy, not just with layers of embroidered fabric, but also with memory and meaning and she states that every time she wears it, there are a myriad of emotions that come to her. The dress was integral to how she experienced the different points in her life (Schamberger et. al. 2008:275). Mrs. Kinne states that the dress does not trigger memories for her, it embodies her personal experiences. Touching the dress and talking about it "collapse space and time" (Schamberger et. al. 2008:275-176).

The object biography explored by the National Museum of Australia and Schamberger et. al. differs from that done by Gosden and Marshall because it is a different type of object. Where Gosden and Marshall focused on gifts and ceremonial objects, Schamberger et. al. focused on an object that was created by a person and stayed with that person for most of their life. The longevity of the relationship is what made it so significant. Both researchers look at the objects similarly as Tret'ikov describes. The use-life of the object is the main focus, but it is the other characters and events going on around it that make the story and give the object a rich narrative.

Archaeologist Jody Joy writes about the use of object biography in her 2009 article, "Reinvigorating Object Biography: Reproducing the Drama of Object Lives." Much like the previous researchers mentioned in this chapter, she starts off by giving a brief history of object biography and its evolution. She praised Gosden and Marshall, stating that in their article, they used object biography to its full capacity. Joy also looks at how processual archaeologists in the United States have used variations of object biography. Lewis Binford and Michael Schiffer are two of the most well-known theorists of archaeology in the United States. They used variations of object biography to explain archaeological record formation (Schiffer 1972). They each acknowledge that objects are not static within their environment but are actively changing (Binford 1983). They look at the practical usage of the material but less at the social and cultural significance that it can hold.

Joy takes time in her article to differentiate between a biography, which is more anthropological, and a life history, which is used in more historical case studies. Biographies and life histories use different terminology, scales, and objectives (Joy 2009:542). A life history looks at material on a macro-scale, looking at changes in artifacts and technology over time, and the relationship with people is used to explain those changes. It tells a chronological history of

the object but leaves out some of the interplay between the object and the people that it comes into contact with (Joy 2009:542). Biographical studies usually focus on a single artifact and focus more on the relationship between the people and the object but in a way that recognizes the artifact's involvement in social interactions (Joy 2009:542).

Once Joy outlined the differences between the two approaches, she discussed the problems with how researchers have applied the biographical approach in the past. The first challenge that Joy discusses is when applying object biography to an object that predates written history or an object that there is nothing written about. The issue being that historians do not know exactly what the human interaction is for that object and therefore cannot create a complete biography of it (Joy 2009:543). This is a challenge addressed in this thesis with the Coharie canoe which was constructed before there was written language in the region so there is no written documentation of it before 2018. Therefore, much has to be speculated and inferred based on historical knowledge of canoe construction techniques and use during the earlier periods of its life.

Joy describes how objects do not exist within a linear pattern. They can have different relationships with different people, hold different meanings, and extend beyond human lifetimes. Its previous environment can impact the relationships that it has in a new environment. How its past is interpreted and perceived has impacts on a more contemporary interaction (Joy 2009:543). This is also true with the Coharie canoe. It holds much more significance with members of the tribe today because of what it symbolizes of their past.

Another issue that Joy brings up is that object biography is defined as the "social life" of an artifact (Joy 2009:540). Once it is no longer interacting with people, the object socially dies and its biography ends. Some historians, including Joy, believe that the objects found by

archaeologists have “died” (Joy 2009:543). Those objects have ended their social lives and the archaeologists must then work backwards, from death to production, to figure out the rest of the biography (Joy 2009:543). Joy goes on to explain that in an object biography, if an object only exists during periods of social interaction with people, then a single object can have multiple lives and deaths. Each period of socialization is a life and then when it falls out of that socialization, it dies. A single object can go through this many times during its existence (Joy 2009:544).

If researchers were to analyze the Coharie canoe within these parameters, they would say that it has lived at least two lives. The first would have been when it was built and originally used. The period where it was in the South River and not interacting with people would have been a period when it was socially dead. The current period, from 2018 to present, when it is back with the Coharie Tribe and is in contact with lots of people would be a new life for that canoe.

The researcher of this thesis would argue that there are issues with Joy’s utilization of both life history and object biography. As Joy stated, the life history of an object leaves out the object’s agency and the impacts that it has on the people and events around it. She argues that a life history is an incomplete history (Joy 2009:545). However, it could be argued that her utilization of object biography also tells an incomplete narrative. If historians only look at objects during their times of human interaction, there could be entire segments of that object’s history that are being purposefully ignored.

### *How Belonging Biography is Used for This Thesis*

Beyond terminology, there are other aspects of object biography that seem problematic, one being the definition. Many scholars utilizing this theory believe that an object only has agency when it is actively interacting with people. When it no longer has that interaction, it is “dead,” the biography ends (Joy 2009:544). But calling a belonging “dead” only eliminates parts of the story. Take the Coharie canoe, for example. It was constructed 640 +/-30 BP (Hood 2018) and rediscovered imbedded in the riverbed of the South River in 2018. There was an extended period of time when the Coharie canoe went with no human interaction but that does not make that period of no social or human interaction any less important. That is a part of the Coharie canoe’s journey and cannot be left out of its biography.

For the purposes of this thesis, the belonging biography in use does not only include times of object-human interaction but the entirety of the object’s existence. It includes what can be inferred about its manufacture, use, and how it came to be resting in the South River, as well as everything that is definitively known since its rediscovery in 2018 (Henry 2018a). There is no way of knowing the full extent of its history prior to 2018. There is no written documentation of the canoe before that point but there is much that can be inferred. This is one of the challenges that Joy discussed in her article (Joy 2009:543). Even though no one knows that specific history, the impacts that it has at present are well known and documented. The full history is important, even though it is not entirely known, it still deeply impacts the more contemporary period and the Coharie Tribe today.

Though some scholars would consider the time that the Coharie canoe was in the South River as a time when it was “socially dead,” the Coharie themselves have a very different view of what was happening to the canoe during that time. Greg Jacobs is the Coharie Tribal

Administrator and was one of several people interviewed for this thesis. He spoke about how the canoe came back to the Coharie people after its time in the South River. He said,

[T]o me, it's spoken and says, "the day has come that I'm coming back to the celebration of the revitalization of the culture of Indian people. I see that you now dance in a traditional Native American way with the drum, and you sing, and you dress in regalia. And, like we used to, before the time came that you had to put that culture and tradition and ceremony safely away, because it wasn't safe. It was a threat to your very existence, for you to be seen, to do that. But now you've, you've returned to your first love... [Y]ou're following the traditional path of Native American people, a love for the land and good stewards of the land. I've been buried for 600 years, that I'm back because you're back. And your ways are back." And that's the way I look at that canoe. It's a reminder to me that it's a time to celebrate, because there is a day in history that we can express ourselves freely as we see fit and who we are. That some people refer to it as "lost," ... it was dormant until it was safe again. So yeah, we celebrate. It came back to the celebration. It's resting right here within the Tribal Community, and I can feel its peace being with its people. And we can feel its spirit. As we're given its gift. It brings tears to so many people's eyes. So much tobacco, so much praying as I've noticed people standing there, ... it's a day of celebration that its back with us. We missed it (Greg Jacobs, interview by author, Dec. 1, 2021, virtual).

Mr. Jacobs and many of the Coharie view the canoe as a living entity and give it agency just as any living thing would have. The canoe knew that for many years, it was not safe to be Native American, so it stayed hidden. Now it is once again safe to be Native American and to live in the

old ways, so it has emerged and made its way back to the Tribe. If the belonging biography were applied to this thesis as so many object biographies have been applied in the past, much of that history would be disregarded. The time when the Coharie canoe was in the South River, in hiding, would be considered a time that it was socially dead and would not be a part of the biography. But that time is clearly very important not only to the Coharie but to anyone who wants to understand the story of the Coharie canoe. That time makes that canoe's return to the Coharie people much more impactful.

It is important when learning about a belonging to view it in the same light as those who interact with it most, whenever possible. The Coharie canoe is alive, it has agency and spirit. In order for the researcher of this thesis to write a true biography of the Coharie canoe, that needed to be understood. It needed to be viewed through the eyes of the Coharie people. Scholars need to go beyond considering the social and cultural significance that material culture can obtain throughout its life and really understand what that means. It is more than just an object. It is a belonging, and being so, it collects its own stories and history. It takes on a life of its own. The Coharie canoe certainly has.



## **Chapter Three: Historical Context:**

### *Introduction*

When the first Europeans came to the Americas they documented their observations of the land, the water, and the people. Some of the most famous examples are the drawings that John White made in the 1580s when he visited the northern shores of North Carolina. Other examples are the writings of Thomas Harriot, also from that time, that nicely compliment the images that White produced. These writings and illustrations give archaeologists and historians a detailed look into Europeans first impressions of how Native American communities were living 500 years ago. However, archaeological research has proven that human occupation in areas such as North Carolina extends far beyond the past 500 years when the early settlers documented their observations.

### *Indigenous History in Sampson and Harnett Counties, North Carolina*

For the purposes of this thesis, a historical timeline of indigenous occupations was limited to just Sampson and Harnett Counties of North Carolina. This is because those are the two counties where the Coharie Tribe are located. This information was obtained from archaeological reports of excavations conducted within the two counties, housed at the North Carolina State Archives, in Raleigh, North Carolina.

The Native American timeline for this region of North Carolina is traditionally accepted as follows: Paleoindian, Archaic, Woodland, and Contact. The Paleoindian Period refers to the earliest time period that archaeological evidence signifies that Native Americans lived in the

area. The Archaic and Woodland Periods are the subsequent periods and are usually each broken into three subperiods: Early Archaic, Middle Archaic, Late Archaic, and Early Woodland, Middle Woodland, and Late Woodland. The Contact Period defines the time in which Native American communities and European communities met (O’Neal 2004:14). Scholars continue to debate the exact time frames of each period, but the most accepted dates will be referenced for the purposes of this thesis.

### Paleoindian Period

The Paleoindian Period is believed to have spanned from 12,000-8,000 BP (Hargrove 1990:6). There is evidence of humans inhabiting southeastern North Carolina since at least 11,000 B.P. (Millis 2017:11). The environment was much colder as it was at the end of the last ice-age, also known as the Holocene. Vegetation was sparse and no large species of trees grew in the area yet (Hargrove 1990:6).

This period is characterized by the use of fluted projectile points, also called Clovis Points (S&ME 2017:9), several of which (as stated earlier) have been found in Harnett County (Hargrove 1990:6). It does appear that the Piedmont region was more intensively occupied by Paleoindian peoples than the Coastal Plains region (O’Neal 2004:15). The Coastal Plains region is the most eastern part of North Carolina and is characterized by how flat and sandy it is. Thousands of years ago, the Coastal plain was underwater which may explain why there is more evidence of human occupation in the Piedmont region during this period (S&ME 2017:10). The Piedmont region is in the center section of the state. This is where the ground is hillier and there are fewer rivers. Sampson and Harnett counties lie right where the Coastal Plain and Piedmont regions meet so it was important to consider both when conducting research for this thesis. It has been noted by researchers “that [the] fluted points [in these regions] are most common near

major rivers at areas where river valleys are constricted providing ease in fording the waterways” (O’Neal 2004:15). Early occupation near major rivers can signify the importance of those waterways to the lives of those people.

Little is known about the actual lifeways of the people who lived during the Paleoindian period because little else has survived within the archaeological record (Fournier-Hackbarth and Hackbarth 1981:20). Most archaeological finds from this period are classified as surface finds rather than found during extensive archaeological excavations. This also means that little information can be derived from singular sites and inferences need to be drawn from more regional collections (S&ME 2017:9). Scholars believe that communities during this period lived in smaller family groups and that they would have moved around sustaining in hunting and gathering societies. Settlements focused around small task-related sites including animal processing and lithic workstations usually oriented near streams and smaller waterways (Millis 2017:11). It is also possible that they hunted the, now extinct, megafauna that also lived in the area such as bison and mammoths (Hargrove 1990:6).

### Archaic Period

The Archaic Period ranged from 8,000-1,000 BP. It is characterized by warming temperatures, an increase in hardwoods, and a decrease in mega-faunal populations. By the Late Archaic Period, there were forests that are comparable to the ones that can be seen today (Hargrove 1990:6,7). As the Holocene (the last ice age) drew to an end, pine trees became abundant throughout North Carolina supporting populations of white-tailed deer, bear, and smaller game (Millis 2017:13).

As temperatures warmed and vegetation became more abundant, human population sizes also grew. Community sizes expanded beyond small family groups and by the Late Archaic

Period, they were living semi-sedentary rather than nomadic lifestyles (Hargrove 1990:6,7). There are many seasonal base camps and small foraging camps from this period represented in the archaeological record (Millis 2017:12). According to Thomas Hargrove, an archaeologist who conducted research in Harnett and the surrounding counties in the late 1980s, “in all Archaic periods, sites seem to have been linked to stream accessibility, particularly at stream confluences, but in the Late Archaic period, [...] a decline in the number of sites along smaller tributaries and a rise in the number of settlement placed along major streams [can be seen]” (Hargrove 1990:6,7). This observation is supported by Dr. David Phelps, a leading archaeologist in the Coastal Plains region who also states that site locations are dependent on stream accessibility (Phelps 1983:24).

The Archaic Period is also the point in the archaeological record that the first ceramics and other raw materials began to be produced (Fournier-Hackbarth and Hackbarth 1981:23). Ceramic and soapstone vessels produced during this period can regularly be found in the archaeological record (S&ME 2017:11). There is still little known about movement cycles and social relationships from the Archaic Period (Millis 2017:12).

### Woodland Period

The Woodland Period ranged from 1,000 BP until the time that the first Europeans settled in the Americas (Hargrove 1990:9). This is the period that the Coharie canoe is attributed to. This period was also when agriculture began to be used as Native groups started cultivating maize and other native plants (Millis 2017:17). Groups moved seasonally along water sources. Summers and winters could be spent closer to the coast where they occupied small villages close to tidal creeks and marches. Here they could exploit a variety of marine resources including shellfish and larger ocean fish species. In the spring and fall, they moved inland and settled near

swamps where they could hunt larger game and gather various fauna (S&ME 2017:13). New types of pottery were also starting to be used. The earliest Woodland Period pottery found in Sampson County consists of sand tempered sherds with imprints made using nets, fabrics, and cords (Fournier-Hackbarth and Hackbarth 1981:24).

Later in the Woodland period, cultural, physical, and linguistic differences between native polities in North Carolina start to appear. In the northern coastal regions, there were Algonkian-speaking groups and in the south were the Eastern Siouan-speaking groups (S&ME 2017:14). The Eastern Siouan tribal nations were located in a pocket of what is now Virginia and North Carolina. The borders between the Eastern Siouan and Algonkian people were not stark and clear. There were many multi-lingual and multi-cultural communities that blurred the lines between the two groups (Fleming 2021:1).

Native Americans in the southern parts of the North Carolina Coastal Plains and Piedmont regions may have also begun constructing burial mounds during this time. Though many of the mounds are characteristic of Algonkian traditions, some have characteristics of Eastern Siouan speaking populations. Some of the biggest differences between the groups that can be seen in the material culture is in the ceramic types, tempers, and prints (Loftfield 1990:1). The Coharie are a part of the Eastern Siouan speaking Native groups, so it is very possible that those mounds were created by their ancestors. Many of the mounds were built in close proximity to villages. This means that the presence of a mound could also signify the presence of a much larger Native site (Loftfield 1990:1).

Unfortunately, many of these mounds were destroyed by curiosity seekers, the expansions of highways and railroads, and other modern developments. Their destruction occurred before the invention of radiocarbon dating so archaeologists may never know exactly

when they were constructed. It does appear that the mounds were not constructed any farther north than the Neuse River basin which is where many ancestors of the Coharie Tribe may have originated from. Some of these mounds were located in Sampson (Homes 2014) and Harnett Counties not far from what is now Coharie lands (Hargrove 1990:8).

The burial mounds are generally circular in shape with the bases varying from forty to one hundred and fifty feet in diameter and raise no higher than three and a half feet high (Homes 2014). Researchers found that the mounds contained human remains with one holding as many as two hundred and sixty-eight skeletons. What happened to the human remains after they were excavated remains a mystery, and the mounds were destroyed (Hargrove 1990:8).

There is one particular mound that is still located in Sampson County, about two and a half miles west of Clinton, North Carolina. It measures forty feet in diameter, three and a half feet tall, and contains the remains of sixteen individuals (Millis 2017:18). With this burial mound, and the human remains within it, being in such close proximity to the Coharie Tribe, it is assumed by tribal members to have belonged to their ancestors and is treated as such (Danny Bell, interview by author, Dec. 2, 2021, virtual).

### Historical/Contact Period

The introduction of Europeans to the Americas resulted in a complete disruption in the Native Americans' way of life (Fournier-Hackbarth and Hackbarth 1981:24). European settlers encroached on Native lands until tensions rose, wars broke out, and the Natives were forced from their lands, killed, or forced to assimilate into white society (Hargrove 1990:9). Additionally, the introduction of new material goods and diseases devastated indigenous populations and cultures (Fournier-Hackbarth and Hackbarth 1981:24). It was during this time of upheaval that the Coharie Tribe migrated to their current location. Their displacement by the European settlers,

along with disputes with other native polities left many different Native groups scattered. They came together at some point “between 1729 and 1746. Since this date, they have lived continuously as an Indian Tribe at or around the Little Coharie River” (Coharie Tribe 2022). They took the name of the river with “Coharie” meaning “driftwood” (Greg Jacobs, interview by author, Dec. 1, 2021, virtual).

One tribe, known as the Cape Fear Indians, lived in the area that is now Wilmington. In 1709, it was documented that the village had some 200 residents, but then they disappear from the written record. The Coharie believe that this tribe, and others like it, migrated inland. This includes tribes such as the Croatan (Millis 2017:20) which is supported by accounts shared by Tribal members. Danny Bell’s father, born in 1920, had “Croatan” written on his birth certificate. And *his* father always said that his people had come from Roanoke (Danny Bell, interview by author, Dec. 2, 2021, virtual). Additionally, the Coharie are also said to descend from the Neusiok Indians, named after the Neuse River (Coharie Tribe 2021). The Coharie are made up of several different bands of people who came together during a time of hardship. There are three or four known Native groups that make up the Coharie and may be even more (Danny Bell, interview by author, Dec. 2, 2021, virtual).

There is a common thread between all of the groups that the Coharie descend from and that is that they are all tribes that had deep connections with the water sources around them. The Neusiok, the Cape Fear Indians, and the Croatan were all located near and named for large bodies of water. Their descendants came together and created the Coharie Tribe who are also named after a body of water and who identify as River People and Stewards of the River.

### *Construction of Dugout Canoes*

Radiocarbon dating determined that the Coharie canoe dates to  $640 \pm 30$  BP. Based on the radiocarbon dating report, there is a forty-one percent chance that the canoe was constructed between 1282 and 1329 and there is a fifty-four percent chance that it was constructed between 1340 and 1396 (Hood 2018). Canoes in that time period were constructed using methods very different from those used today. Native Americans did not have access to metal tools let alone machinery to cut, carve, and shape their canoes. Primarily, Native Americans living six hundred and fifty years ago would have given shape to their canoes with the careful and precise use of fire (Henry 2018a:2).

Thomas Harriot, an explorer, mathematician, and astronomer, sailed to America with the intent of surveying the land and documenting everything he could of it and the natives who lived there. His counterpart, John White, was sent along to make maps and drawings of what he and Harriot witnessed. Harriot produced the first English treatise about America called *A brief and true report of the new found land of Virginia* in which he wrote all of his observations including how the Natives constructed their canoes (National Park Service 2015). At that time, all the lands in the region were part of Virginia, including what is today North Carolina. In a brief description of the process, accompanied by John White's drawing, Harriot wrote

The manner of makinge their boates in Virginia is verye wonderfull. For wneras they want Instruments of yron, or other like unto ours, yet they knowe howe to make them as handsomeye, to saile with whear they liste in their Rivers, and to fishe with all, as ours. First they choose some longe, and thicke tree, accordinge to the bignes of the boate which they would frame, and make a fyre on the grownd aboutt the Roote therof, kindlinge the same by little, and little with drie mosse of trees, and chipps of woode that the flame should not mounte opp to highe, and



burne to muche of the lengte of the tree When it is almost burnt thorough, and readye to fall they make a new fyre, which they suffer to burne untill the tree fall of its owne accord. Then burninge of the topp, and bowghs of the tree in suche wyse that the bodie of the same may Retayne his iust lengthe, they raise it uppon potes laid over cross wise uppon forked posts, at suche a reasonable heighte as they may handsomlye worke uppon it. Then take they of the barke with certayne shells: thy reserve the, innermost parte of the lennke, for the nethermost parte of the boate. On the other side they make a fyre accordinge to the lengthe of the bodye of the tree, sauinge at both the endes. That which they thinke is sufficientlye burned they quenche and scrape away with shells, and makinge a new fyre they burne it agayne, and soe they continne somtymes burninge and sometymes scrapinge, untill the boate have sufficient bothowmes (Harriot 1588).

It was in this manner that dugout canoes in North Carolina and along the Atlantic Coast were produced. This is also the manner in which the Coharie canoe was made. The charring on the Coharie canoe is still clearly visible which is a nod to this extensive and time-consuming process that was used to form it (Henry 2018a:3).



FIGURE 2: *The Manner in Making Their Boates* by John White. Image showing the different stages of canoe construction as observed by Harriot and White.

It is common with dugout canoes that the ends differ clearly in shape. One end tends to be visibly blunter while the other is more angled. It has been suggested by some archaeologists that the blunt end of the canoe is the end that was located at the base of the tree and was girdled while the other, more angled, end was higher on the trunk (Henry 2018a:3). Robert Beverly, who published the first history of Virginia wrote that “they shape the Ends till they have made it a fit Vessel for crossing the Water” (Brewington 1963:3).

These canoes could vary drastically in size. The dimensions of the Coharie canoe turned out to be 12 feet, 9 inches long. It is between 19-20 inches wide and 12 inches deep. The tree that the canoe was made from is most likely a longleaf pine tree, also called loblolly pine (Henry 2018a:3). Longleaf pine was good for making canoes with because it is relatively rot resistant which is important for a wooden object that spends most, if not all of its time, in the water. It is a very durable wood and does not bend easily. It is also resistant to organisms such as shipworms

which can burrow into the wood and cause considerable damage to the integrity of the vessel (*Boat Building Wood*, North Carolina Maritime Museum).

### *Uses of Dugout Canoes*

Dugout Canoes had many uses in Native societies. Transportation may be the most obvious use. With no roads being cut across the land, the water was the best avenue of travel. Following waterways along the coast and inland allowed for easier trade among different Native societies. This allowed for expanding trade, economy, and communication. Rivers and other waterways wove an intricate web of relationships between different polities and communities. These canoes were also regularly used for subsistence reasons.

There were several fishing methods deployed during the Woodland Period and the Coharie canoe could have been used for any number of them. Hunting during this period was done solely by men, but fishing was an activity that both men and women took part in (Perdue, Oakley 2010:20). Though the canoe would have easily been used for transportation along trade and hunting routes, it also would have been used for fishing. Various types of fish, turtles and eels would have been staples in the Native diet and using a canoe could aid in capturing them (Wetmore 1977:105).

To catch a turtle, a hunter would probe the soil of the riverbed with a stick that had been burned and hardened. Once they felt the distinct shape of the turtle's shell with the stick, they would spear it and pull it to the surface (Wetmore 1977:105). They also had different methods for catching fish. The variety of fish in southeastern United States during the time were wide and plentiful. Catfish was popular, as it still is today, because of its sheer size. Blue catfish and channel catfish were the most popular. Other desired catches were paddlefish, common sturgeon, pikes, shad, bass, perch, and other smaller varieties (Hudson 1976: 280).

The methods of catching the fish were as plentiful as the variety of fish themselves. One technique that very likely could have been used in the South River, where the Coharie canoe was found, was to make V-shaped dams or weirs out of rocks. These rocks would help channel the fish downstream where traps made of reeds would be placed to collect them. Nets, not unlike those children today use to catch butterflies, would also be used to catch the fish. Sparring the fish was also an option (Hudson 1976:282).



FIGURE 3: Location of Canoe No.SOR0001 discovery site. Image supplied by Lydia Downs.

Most, if not all of the fishing practices mentioned above could have been done while sitting or standing in a canoe, or by wading into the water. The use of canoes was especially popular when fishing with the spear. In some cases, if spearing the fish did not immediately kill it then the fishermen and women would let go of the spear while it was still impaled in the fish. The buoyancy of the wood would keep the fish swimming at the surface of the water and easy to follow. Fighting against the buoyancy of the spear would eventually tire the fish out and make it easier to retrieve (Hudson 1976:284).

One of the fishing techniques that most utilized dugout canoes was done at night. A fire set in a clay basin would be placed in the canoe. The basins were elevated so that the fire burned several inches higher than the side of the canoe's gunwales. One person tended the fire to make

sure it neither went out or got out of control and set their transportation on fire. The other members of the fishing party readied themselves with spears. The fire, being the brightest light visible at night, would attract the fish close to the canoe while also illuminating them for those with the spears to see and stab (Hudson 1976:584).



FIGURE 4: *Indians Fishing*, by John White. Drawing showing the fishing technique utilized at night.

Fishing with a bated hook on a line was also common and very similar to how many people fish today. Rather than using a U-shaped hook like what is popular for today's fishing ventures, during the Woodland period, they would use a straight shank made of deer or turkey bone. They would have multiple of these hooks on a line stretched across a stream or river. The fisherman (or woman) would pull themselves along the line in a dugout canoe to check and rebait the lines several times a day (Hudson 1976:284).

#### *How the Coharie Canoe May Have Come to be in the South River*

Early on in the Coharie canoe's life it entered the South River and then did not move until its identification in 2018. There is no way to know exactly that happened or why it was

never retrieved, but there are a few possibilities that can be considered based on what is known about the use of dugout canoes.

One possible theory as to how the Coharie canoe ended up forgotten in the South River is that it was left there purposefully to allow it to return to Mother Earth. Usually this would have been done when the canoe became too old and deteriorated to be of further use (Ruhl et. al., 122:2005). Typically, the canoes would have been left along the village shoreline (Ruhl et. al., 123:2005). This is why there can often be a great number of canoes found in various stages of degradation and from different time periods all in one area. One example of this is the 26 Lake Phelps logboats found in North Carolina. However, the Coharie canoe is in excellent condition so it is unlikely that it would have been left for this reason.

There are many conjectures that could be made. Perhaps the last person using it capsized and was unable to retrieve it. Perhaps it was resting on or near the shore and a storm or flood washed it away keeping it hidden until another storm or flood loosened it again. Perhaps someone stored it and simply was never able to return for it or forgot its location and Mother Earth decided to keep it safe in the waters of the river. There are endless possibilities as to how the Coharie canoe came to be in that spot in the South River and there is no way to know for sure how it happened. The best anyone can do is be grateful that it found its way back to the Coharie and focus on its story going forward.

### *Recovery of the Coharie Canoe*

The Coharie canoe was identified by a fisherman in May of 2018 in the South River by the Cumberland-Sampson County line, in North Carolina. While standing at the water's edge, a man named Johnathan Autry noticed a strange log protruding from the water. He waded into the

shallow water and upon closer inspection of the log he noticed that it was hollowed out and burned along its entire length. He recognized it immediately as a dugout canoe. Though one end was protruding from the water, the other end was embedded in the riverbed making it impossible to remove without assistance (Henry 2018a:1).

Autry left the fishing hole and went to get a friend to assist him in getting the canoe out of the water and back home where it could dry out and then they could use it for fishing. Thanks to the age of social media and sharing, Autry posted on Facebook that he found a dugout canoe. After that, word of the canoe got out with remarkable speed, and Bruce Daws, director of the City of Fayetteville's Transportation Museum, was contacted to retrieve the canoe so that it could be properly treated and preserved. Daws had to move quickly as Autry and his friend were making plans to remove the nearly 13-foot canoe that day. Daws reached out to city employee John Adams and his partner Robert Avina to aid in the recovery of the canoe (Daws 2018:1).

When Daws, Adams, and Avina arrived at the area where they were told the canoe was located, Adams spotted it sticking out of the water. Daws, Adams, and Avina made their way back to the road to make a plan just as Autry returned with his friend who was carrying a pistol. The group watched as Autry and his friend pulled the canoe up onto the riverbank (Daws 2018:1). The canoe appeared to be in relatively good condition. Both ends were intact as well as most of the sides up to the gunwale (Henry 2018a:1).

At this point, a custody battle for the canoe began. Daws stayed by the canoe, watching from the road while Adams and Avina left to retrieve straps that would aid in transporting the canoe from the riverbank to a secure location. The Sampson County Sheriff's Department was also contacted, and a deputy responded ordering Autry and his friend to also return to the

roadway (Daws 2018:1). Daws explained to Autry and his friend that since the Canoe was found in North Carolina navigable waters it was thereby property of the state (Henry 2018a:1).

When Adams and Avina returned with the straps, the canoe was loaded on the city truck and brought to the Transportation & Local History Museum in Fayetteville. Once there, it was placed on wooden blocks, filled with water, and wrapped in towels to ensure that it did not dry out too rapidly. Nathan Henry of the Underwater Archaeology Branch, North Carolina Office of Archaeology was contacted, and arrangements were made to move the canoe to The Fort Fisher Preservation Laboratory where it would get proper treatment. The Canoe received water treatment at the Transportation & Local History Museum for four days before it was finally able to be moved to Fort Fisher (Daws 2018:1).

At that point, on May 17<sup>th</sup>, in an act to learn more about where the canoe came from, state archaeologists reached out to the Coharie Tribe, the closest state recognized tribe to the location of the canoe's rediscovery. However, they had been unaware of the canoe's existence up until that point. Having been made aware of the canoe and its presence in such close proximity to their home, the Coharie community made it their mission to make sure that the canoe remained in Sampson County whether it be displayed at the Coharie Intra-Tribal Center or at the Sampson County History Museum (Berendt 2018:1).

#### *Preservation of the Coharie Canoe*

Before the canoe (then called Canoe No.SOR0001) could be displayed anywhere, it first needed to be properly preserved. The preservation of waterlogged wooden artifacts is a process that has yet to be perfected. Researchers have been trying different techniques for decades and are always improving their methods. The problem with wooden artifacts is that they are especially fragile. Artifacts that have an organic makeup leaves them at risk for cellular collapse.



A wooden artifact that has been left in a waterlogged state for an extended period of time needs to be removed from that environment very carefully or further damage or degradation could be caused. Conservation of the removed artifact requires that researchers use solutions that actively replace the water molecules within the wood in a manner that does not cause it to shrink, flake, or crack (Curci 2006:16).

Over the past several decades many advancements have been made in finding an adequate solution for preserving wooden waterlogged artifacts. There were several different methods that were used on the Coharie canoe. When it arrived at Fort Fisher Preservation Laboratory in May of 2018, it was placed into a makeshift holding pen within a storage facility. The pen was constructed with tarps and 10-mil plastic. The canoe was then treated with a solution of boric acid and water that would both keep the wood wet and kill any fungi that was in or on the wood (Henry 2018a:3).

The Coharie canoe was removed from the boric acid and water solution in July of 2018 and placed in a double 10-mil envelope and treated with a solution called SP-11 which is produced by Preservation Solutions, Inc. SP-11 was especially developed to avoid the cracking of green wood and reduce the shrinkage of waterlogged wood (Henry 2018a:3).

Researchers at the Fort Fisher Preservation Lab tested it on a variety of other wooden artifacts before using it on this canoe. They have found it to work better than either sucrose or polyethylene glycol (PEG) which have consistently been used on waterlogged wooden artifacts in the past (Henry 2018a:2).

The sucrose solution is a mixture of sugar and water that is applied to the artifact over a long period of time. Eventually the sugar replaces the water molecules inside the artifact. The problem is that as the artifact ages in its dry environment the sugar can create a white

crystallization within and around the artifact. This is a problem because not only does it damage the artifact, but it also attracts insects and termites (Curci 2006:113).

The polyethylene glycol (PEG) solution has also commonly been used to replace water molecules in wooden artifacts. Different grades of PEG can be applied to the artifact depending on the degradation level of the wood. Each grade has a different molecular weight and both high and low weights can be used on artifacts that have more degradation (Curci 2006:106).

What is nice about SP-11 is that it can be applied to any wooden artifact at full strength and there is no fear of crystallization. It also is not hygroscopic, meaning that it will not absorb excess moisture from the air either. This greatly simplifies storage, transportation, and display options (Henry 2018a:2).

The greatest downfall of using SP-11 is the price. It can be very expensive to purchase especially in quantities required to treat an artifact as large as a dugout canoe. Researchers at Fort Fisher were fortunate enough to be offered a considerable amount that was left over from a project that the USA Corps of Engineers Falls Lake Recreation Center had been working on (Henry 2018:2). The Fort Fisher researchers acquired enough SP-11 to submerge about two thirds of the canoe on the outside of the hull and on the inside of the hull to the point where the damage on the gunwales allowed the solution to spill out. Only the top of the undamaged gunwales were exposed but they were sprayed with the solution daily until September, 2018 to prevent drying and deterioration (Henry 2018a:3).

On September 7<sup>th</sup>, 2018, Nathan Henry, the lead conservator of the canoe, had to have knee surgery and therefore could not continue spraying the exposed part of the canoe's gunwales. This was not a great concern as it did not appear that the gunwales were accepting any more of the solution at that time anyway (Henry 2018a:3).

Within a week of Henry's surgery and having stopped spraying the gunwales, Hurricane Florence set its eye on North Carolina (Henry 2018a:3). The category one hurricane slammed into eastern North Carolina and spent two days dumping up to thirty inches of rain on the state resulting in record breaking flooding. One hundred mph winds caused significant damage to trees, powerlines, and buildings. The hurricane also caused a storm surge of more than four feet that eroded beaches and damaged property (National Weather Service 2018).

Fort Fisher Preservation Laboratory is located in Kure Beach, North Carolina. It is located on a barrier island between the Cape Fear River and the Atlantic Ocean. This area took the brunt of the storm surges brought on by Hurricane Florence. In preparation for what was anticipated to be a record-breaking storm, Cultural Resource Management directed that the Coharie canoe be moved to higher ground before the hurricane hit. It was wrapped in plastic and moved to Spencer Shops Transportation Museum in Spencer, North Carolina where it stayed until November 6, 2018. At that point it was transported to the Queen Anne's Revenge (QAR) Conservation Lab in Pitt County, North Carolina (Henry 2018a:3).

After the threats of Hurricane Florence had passed the Coharie canoe was briefly brought back to the Fort Fisher Conservation Lab and then moved to the Coharie Intra-Tribal Center in Clinton, North Carolina. There it was exhibited during the Coharie Tribe 50<sup>th</sup> Annual Cultural Powwow. It remained there for approximately three weeks before moving to the Dunn Museum for a short exhibition. After its exhibition at the Dunn Museum, the Coharie canoe again returned to Fort Fisher for additional treatment and conservation. Once it had been successfully retreated it was finally returned to the Coharie Intra-tribal Center and officially repatriated to the Coharie People. The North Carolina Office of Archaeology Underwater Archaeology Branch still monitors the Coharie canoe. They check on it every six months to make sure that it is not

deteriorating. If it appears that it needs to be retreated then it can easily be brought back to Fort Fisher, treated, and then returned to the Coharie Intra-Tribal Center. In an interview, State Archaeologist John Mintz stated that “for all practical purposes that canoe, although it belongs to the state of North Carolina, because it was found in state waters, actually philosophically, ethically, and morally belongs to the Coharie People and the American Indian Community of North Carolina” (John Mintz, Interview by author, Nov. 5, 2021, North Carolina Maritime Museum, Southport, North Carolina).

## **Chapter Four: Research Methods**

### *Introduction*

There were a number of research methods used in the culmination of this thesis. Many primary and secondary sources were consulted to gain an understanding of the general history of dugout canoes and Native Americans in North Carolina. This created a foundation of knowledge for further research. Visits to the Coharie Intra-Tribal Center and to cultural events such as powwows and talking circles helped to deepen knowledge of the culture, beliefs, and practices of the Coharie Tribe. Interviews with Tribal members and the state archaeologist offered first-hand accounts of the repatriation process and the importance that the Coharie canoe holds to the Tribe.

This thesis utilizes a multidisciplinary approach. Though no excavation or surveying field work was done by the researcher, the North Carolina Office of Archaeology was closely consulted during the research stages. Archaeological reports from the state archive also offered information on the fifteen hundred pre-contact sites that have been identified in Sampson and Harnett Counties. A historical approach was used when reading primary and secondary sources about the history of the area and about Native Americans in general. An anthropological approach when conducting interviews with the state archaeologist and Coharie Tribal members as well as during visits to the Coharie Intra-Tribal Center.

### *Previous Works Consulted*

The first step in starting the research for this thesis was to learn about the history of dugout canoes in North Carolina. Out of the fifty-four dugout canoes that have been relocated in the state,

almost thirty of them were identified in Lake Phelps (NC State Database 2021). As more than half of the state's known canoes are all located in the same spot, this was a natural first place to research.

The Lake Phelps canoes range in age from a couple hundred years old to over four thousand years old. There has been extensive research conducted in that area since their original rediscovery in 1986 (NC State Database 2021). Dr. David Phelps is the foremost expert on the history of the lake and has published a number of articles, pamphlets, and books on the topic. Dr. Phelps became a professor in the Anthropology Department at East Carolina University in the 1970s. He helped found the archaeology lab on campus that was later named after him. In 1997, he was awarded the Award of Honor by the American Association for State and Local History for all of the archaeological work he has done in eastern North Carolina. Previous East Carolina University masters and PhD students have also written theses and dissertations on the Lake Phelps canoes' history, excavation, preservation, and conservation. All of these works were fundamental in establishing a basis of knowledge on canoes in North Carolina.

The North Carolina Underwater Archaeology Branch was also integral throughout every stage of the research process for this thesis. They were able to provide spreadsheets with information on every canoe currently known within the state of North Carolina including: site number, location of identification, current location/housing, condition, age, wood type, whether or not it has been conserved, if there is public access to it, whether there are photos of it or literature about it, whether there is Native American knowledge of it, and so on. This information elaborated on what practices were in use across the state pertaining to canoe construction and use. It also offered insight as to the modern-day management of the canoes.

To build on this, museums including the North Carolina Museum of History, the North Carolina Maritime Museum, and the North Carolina Estuarium, were also visited. They each have

exhibits on dugout canoes that proved useful. The North Carolina Museum of History has, in its exhibit, a Lake Phelps canoe that is thirty feet in length. Though the canoe is impressive simply due to its size, it is not in the best condition. The gunwales are almost completely deteriorated, and it is severely cracked. At the North Carolina Estuarium, they have a fragment of another Lake Phelps canoe on display. This fragment is also in very poor condition. It was treated with sugar when it was pulled from Lake Phelps in the eighties to replace the water molecules in the wood. Today, the sugar is recrystallizing on the canoe causing it to crack and flake from the inside out. The North Carolina Estuarium does not have any canoes on display, but they do have two display cases that exhibit the creation and use of canoes as well as the process of wood selection.

Historical documents were also referenced as part of the research for this thesis. Most notably, Thomas Hariot described Native Americans building boats in his 1588 book, *The Breife and True Report of the New Found Land of Virginia*. It should be noted that the area then known as Virginia included much of what is modern day North Carolina. Harriot's work is filled with descriptions of the Native Americans' way of life as it was in 1588. Though Harriot's report was written from the European perspective, it is still useful, as he wrote about all of his observations. The report also included images made by Theodore de Bry that are based on watercolors created by John White. Many of these images have become famous and are attributed, inaccurately, to Native communities far beyond the boundaries of North Carolina and Virginia.

Beyond researching dugout canoes in North Carolina, research on the Coharie Tribe also needed to be conducted. Fortunately, they maintain a very well updated website that includes a page on the entire history of the Tribe. They also produced a number of videos that cover topics such as Tribal culture, spirituality, and notable tribal members. These sources served as a starting

point but speaking with and interacting with the current tribal members offered the best knowledge into who they really are.

*Visits to Coharie Intra-Tribal Center to see the Canoe/Powwow*

In 2019, the Coharie celebrated their 50<sup>th</sup> Annual Cultural Powwow. The celebration was made especially significant by the fact that the newly rediscovered dugout canoe (No.SOR0001) was back in its rightful place with the Tribe for the first time in about 650 years. Though it was only there for three weeks before it was moved to the Dunn Museum for a brief exhibition, having the canoe back with the tribe was no small matter. The Coharie canoe represented a very tangible piece of the Coharie past brought into the present and cherished for the future. The canoe sat on display in the Coharie Intra-Tribal Center for everyone at the powwow to see.

After its brief exhibit at the Dunn Museum and a quick retreatment at Fort Fisher it was returned to the Coharie Tribal Center where it has sat on display ever since. Unfortunately, the 2020 Coharie Annual Cultural Powwow was cancelled due to the Covid-19 pandemic and the room holding the canoe was not open to the public. Behind the scenes though, tribal members had been hard at work making the room suitable to hold such a relic. Using grants and volunteer work, tribal members were able to replace the windows in the room housing the canoe. They installed heating and cooling elements to ensure that the canoe could remain in a climate-controlled environment. The walls were repainted, and makeshift exhibits were put up around the canoe until the actual exhibits could be installed.

In 2021, Covid-19 levels had dropped low enough for the Tribe to feel that they could safely host another powwow, and the room holding the canoe was again opened to the public. The Coharie's 51<sup>st</sup> Annual Cultural Powwow was held on September 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup>, 2021 with some



pre-powwow celebrations on the 10th. The researcher of this thesis was able to safely attend all three days of the celebration, visit the canoe, witness numerous ceremonial events, watch traditional performers, eat Native American foods, and purchase artisan's wears while learning about what it meant to be Coharie both in the past and today.

The ceremonies started with a grand entrance where select members of the tribe entered the arena carrying the Eagle Staff, the American flag, the North Carolina state flag, and the POW MIA flag. Following these members were the two head dancers (one man and one woman), the Chief, and then the rest of the dancers who were competing during the powwow. A stage stood at one end of the arena. This is where the Master of Ceremonies (MC) sat. He made announcements starting with recognition to veterans and first responders. When the competitions began, he was in charge of announcing the events, performers, and the awards that were won. On the front of the stage was a railing over which hung a large blanket. Depicted on the blanket was just a single image; a canoe, a nod to the pride that the tribe has in the fact that the Coharie canoe found its way back to them.

There were six groups of drummers and singers who played for the dancers and competed against each other. They performed both traditional songs and originals. They played one at a time, in turn, sharing their music and setting the entire pace of the powwow. The dancers were divided by their style of dance, gender, and age group. These included women's jingle, women's fancy, men's fancy, men's plains, men's northern traditional, men's eastern warrior, ladies traditional, and others.

Each style of dance and regalia varied greatly. The jingle dancers wore dresses adorned with jingle cones; their movements, mostly footwork, made the cones knock together to make the distinct jingle sound (figure 5a). This style of dance is used for healing, and it was performed for

those who were in need. The ladies' traditional dancers moved more fluidly and rather than wearing dresses covered in jingle cones, their accessories included feather fans in one hand and a long sash over the opposite arm that they rhythmically swept back and forth. The fancy dancers, both men (figure 5b) and women (figure 5c) wore bright colorful regalia with long tassels that billowed out as they spun in all directions. The men's eastern warrior dancers wore regalia completely covered in turkey feathers. They had elaborate headdresses, fans, and turkey tails (figure 5d). They performed dances for hunting, getting low to the ground and then popping back up again.

The regalia the dancers wore was all handmade by the performers. They came up with their own designs that held meaning to each of them, sewed every bead, and attached every feather. Each outfit was a work of art that held symbols of who each of them are and the aspects of their lives that added to their identity (Greg Jacobs, interview by author, Dec. 1, 2021, virtual). These adornments were not only decorative, but the craftsmanship was made to withstand dancing for days at a time.

To watch the performers, the researcher was able to sit with Greg Jacobs, the Tribal Administrator for the Coharie Tribe who was integral to the completion of this thesis. He opened up his seating area to them and introduced them to other tribal members. He told them about the different dance styles, their meanings, as well as the symbolism behind the elaborate regalia.



a. Women's Jingle Dancer



b. Men's Fancy Dancer



c. Women's Fancy Dancer



d. Men's Eastern Warrior Dancer

FIGURES 5 a, b, c, d: show the regalia and styles of dancers who performed at the Coharie 51<sup>st</sup>

Annual traditional Powwow. Photos supplied by Lydia Downs

The artisan wares included blankets, dream catchers, jewelry, clothing, toys, hair accessories, and pottery. Food vendors sold turkey legs, collard green wraps, smoked meats, and a variety of other tasty treats. Near the back of the powwow grounds was a treat that the Coharie were especially proud of, sorghum. Near the Coharie Intra-Tribal Center there is a community garden where volunteers in the Coharie community work together to grow crops that they distribute to their community members for free. One of the many crops that they grow is sorghum. At the powwow, there was a machine that was squeezing the sugary juices out of the sorghum plants and collecting them in a bucket. This liquid was then boiled down into a thick syrup, bottled, and sold. They had the sorghum in every step of production displayed during the powwow.

#### *Photogrammetry Model, Animation, and 3D Model*

On September 26<sup>th</sup>, 2021, the researcher met with Danny Bell at the Coharie Intra-Tribal Center near Clinton, North Carolina. Danny is a member of both the Coharie and Lumbee Tribes. He is an active speaker for indigenous communities and shares their culture, making sure they get the recognition they deserve. His hopes are that this thesis helps to tell more people about the Coharie Tribe and to connect archaeological and Native communities. He has been very helpful with every step of the research process.

Danny let the researcher into the Tribal Center. The room where the canoe is being housed is in the process of being turned into a small museum exhibit so there is special lighting and a climate-controlled environment. A DSLR camera was used to take one hundred and seventy-seven photos of the entirety of the canoe. The process took little more than 45 minutes.

Over the course of the next week, a photogrammetry model was created through Agisoft Metashape. Each step of the model took about 12 hours to process. The first step was photo alignment. Each photo needs to have at least 30% overlap with the previous photo taken.

Metashape has the capability of matching the overlapping aspects of the photos and aligning them. Once the photos were aligned, the next step was to create a dense cloud that started the process of adding pixels to the image. A mesh is then used to unify the pixels together. At this point, the model really started to take shape. After that, texture is added to give the image fine details. After that, the model was sent through an animation that rotated it on an axis and offers the viewer a complete 360-degree view of the object. The photogrammetry model and animation that was created of the Coharie canoe was completed and given to Greg Jacobs, the Coharie Tribal Administrator for the Coharie Tribe to have in their exhibit room and elsewhere.



FIGURE 6: Coharie canoe Photogrammetry Model. Image provided by Lydia Downs.

Once the photogrammetry model and animation were completed, they were moved into Rhinoceros, another digital modeling platform. This platform was used to close the gaps in the image. In this case, the gaps were all located on the base because when the canoe was originally photographed, it was sitting on a table and those areas were not visible. Once the gaps were filled, the image could be styled to that it could be 3D printed. A block replaced the cradle that the real canoe rests on for the simplicity of printing.



FIGURE 7: Coharie canoe in the Rhinoceros modeling platform. Image shows what the 3D model will look like before printed. Image Supplied by Lydia Downs.

The model was printed at the Innovation and Design Lab associated with East Carolina University. It was created using a resin rather than a filament so that it had a more solid appearance. When filament is used, the viewer can see every string that it used to create the model. The resin model took five hours to complete and then needed to have an exterior coating removed by means of scraping and pressure washing. Ultimately, three models were made, one for the Coharie Tribe, one for the researcher, and one for the Maritime Studies Department at ECU. The model printed for the Coharie Tribe was presented to The Coharie Tribal Administrator, Greg Jacobs, and to Danny Bell. Upon receiving it, Mr. Jacobs stated that it was the most unique gift he had ever received, and he was very excited to use it for educating the younger generations about the canoe. Since the Coharie canoe cannot be touched, this offered a tactile education option.

### *Visit to the North Carolina State Archives*

On November 18<sup>th</sup>, 2021, the researcher went to the North Carolina State Archives in Raleigh, North Carolina to obtain archaeological records for Sampson and Harnett Counties. Arriving at 10am, the researchers then spent the next several hours combing through databases and stacks of manila folders. The goal was to obtain copies of reports regarding every site within the two counties that dated to any of the pre-contact periods (before the settlement of Europeans). This was done in hopes of adding context to the Coharie canoe. The fact that there are 1514 sites located on those two counties alone proves that there is a long history of indigenous occupation in the area.

With 74 reports and 1514 sites to look at, the files had to be saved to a flash drive so they could be more deeply studied at a later date. Each report was listed with an associated Bib Number and discussed a specific archaeological investigation. With 1514 sites and only 74 reports, many of the reports contained information on many different sites that were located during an investigation.

For the purposes of this thesis, only the reports with more than ten located sites were looked at. Those with fewer sites often referred only to disarticulated, isolated finds. The reports included sites from each of the pre-contact periods (Paleoindian, Archaic, and Woodland) and analyses of the types of sites they might be (campsite, workshop, quarry, etc.). They also gave information of the environmental conditions each one was located in such as proximity to water sources, elevation, and soil types. These are all important when considering how the Coharies of previous generations lived.

### *Interviews with Coharie Tribal Members*

Before reaching out to the interviewees, specific avenues were followed to acquire IRB review and approval. Mallory Ball, the IRB Administrator with East Carolina University, was contacted about what was necessary for this process. She informed the researchers that the types of research not requiring IRB review included “scholarly and journalistic activities (e.g., oral history, journalism, biography, literary criticism, legal research, and historical scholarship), including the collection and use of information, that focus directly on the specific individuals about whom the information is collected” (Mallory Ball 2021 elec. comm.). It was determined that since only oral histories were to be obtained, there was no need for either an IRB review or form.

Four people were interviewed for this thesis; John Mintz, the North Carolina State Archaeologist, Danny Bell, a member of the Coharie Tribe, Philip Bell, a member of the Coharie Tribe and the Great Coharie River Initiative Coordinator, and Greg Jacobs, the Tribal Administrator for the Coharie Tribe.

Many of the questions for the interview process were prepared beforehand but this was not the case for the interview with Mintz who was interviewed on November 5, 2021. Because the canoe was found in state navigable waters, it was thereby determined to be owned by the state. As a historical artifact, it fell into Mintz’s possession. Mintz monitored the transportation, preservation, conservation, repatriation, exhibition, and overall welfare of the Coharie canoe since it was pulled out of the South River in May of 2018. It is his responsibility, and the responsibility of the other state archaeologists that the canoe does not obtain any further damage now that it is in a controlled environment.

The researcher presented at the North Carolina Maritime History Council Conference in Southport North Carolina which is where she met Mintz. He offered to do an impromptu interview there at the conference. The questions during that interview mostly focused on the process of



recovering, preserving, and repatriating the canoe and all of the work that went into each of those steps. The researcher had recently downloaded a recording app, called Otter, on her phone and was able to document what was said with Mintz's permission. The app transcribes the conversation in real time which allows the interview to devote all of their attention to the interviewee.

Greg Jacobs and Phillip Bell were interviewed separately on December 1<sup>st</sup>, 2021. Greg is Coharie and Phillip is Coharie and Lumbee, and they are both active members and advocates of the Coharie Tribe and for Native American communities in general. They fought for the canoe to be returned to the tribe and have worked to give it a home with the people. Danny Bell, interviewed on December 2, 2021, is also an active tribal member, and Phillip's older brother, and works tirelessly as a member of the Board of Directors of the Triangle Native American Society (TNAS) to "promote and protect the identity of Native Americans" (Triangle Native American Society 2021). Danny also spent 14 years working for the North Carolina Commission of Indian Affairs (Triangle Native American Society 2021).

Since Jacobs, Bell, and Bell all have a similar relationship with the Coharie canoe, many of the questions asked during their interviews were the same and prepared beforehand. The starting questions set a baseline for who they are and what it means to them to be Coharie. Other questions explored their part in the repatriation process as well as how the canoe connected them with the Coharie River and to their identity as Stewards of the River. The questions acted more as a loose guide rather than a script. They each had their own experiences with the canoe and that allowed some questions to come organically during each interview. All three were interviewed virtually as covid was still a major factor as well as time constraints. They were each also recorded using the Otter app after granted permission to the interviewer to do so.

Jacobs, Bell, and Bell each played an important role in the story of the Coharie canoe. Each one of them made an impact in getting the canoe where it is today and raising awareness about what it is, what it means to the Coharie people, and why it is so important. Without each of them collaborating with John Mintz and petitioning with state officials, it is very possible that the canoe never would have found its way back to the Coharie Tribe.

### *Conclusion*

There were a number of different disciplines used when researching for this thesis that helped create a well-rounded approach. These disciplines included history, archaeology and anthropology. This thesis required collaboration with both the North Carolina Office of Archaeology and the Coharie Tribe. The strong relationship that the two groups already had formed with each other made this a very accomplishable task. Consulting archaeological reports about the area and learning the personal histories side by side allowed for a very comprehensive history to be obtained. Additional historical sources helped to fill in any cracks in that information that may have been lacking. Creating a photogrammetry and 3D model forced the researcher to look much more closely at the canoe itself and study it in its own right. All of these elements were important for the researcher to understand the canoe and its significance.

## **Chapter Five: Cultural Narratives**

### *Introduction*

When creating a belonging biography, it is important to obtain as much firsthand information as possible. In this case, it meant speaking directly to both the descendants of those who may have constructed the Coharie canoe, and its current caretakers. As discussed in previous chapters, the Coharie canoe is legally owned by the state of North Carolina and is in the custody of the North Carolina Underwater Archaeology Branch. However, that is just on paper. The canoe is a part of the Coharie Tribe, and it will continue to reside with them for the foreseeable future only going to the UAB lab when it needs preservation treatments. The UAB technically has the legal authority to take the canoe back if they wanted to, but it is agreed by all that that would be morally and ethically wrong. Because both the Coharie Tribe and the North Carolina State Archaeology Office are so involved in the Coharie canoe, members of both were interviewed for this thesis. Both have a hand in the Coharie canoe's story and will continue to, going forward.

Information concerning the recovery, preservation, repatriation, and continued management was covered in the interview with the State Archaeology Office. One state archaeologist was interviewed, John Mintz. He was involved with each of these steps that the Coharie canoe took to get to its current location and situation. Even in the height of the Covid pandemic, the researcher of this thesis was able to interview Mr. Mintz in person with the aid of a recording app on a cell phone.

Three members of the Coharie Tribe were interviewed: Greg Jacobs, Danny Bell, and Phillip Bell. Each of these interviews were conducted over online interface platforms such as Teams and WebEx and were recorded on a mobile recording app. All interviewees were aware of and consented to being recorded prior to the interviews taking place.

The interviews with the Coharie Tribal members were conducted with the intention of bringing their voices to the forefront of the story of the Coharie canoe. After all, the canoe's story is also their story. Without the Coharie, there is a very good chance that canoe No.SOR0001 would be just another canoe in a museum or storage facility with an unknown history. It would have lost much of its context connection to the people of the present. But the Coharie have been able to give it its voice. It is a belonging with agency. By hearing the voices of the Coharie people, the voice of the canoe can also be heard, and its story can be shared for future generations.

*Mr. John Mintz*

John Mintz is one of the State Archaeologists for the North Carolina State Archaeology Office who has overseen the management of the Coharie canoe since the day it was pulled out of the South River. He talked about those processes and the various locations that the canoe went to as well as the many functional hiccups that occurred throughout (John Mintz, interview by author, Nov. 5, 2021, North Carolina Maritime Museum, Southport, North Carolina).

Mr. Mintz shared that the Coharie Tribe was contacted once the Coharie canoe started undergoing conservation at the UAB lab in Kure Beach, North Carolina, and their collaboration began. He states that collaboration was done primarily with Mr. Greg Jacobs and Mr. Danny Bell. The UAB and State Archaeology Office strove to meet their wishes and took into

consideration what they wished to see done with the Coharie canoe. Mr. Mintz stressed that it is the foremost mission of the State Archaeology Office to keep archaeological materials that are clearly of Native American creation near the location in which they were recovered whenever possible. Sometimes that means to leave it in situ but in this case, since it was pulled out of the river before they could manage it, the preservation of the Coharie canoe was a cooperative effort between the North Carolina Commission of Indian Affairs, the North Carolina Office of State Archaeology, and the Coharie People (John Mintz, Interview by author, Nov. 5, 2021, North Carolina Maritime Museum, Southport, North Carolina).

Mr. Mintz especially wanted to emphasize the level of cooperation and trust that is continuous between the North Carolina Office of Archaeology and the Coharie People. It is so important for their current relationship, their future collaborations, and the future of the Coharie canoe, and they have open communication where every party has a space to speak and a space to be heard. He also made sure it was clear that “for all practical purposes that canoe although it belongs to the state of North Carolina, because it was found in state waters, actually philosophically, ethically, and morally belongs to the Coharie People and the American Indian Community of North Carolina” (John Mintz, Interview by author, Nov. 5, 2021, North Carolina Maritime Museum, Southport, North Carolina).

The work that Mr. Mintz is doing by collaborating with the indigenous communities in the state is very important because too often archaeologists have worked without allowing for their involvement. In recent years, more archaeological projects focusing on indigenous sites have been including indigenous communities, not only in the discussion of where the material culture ends up, but also in the excavation and preservation processes. It is morally and ethically important that they be consulted on what happens with the materials of their ancestors and Mr.

Mintz and his staff are working hard to make sure that it continues in the North Carolina State Archaeology Office (John Mintz, Interview by author, Nov. 5, 2021, North Carolina Maritime Museum, Southport, North Carolina).

*Mr. Greg Jacobs*

Mr. Greg Jacobs is a member and Tribal Administrator of the Coharie Tribe of North Carolina. When being interviewed, Mr. Jacobs started by describing what it meant to him to be Coharie. He described it as being the foundation of his very being. It is central to who he is. He explained that being Coharie is an unspeakable joy and has a very proud heritage. Being Coharie is to be in a community and a family. He feels that he will never be without them, no matter where life may take him. He knows that the Coharie are always there, and it is a feeling that means the world to him. Mr. Jacobs compared the Coharie Tribe to a security blanket. When he is home in Coharie Country, he is warm, he is wrapped in a place of truth where he has everything that he needs (Greg Jacobs, interview by author, Dec. 1, 2021, virtual).

When asked what it meant to Mr. Jacobs to have the Coharie canoe back with the Coharie people, he said that it made him feel visible. He grew up in the segregated South where everything was black or white. He would read signs on doors and wonder where he belonged since he did not fit into the black or white categories. He felt invisible growing up in that environment. But when the Coharie canoe reemerged in 2018, Mr. Jacobs said that he heard his ancestors speak to him saying, “Yeah, we’ve been here the whole time. We were visible. You are visible.” The Coharie canoe helped him feel seen and reminded everyone that indigenous communities have been in that area for a *very* long time (Greg Jacobs, interview by author, Dec. 1, 2021, virtual).

When it came to getting possession of the Coharie canoe, Mr. Jacobs reflected on the days when it was recovered from the South River. He wanted it to find its home in the Coharie Tribe, but he also knew that it would be highly sought after by museums and other institutions. He was concerned because the Coharie Tribe only has about three thousand members, and therefore they do not have much political influence in the state. Mr. Jacobs had little hope that it would return to the Coharie Tribe. He thought that the closest it would get was the History Museum in Clinton, North Carolina located very close to Coharie Country. He was not accustomed to the Coharie, or other indigenous communities for that matter, winning in these sorts of situations (Greg Jacobs, interview by author, Dec. 1, 2021, virtual).

Mr. Jacobs had spoken with John Mintz early after the canoe's recovery and said that he would love for the canoe to end up at the Coharie Tribal Center. He spoke of these desires, but he did not believe that he or the Coharie People were visible enough or powerful enough to make it happen. But then, in front of an entire Unity Conference, Mr. Mintz said, "I will do everything I can to see that it rests with the Coharie Tribe. It is the only right thing to do" (Greg Jacobs, interview by author, Dec. 1, 2021, virtual). And the act of Mr. Mintz saying those words publicly, at a conference, in front of a room full of people, and meaning it, helped Mr. Jacobs overcome some of his historical trauma. He heard someone that he considered to be from an outside, dominant society say that the right thing to do was to recognize that Mr. Jacobs and the Coharie do exist. Mr. Mintz recognized that the Coharie do have an equal say, equal rights, need to be treated fairly, and that their wants and needs are important and heard. That was a big moment for Mr. Jacobs, and he was going to hold Mr. Mintz to his word (Greg Jacobs, interview by author, Dec. 1, 2021, virtual).

Mr. Jacobs said that that interaction brought a change to his heart. He felt that the Coharie Tribe could be a part of the state government after that interaction. He felt that they had a seat at the table. He had felt his entire life that they had never been invited to the table. There had always been someone else to speak for them. Before, he did not feel as though the Coharie had a voice at all. But that day, at the Unity Conference, Mr. Jacobs learned that the Coharie had a voice and that it was being heard. He felt that the voice came from the entire community. It was through them that the conversation was being had (Greg Jacobs, interview by author, Dec. 1, 2021, virtual).

It meant even more that Mr. Mintz backed his words with actions and really did return the canoe to the Coharie People. Mr. Jacobs spoke about how it completed a circle within him. It was a big moment for him to see that he was not an outsider to the government and that it could work for him and his people. He is truly thankful for how things have turned out and the position that he now feels he and his people have (Greg Jacobs, interview by author, Dec. 1, 2021, virtual).

Mr. Jacobs spoke about how the Coharie Tribe wanted to have a large celebration when the Coharie canoe was formally repatriated to the Coharie people, however, the Covid-19 Pandemic had other plans. They still held a ceremony, but it was much smaller than the one they had originally planned. They readied a space specifically for the canoe. They built a cradle for it and gave it its very own room in the Coharie Tribal Center. They used the sacred herb, sage, just as many others do on Turtle Island, and offered it to their Creator. They burned the sage and touched everyone present with an eagle fan and washed all negativity away. It was a space of positive thoughts, wellbeing, and giving thanks. Mr. Jacobs explained that that is how they do all their ceremonies, including giving thanks for the harvest. They give thanks and they pray to God.



In that manner they can symbolically cleanse any negative vibes away (Greg Jacobs, interview by author, Dec. 1, 2021, virtual).

Mr. Jacobs also wanted to bring attention to the collaborations that the Coharie canoe has sparked beyond that of the one with the North Carolina State Archaeology office. It has also sparked collaborations with other tribal communities. People travel from all over to share space and time with the Coharie canoe. It has strengthened their bonds with their sister tribes. It has also brought non-indigenous people to their community. People come to see the canoe and they learn about the Coharie culture, and it gives the Coharie even more visibility (Greg Jacobs, interview by author, Dec. 1, 2021, virtual).

The Coharie Tribe used a \$84,000 grant from the Cannon Foundation to refurbish the room that the canoe now lives in. They created a climate-controlled space with proper lighting to ensure that the canoe stays with the Coharie people for many years to come (Greg Jacobs, interview by author, Dec. 1, 2021, virtual).

The Coharie canoe did more than change Mr. Jacobs' view of where the Coharie stands politically. It also changed his perspectives within his community. The Coharie are River People and are Stewards of the River. When the canoe returned, it added life to Mr. Jacobs' perception of the Coharie River. He once again saw the river as a living entity. He felt that the canoe told a story, sharing the importance of the river to the Coharie Tribe's existence. The river's importance does not only stem from the time of the Coharie canoe when the river was a main mode of transportation, trade, economy, and subsistence. It still holds that same importance today, if in a different way. Having the canoe back brought many memories of Mr. Jacobs' childhood back to him. When he was young, they would eat fish out of the river two or three times a week. When they would fish there, there was never a question of whether or not they

would come back with fish, they always did. The river would give them what they needed (Greg Jacobs, interview by author, Dec. 1, 2021, virtual).

Mr. Jacobs reflected on the conditions of the river when he was a child and how important it was to the community back then. The Coharie River is a part of the Cape Fear Watershed Area. It flows from north to south through the center of Sampson County.

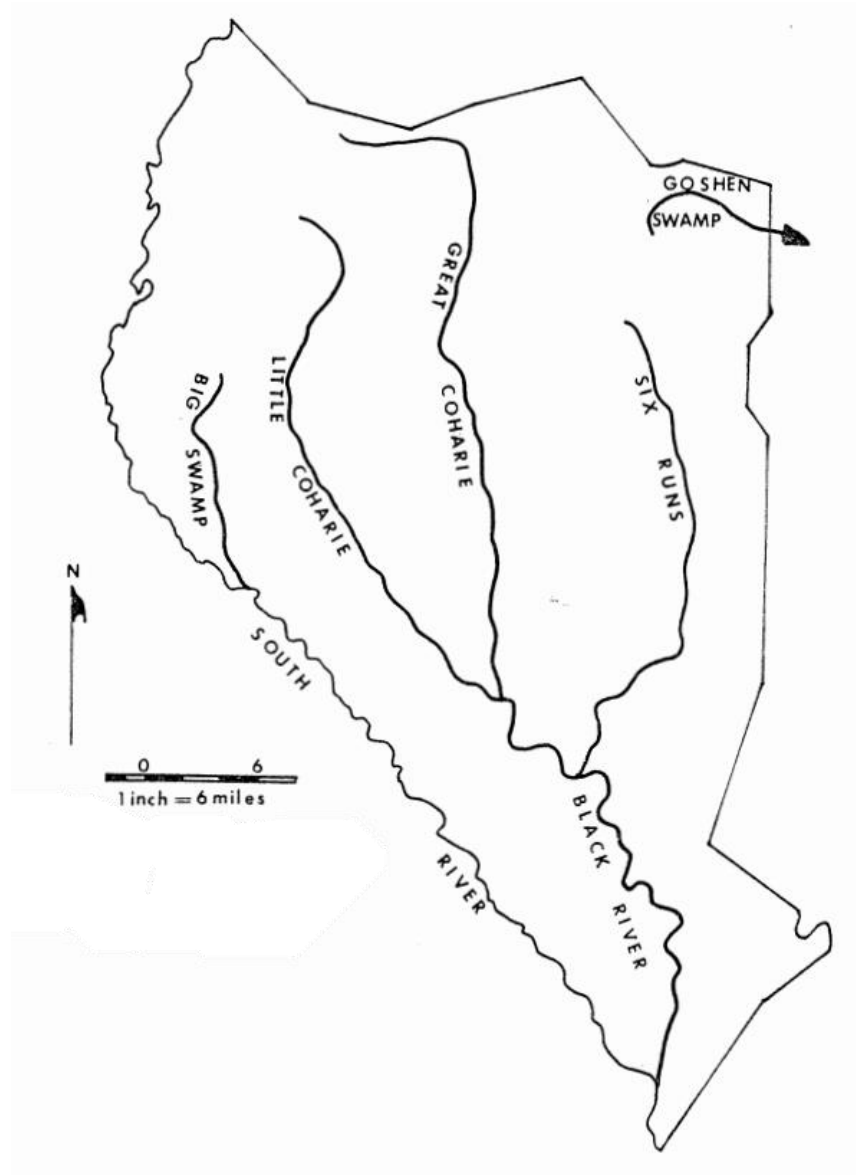


FIGURE 8: Drawing depicting the major drainages in Sampson County. Image from Archaeological Report “Prehistoric Settlement in Sampson County, North Carolina.” North Carolina Commission of Indian Affairs, Raleigh, NC. Courtesy of the State of North Carolina Office of Archaeology.

Having the canoe made Mr. Jacobs look at the Coharie River as it is today and what it offers today’s youth. He realized that the Coharie Tribe needed to be responsible stewards again. It is a place of spiritual connection. The Coharie River always gives the people what they need, be it food or guidance. When people feel that there is too much built up in them emotionally, they go down to the Coharie River, sit by it or float down it in canoes just like their ancestors before them, and they can lay all of their burdens on the water. The currents can take that burden away. The river is medicinal in that way (Greg Jacobs, interview by author, Dec. 1, 2021, virtual).

When Mr. Jacobs goes down by the river, he can hear it speak to him. It says, “I am medicine. I have always been medicine. That is why your people stopped here. They were running from disease, colonial conflict, and intertribal conflict. But they stopped here on the Coharie River because I was healthy, and I was wholesome. And they knew I had medicine. And they want you to know that that medicine that they experienced is still here today” (Greg Jacobs, interview by author, Dec. 1, 2021, virtual). Mr. Jacobs can hear the river’s words and he can see the effects that it has on the tribal members, and he knows that it is true. He can see his ancestors smile when they take care of the river and the river in turn takes care of them. They are River People and their connection with the river is a strong one (Greg Jacobs, interview by author, Dec. 1, 2021, virtual).

Many members of the Coharie Tribe descend from another tribe of river people, the Neusiok, named after the Neuse River. They had two towns near what is today New Bern. Those towns were called Chatooka and Racouncka (Greg Jacobs, interview by author, Dec. 1, 2021, virtual). In the early 1700s, an English explorer by the name of John Lawson traveled around much of the Carolinas and Georgia. He documented everything that he saw in his book, *A New Voyage to Carolina*. In his book, Lawson described the town of Chatooka as having several communal wigwams and a palisade around it made of vertical posts. He also described a garden in the village containing corn, beans, and squash (Hand 1:2021).

When the Europeans came with war, disease, and conflict turning tribes against each other, many were forced to flee or be annihilated. They followed the Neuse River inland, followed its tributaries, and found other groups of survivors. That is how they found their beautiful place by the Coharie River. Coharie is the Iroquois (also called Haudenosaunee) word for “driftwood.” An appropriate name for River People who were forced to drift along the riverbanks until they found a new home that welcomed them (Greg Jacobs, interview by author, Dec. 1, 2021, virtual).

Having the Coharie canoe returned to the Coharie People did a lot to elevate Coharie visibility within the State of North Carolina but also within the Coharie Tribe itself. They were able to stand up and tell the state government that they had rights, and they were heard. This granted them the opportunity to share more of their story with outside communities of people. They were also able to reflect inwardly on who they are, who they have been, and connect to what it really means to be Coharie. The return of the canoe spurred many changes for the Coharie People, and they will continue to ensure that they do not lose everything that they have gained since the canoe’s return.

*Mr. Danny Bell*

Mr. Danny Bell is a member of both the Coharie and Lumbee Tribes of North Carolina. He was born to a Lumbee mother and a Coharie father (University Gazette, 2014) and is the older brother of Mr. Philip Bell who was also interviewed for this thesis. Mr. Bell has committed much of his life to building relationships between Native and non-Native communities in North Carolina. He left college early when he was drafted in the Vietnam War but upon his return, he was hired by the North Carolina Commission of Indian Affairs in Raleigh (University Gazette, 2014) where he worked for 14 years (Triangle Native American Society, 2021).

In 1988 Mr. Bell became a Student Loan Officer for the University of North Carolina and worked hard to promote higher numbers of Native American students in the university system. For his work there, he was awarded the 2014 C. Knox Massey Service Award (University Gazette, 2014). In 1996, the university approached him and asked that he aid in starting an American Indian Studies Program. After getting the program up and running, he stayed on with the university as support in running it. Additionally, Mr. Bell is an advisor to the Carolina Indian Circle and the Native American Law Student Association (NALSA) (University Gazette, 2014). Though Mr. Bell is now retired, he still works tirelessly to promote Native American presence and identity. He is on the Board of Directors of the Triangle Native American Society which offers support and assistance to Native Americans in the Triangle Area (Durham, Raleigh, and Chapel Hill) (Triangle Native American Society, 2021).

Being Coharie is something that Mr. Bell believes comes with a lot of responsibility. It is something that their Creator gave him to be, and he needed to decide what he would do with that position in life. He is very thankful to be given the identity of Coharie and the opportunity to follow the paths that have been set before him by the people of the past. He considers the Coharie Tribe to be his large, extended family, just as Mr. Jacobs described. Every member of

the tribe has influenced him spiritually, mentally, or culturally. They have all had impacts on his life and made the Coharie Community his home (Danny Bell, interview by author, Dec. 2, 2021, virtual).

When the Coharie canoe returned to the Coharie Tribe, Mr. Bell saw it as an opportunity for tribal visibility, similarly as Mr. Jacobs did. When he looked at the canoe, he saw it almost as a cradle that holds the Coharie story. The canoe has a spiritual presence that fills in the blanks of the Coharie narrative. The fact that the canoe is a physical object and does not only exist in the spirit world draws more people in and everyone who interacts with it is affected differently. The more time that the Coharie Tribe members spend with the canoe, the more they can fill it with their stories. When people come to visit Coharie Country, the canoe can facilitate the telling of their story (Danny Bell, interview by author, Dec. 2, 2021, virtual).

This is important because the Coharie story has not been told in full before. Various scholars, archaeologists, and newspapers have mentioned them, but overall not much has been written about the Coharie people. There is considerable misinformation and bits and pieces of stories, but never a complete narrative. The canoe offers the Coharie the opportunity to decide what their story really is (Danny Bell, interview by author, Dec. 2, 2021, virtual).

Part of the difficulty is that the Coharie story is not a straightforward narrative. During the 1700s and 1800s when war, disease, and land encroachment forced many indigenous communities to move from their ancestral homelands in search of new places to settle. Many of them were forced to travel a great distance, especially those originally located in the coastal regions. It was in this manner that many members of the Coharie Tribe got to their current location. There are many tribes that came together to create the Coharie Tribe and so there are many names that could be attributed to the Coharie even though “Coharie” is the most common

name used today. Mr. Bell's father's birth certificate had him listed as Croatan and their oral history states that his family came from Roanoke. It is likely that other ancestors of the Coharie Tribe may have traveled up from the Cape Fear region. And, as stated earlier, many more descend from the Neusiok Tribe. But there were also those who did not have to move as far during the times of upheaval. There were people who may have always been there and never had to leave. The Coharie are located near Tuscarora lands, so it is possible that there are Tuscarora connections as well. The Coharie have farmland all around their Tribal Center and when they are farming, they often find projectile points, stone axes, and other evidence that they have been there for a very long time. There are many stories that can be woven together to tell the Coharie story and the Coharie canoe can be used to facilitate the telling of their story in a way that more people will understand (Danny Bell, interview by author, Dec. 2, 2021, virtual).

Mr. Bell commented on how the Coharie canoe is currently sitting in a room in the Coharie Tribal Center that has been purposefully set up to preserve it. It is sitting alone in the room with no other belongings or decorations. In the South River, it was preserved in its environment. It was swaddled and safe, but now it has been removed from that environment and is exposed. It is now the tribal community's responsibility to keep it stabilized. They can fill it with stories to help it have agency and to preserve the spirit within it. Mr. Bell talked about how the canoe is a living thing. It does not live in the same way that humans live but it has a life structure, and it benefits from being a part of the Coharie past and present. Just like people, if it is not cared for and nurtured then it will deteriorate and fall apart. It needs to be cared for and loved just as a person needs to be (Danny Bell, interview by author, Dec. 2, 2021, virtual).

Mr. Bell reflected on how the process of getting the canoe back with the Coharie people actually started many years before it emerged from the South River. Mr. Bell and other tribal

members had started building a relationship with the North Carolina State Archaeology Office for up to forty years before the canoe returned. Since the relationship was already so well developed when possession of the canoe came into question, the Coharie were at the top of the list. If tribal members had not had that relationship with the State Archaeology Office already formed, there is a chance that they could have lost it and it could have gone to another institution or ended up in storage (Danny Bell, interview by author, Dec. 2, 2021, virtual).

Mr. Bell spoke about the ceremony that was held when the Coharie canoe was returned to the tribe. Due to covid, it was a smaller ceremony, but there were several tribal members there as well as those who had acted as guardians of the canoe (the State Archaeologists) since it was recovered. Many people had different ideas about how the ceremony should be performed, but the important thing to Mr. Bell was that they gave thanks to everything and everyone that had brought the canoe back to them. They smudged the space and themselves and they prayed, thanking their Creator for the opportunity to be reconnected to the canoe. They thanked the spirits of those who made the canoe and thought about the last time the canoe was left in the South River before lying in wait for hundreds of years. They gave thanks for the fact that it was recovered and everything that had happened since then. The ceremony helped strengthen their connection with the spirit world and helped them focus on their gratitude and their responsibilities as Stewards of the River (Danny Bell, interview by author, Dec. 2, 2021, virtual).

Having the canoe returned made Mr. Bell think about the Coharie's history as River People. In the past, the Coharie people and the Coharie River both thrived off of a symbiotic relationship that they had with one another. Over time, as technology developed and people could travel farther from home, the tribe's relationship with the river lessened. People moved farther away from the river. They no longer had to rely on it for food or recreation. "But with the



canoe coming back, [...] it sort of rekindled [the] memories and stories of what our parents, and grandparents, and others before [and] the relationship they had with the river. It's sort of like reconnecting to the spiritual side of our lives and to nature. And I think that the spirit of the river and all that's around the river, is just not water" (Danny Bell, interview by author, Dec. 2, 2021, virtual). They were reminded that the river is also plants, fish, birds, and other animals. They were reminded of their duty as Stewards of the River and that to have a more holistic relationship with the river, they need to keep it healthy too. The canoe helped rejuvenate their identity as River People in a way that will positively impact the future generations of the tribe (Danny Bell, interview by author, Dec. 2, 2021, virtual).

The return of the Coharie canoe impacted Mr. Bell very similarly to how it impacted Mr. Jacobs. They both felt that it brought visibility to the Coharie Tribe and reminded them of their duties as Stewards of the River. Seeing the canoe brought up memories of their childhoods and how significant the Coharie River had been in their lives. It fed them, offered joy, medicine, solace, and comfort. The modern age had drawn people away from the river and made them forget the relationship that they used to have with it, but the canoe is reminding them about the relationship they used to have and that their ancestors before them had with the river.

*Mr. Philip Bell*

Mr. Philip Bell, just like his brother, Mr. Danny Bell, is a member of both the Coharie and Lumbee Tribes of North Carolina. He has spent his entire life, with the exception of when he was working or traveling, in Coharie Land, and it is the place he calls home. Mr. Bell talked about how being Coharie is something that has always been a center point of his identity, but he did not understand the position that put him in until just a few years ago. He described being

Coharie as being hospitable. It is caring, not only for one's neighbors, but also for the land they are on (Philip Bell, interview by author, Dec. 1, 2021, virtual).

To Mr. Bell, being a member of the Coharie Tribe centered him. He feels that he is part of a place and a people. The community is a vortex, and it pulls people to its center. He said that to be Coharie is to be proud. The Coharie are solid and strong. They have an identity that stands out, especially now. Just like with his brother and Mr. Jacobs, when Mr. Bell was growing up, segregation was the law and Native Americans did not fit into the categories of Black or White. Now, they are visible, and people know what their identity is (Philip Bell, interview by author, Dec. 1, 2021, virtual).

Mr. Bell was very active in the process of bringing the Coharie canoe back to the Coharie people. As soon as they found out that it was recovered in Sampson County, they started making moves to ensure that it stayed in Sampson County. It was a long and complicated process to ensure that the Coharie canoe found its home in the Coharie Tribal Center. It helped that Mr. Jacobs had already built a relationship with Mr. Mintz and the North Carolina State Archaeology Office. Several Coharie members, including Mr. Bell and Mr. Jacobs, were invited to that Underwater Archaeology Branch in Kure Beach to see the canoe when it was being processed in the SP-11 bulking solution (Philip Bell, interview by author, Dec. 1, 2021, virtual).

Mr. Bell and the other tribal members wanted a letter of support from the County Commissioner's Office that they could give to the State Archaeology Office to convince them to place the canoe with the Coharie Tribe. Mr. Bell scheduled a meeting at the County Commissioners office to petition their support. The Assistant Director for the County Commissioner's Office told him that he would be given five minutes to talk about whatever he wanted but not to expect anything to happen right away. They would listen to his presentation

and then table it to be discussed on a later date. The County Commissioner's Office paired Mr. Bell up with a representative from Friends of Sampson County Waterways who spoke first in their five-minute time slot. Unfortunately for Mr. Bell, that man used four of the five minutes that they were given. So, Mr. Bell used his one minute and pitched his case to the best of his ability (Philip Bell, interview by author, Dec. 1, 2021, virtual).

When Mr. Bell finished his one-minute presentation, he sat down and waited for what came next. He had just spoken to a room with fifty or sixty people in it and as he took his place in his chair, the room sat in complete silence. Mr. Bell remembers being very uneasy and trying to think about what he may have said that could have been upsetting to the people present. But the Chairman of the County Commissioners Office broke the silence by asking the room, "Gentlemen, do you think we could help the Coharie Tribe here with this?" And the answer was a unanimous nod from the room. They voted right then to issue a letter for the Coharie Tribe immediately. The County Commissioners Office had the letter prepared the next day. The Assistant Director called Mr. Bell the day that the letter was ready and told him that he had accomplished something that had never been done before and his answer to her was "Thank you very much" (Philip Bell, interview by author, Dec. 1, 2021, virtual).

Mr. Bell knew how important it was to get the canoe brought to the Coharie Tribe. It was important and impactful for the Coharie people as well as being the right thing to do. He and Mr. Jacobs worked together to share the message of the canoe and make sure as many people as possible knew of its importance to the tribe. They knew that other institutions were also trying to acquire the canoe. The Transportation Museum in Fayetteville was one such institution that was trying to convince the State Archaeology Office to give it to them for permanent exhibition.

When the Coharie learned that there were several other parties interested in the canoe, they started campaigning even harder to get it (Philip Bell, interview by author, Dec. 1, 2021, virtual).

All of their hard work paid off and the Coharie canoe found its home in the Coharie Tribal center. Mr. Bell reflected on the first time it was there, during the Coharie's Fiftieth Annual Cultural Powwow in 2019. He said there were many tearful eyes, not only from tribal members but also from the State Archaeologists. He spoke of a presence that was with them in the room and that touched everyone present. Tribal members who had not been home in years came to that powwow to see the canoe. Many just stood next to it and cried with joy. Everyone was talking about the value of having the canoe there. There was an atmosphere that could be felt by everyone present that Mr. Bell explained was not a feeling that could be described, one simply had to be there to know it. It was a feeling that emanated from the canoe and was overpowering as if the canoe spoke and said, "This is where I belong" (Philip Bell, interview by author, Dec. 1, 2021, virtual).

Mr. Bell then talked about how the Coharie River is one of the cornerstones of the Coharie community, the other cornerstones being the church and the school that is now the Intra-Tribal Center. Many of the Coharie are very spiritual and everything that they do is with their Creator in mind. Education is the next important aspect in their lives and as is making sure that their younger members get every possible opportunity to grow. For many people of the younger generations, the Coharie River is less of a cornerstone than it is for Mr. Bell's generation. When he was young, the river flowed clearly and was full of fish. It was a place where everybody went to gather and spend time with each other as well as with the spirits of their ancestors (Philip Bell, interview by author, Dec. 1, 2021, virtual).

Over time, the river lost its fluidity. In the 1970s, the beaver population rapidly grew, and dammed up many spots along the river preventing the fish populations from being able to migrate and spawn as they normally would resulting in a sharp decline in their populations. The county allowed for beaver hunting, but it could not keep up with the rate that the beavers were populating. Additionally, hurricanes brought devastation and destruction to the area, toppling trees into the river, and clogging the once open river. This resulted in the river becoming all but unusable (Carter, 2017a) and instead of a flowing river, the area became swamplands. Because of this, many of the younger tribal members had never been to or in the river that is their namesake (Philip Bell, interview by author, Dec. 1, 2021, virtual).

In 2014, Mr. Bell gathered a group of volunteers and collaborated with the United States Forestry Service to start cleaning up the Coharie River. Their goal was to make it navigable by kayak or canoe and create spaces for people to access it again. In 2015, The Coharie Tribe joined The Great Coharie River Initiative which Mr. Bell is the coordinator of. Clearing the river is slow work. They were able to clear about five miles of waterway between 2014 and 2016, but then Hurricane Matthew hit in 2016. It toppled more trees into the river and filled in everything that had been cleared (Carter 2017a).

These setbacks have not deterred Mr. Bell and the Great Coharie River Initiative from doing their work. Many people have come together to help clear the river. The Great Coharie River Initiative is powered completely by volunteers who come out and donate equipment to support the cause. The volunteers come from more than just the Coharie Tribe. Volunteers have come from the Waccamaw Siouan, Lumbee, Haliwa-Saponi, and Eastern Band of Cherokee Tribes, as well as non-indigenous members of the local community (Carter, 2017b). For all of their hard work, they received the Water Conservationists of the Year award from the Wildlife

Federation for the State of North Carolina. The Coharie were the first Native American Tribe in North Carolina to receive that award. Today, The Great Coharie River Initiative is responsible for clearing over one-hundred miles of waterway in Sampson County (Philip Bell, interview by author, Dec. 1, 2021, virtual).

Mr. Bell said that all the hard work is worth it when he gets to see people who have never been to the river go there for the first time and to see the impact that it has on them. He gets the most joy when they go and experience the power that the river has. They get to experience it in the same way that their ancestors did and see the river as they did. Experiencing the river has a way of changing people. Mr. Bell explained how many of the older generation knew what the river was. but the younger generation had no idea. Mr. Bell talks about seeing the younger tribal members go to the river for the first time and when they come out, they are different people (Philip Bell, interview by author, Dec. 1, 2021, virtual).

For example, Mr. Bell described how the river changed a brother and sister who are both veterans who had fought in Iran and Iraq. Both were being medicated for Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder and one had regular meetings with a therapist to be able to function in society. One day, the sister spoke with Mr. Bell and told him that she no longer needed to take medication or see her therapist anymore. She shared that she had gone down to the river and everything that had been affecting her and weighing her down washed away in the river. It all flowed away from her on the currents of the Coharie River. She visits the river about once a week all year round and lays her burdens on the water. Mr. Bell has seen the change in her. The river and its medicine were able to heal her. Mr. Bell went with her one time, and it was the first time he had been to the river in about 6 months. He paddled a kayak a mile down the river, and he felt himself being

rejuvenated. It gave him a feeling of euphoria, as though he was coming home after being very homesick (Philip Bell, interview by author, Dec. 1, 2021, virtual).

It is clear that the Coharie canoe brings people closer to the Coharie River and the medicine that it holds. Mr. Bell has seen the power that both the Coharie canoe and the Coharie River possess. He has felt it and seen how others have felt it and has shared their stories. His work with the Great Coharie River Initiative allows him to share that experience with people far beyond their immediate community. Both indigenous and non-indigenous people have been impacted by the Coharie River and the Coharie canoe. Thanks to a wide range of supports for the Coharie Tribe, that will continue to be true.

### *Conclusion*

These are just three of the many stories that the Coharie people have to share about the Coharie people, the Coharie canoe, and the Coharie River. Everyone's perspective is different and impactful and adds to the Coharie narrative. With over three thousand members of the Coharie Tribe, it was not logistically possible to interview each of them so only the three who were most involved with the canoe's repatriation were selected for the purposes of this thesis.

Through these interviews, the author was able to learn about more than just the processes of the repatriation. She was able to learn about the Coharie perspective on the world around them and how they interact with it. She was also able to learn about their spirituality with nature and their Creator. They shared intimate stories about their relationships with the Coharie River and the spirits of the river, the canoe, and their ancestors.

The more this story is shared, the more people will realize that repatriating belongings such as the Coharie canoe have an impact that is far greater than simply giving an indigenous object back to an indigenous group. It belongs to them, past, present, and future. It is a part of

them and their community just as any human tribal member is. It has animacy, its own life, and brings more life to their people. It holds and tells stories of who they are. There is a spiritual connection that is beyond words. This is just one story that exemplifies why this kind of relationship between Native American communities and the archaeological community are so important.



## **Chapter Six: Results and Conclusions**

### *Introduction*

Researching dugout canoes has several layers of complexity and the Coharie canoe is no exception. The history of the Coharie canoe spans over six hundred years and although this biography tells its story in a linear manner, Native American history is rarely seen in a linear sense. Their stories transcend time and space differently than the stories told by those of European descent. The spirits of the Coharie canoe, Coharie River, and Coharie ancestors are still living and communicating with the Coharie people who are alive today. Their story has not ended. This thesis addressed the Coharie canoe's story in a linear view for the sake of clarity to the reader.

This thesis attempted to keep the Coharie voice in the forefront of the sharing of the research. It is their story that is being told here, and they are the only ones who can tell it. No one else can do that for them. Though the researcher of this thesis wrote it down and analyzed it, the Coharie are the ones sharing their history, this thesis is another mode for them to communicate it with different communities of people. When the Coharie tribal members were initially approached during the beginning stages of this thesis, they were overjoyed that the researcher was taking an interest in them and their culture. They viewed it as a chance to heighten their visibility and proved that the canoe is an excellent vessel to share their story.

## *Results*

The belonging biography utilized in this thesis helped the researcher learn about the cultural significance that the Coharie canoe has for the Coharie people both during the period that it was built and today. Six hundred and fifty years ago, when the Coharie canoe was newly made, canoes were very important to the indigenous way of life. They were used for transportation, fishing, trade, economy, and building and maintaining relationships with other people and communities. Water played an important role in the lives of many Native Americans in North Carolina. Today, the canoe has reminded the Coharie people of that connection to the water that they once had, and they have started to rekindle it. They are once again teaching their younger tribal member of the importance of the Coharie River and the powers that it holds. It is evident in the case of the Coharie canoe that its return to the Coharie people had helped them maintain their sense of community and identity.

The belonging biography also revealed more about the effects of the archaeological community and how they should approach the topic of repatriation. Historically, archaeologists have excavated indigenous sites and taken their finds back to their labs with little or no tribal consultation. Many times, the tribes never know what the archaeologists are looking for or what they are finding. The belongings of their ancestors get swept away and they can do nothing about it. The materials end up in a lab and then in storage, on a shelf, or in a museum. This practice has changed in recent years and more often, tribes are being brought into the excavation and lab analysis processes. More uncommon, however, is that the materials found are actually given back to the tribes whose lands they were identified in. The Coharie canoe stands as a perfect example of the delicate relationship between the archaeological and Native American communities and how powerful those relationships can be. Seeing the impact that the repatriation of the Coharie canoe, being just a single belonging, has had on thousands of people could be

enough to influence archaeologist to repatriate other belongings that have been collected during archaeological excavations if the tribes have the facilities to house them.

Through conversations with the Coharie people, the researcher was able to learn what the existence and ownership of the canoe means to members of the Coharie Tribe today. It brings a new presence to the tribe that many cannot describe. The spirit of the canoe can be felt by all who are in its presence both Native and non-Native. The Coharie people are proud to reclaim the canoe. It exemplifies their identity as Stewards of the River and as River People and has helped many members of the Tribe reconnect with the Coharie River. Additionally, the process of obtaining the canoe brought visibility to the Coharie Tribe on the government level that otherwise was not there. Before the Coharie canoe was returned to them, many Coharie people felt that they did not have a voice to discuss important matters such as repatriation, but this process has proved that they do. Greg Jacobs expressed that it “was like my ancestors spoke to me and said, yeah, we've been here all the time. We were visible. You are visible” (Greg Jacobs, interview by authors, Dec. 1, 2021, virtual). They were able to stand before state government officials and they were heard. That made a markable difference because realizing that they were able to be seen and heard made them view themselves differently. They were able to feel the impact of their own presence.

The Coharie canoe reconnected the Coharie people with their ancestors. Tribal members have heard their ancestors speaking to them through the canoe and through the Coharie River. The voices they hear remind them of their history, of who there are, and who they have been for thousands of years. The Coharie canoe is not only a vessel that floats on the water, but also a vessel for the Coharie people to communicate this to their ancestors. It stands as “a documented fact of our industriousness, our resilience to make a living with what we have, and it was almost as if the

canoe spoke to me and said, I came back to speak of your existence in this area, for a long, long, long time” (Greg Jacobs, interview by authors, Dec. 1, 2021, virtual). The Coharie canoe is full of their stories, and they will continue to fill it to tell the Coharie narrative. As Danny Bell stated in his interview, a complete history of the Coharie people has never been fully told but the canoe will help to facilitate a full telling. It allows them a new access and control in telling their history and sharing their culture that had previously been denied them.

By learning about the Coharie canoe, much was also learned about the history of the Native American people of North Carolina. Learning about the canoe also meant learning about thousands of years of local Native history. Though many of the Coharie may have traveled from the coastal regions before settling in their current location, some did not have to travel so far. Some of the Coharie ancestors were located in that same location all along. Not only do the Coharie people regularly find material culture in their fields that date back hundreds and thousands of years, but the North Carolina State Archives has over seven hundred archaeological reports that document more one thousand and five hundred Native American sites, dating before the colonial period, in Harnett and Sampson Counties. Though the Coharie Tribe did not officially form until the 1700s, their history in the region goes back much farther than that.

The story of the Coharie canoe shows the positive impacts that repatriation can have on the people that the belongings are repatriated to. There are fifty-four identified dugout canoes in North Carolina and out of those, two have been successfully repatriated. This is not to the fault of the North Carolina State Archaeology Office. It is the goal of the State Archaeology Office to keep archaeological materials as close to their site of identification as possible. Of the fifty-four canoes identified in the state, about thirty of them are located in Lake Phelps. Though four of the Lake Phelps canoes were pulled from the lake, most of them are still laying in situ. The problem

is that there are no longer any Native Tribes located in that area of the state, so the State Archaeology Office has no way of knowing who to attribute the canoes to. The State Archaeology Office seeks to connect as many of the canoes and other belongings to the appropriate Native groups as they can going forward.

All of this information was learned by researching the history of a single belonging. Using a multidisciplinary approach and incorporating archaeological, historical, and anthropological research methods has allowed for a well-rounded analysis to be conducted. Using one discipline alone would have resulted in a very one-sided view of the Coharie canoe and the story of the Coharie people but combining the three adds many different perspectives. There is an extensive history to understand when creating a belonging biography because the focus is on more than just the belonging itself. The focus is also on all the people that interact with that belonging throughout its existence. Its story is intertwined with the stories of every person that it encounters, and a multidisciplinary approach was the only way to encompass that entire history. The Coharie canoe has been impacting people for six hundred and fifty years and hopefully it will continue to do so for many generations to come.

### *Importance of Working Alongside Tribal Members*

Many scholars have researched Native American history without actually consulting the groups they are studying and by doing so they are missing out on a huge opportunity to learn. As has been stated many times in the thesis, the best way to learn about a specific group of people is to talk to that group of people. In North Carolina, much of the research that has been done on dugout canoes has focused on the Lake Phelps logboats and there are no tribes currently located near the lake to consult. This thesis is the first study of its kind to take place within the state of

North Carolina. Building a trusting relationship with members of the Coharie Tribe was not only rewarding in the information that was obtained but also in the genuine friendships that formed. This study acts as one step closer to mending the broken relationship that has existed between the archaeological and Native American communities.

When conducting research that includes working closely with Native American groups it is very important for the researcher to respect their beliefs and traditions, especially if the researcher is non-Native. Making sure to learn about decolonizing language, how to address tribal members and elders respectfully, and to try to view the topic through their perspective are all very important aspects to conducting this kind of research. Researchers cannot approach topics such as the one researched in this thesis in the mindset that they are studying another group as the “other.” They need to go into the research realizing that the people they are interacting with are the real experts on the topic in question and the researchers must listen and learn from them.

Native American people have not been lost to time, they are real people who are living in real time and have much to teach. Their story cannot be told without them being there to tell it. They know their story better than anyone else, so they need to be the ones who share that story. Native American history attracts many historians who are eager to learn but there is only so much that can be obtained from old books. Talking to actual living people and seeing their culture firsthand offers so much more than a textbook can offer.

### *Decolonizing Language*

When it comes to communicating with Tribal members, many groups have different practices and systems of communication. Researchers must be patient to see what the most appropriate mode of communication is. Being open and honest can go a long way. For the

purposes of this thesis, the researcher was very open with the fact that she was still learning about decolonizing language and asked to be corrected often so she would not offend anyone she was working with. Language is something that is always changing, and people must continually make the conscious effort to speak inclusively and respectfully.

One of the first questions that the researcher asked was what term tribal members preferred; “Native American” or “American Indian”. Other important points of language decolonization included avoiding using words such as “discovered,” “abandoned,” “artifact,” and “object” whenever possible. The Coharie canoe was not “discovered” in 2018. It was “recovered.” The word “discovery” implies that something was found that no one has ever seen before and that is not that case with the Coharie canoe. Six hundred and fifty years ago, people were very aware that the Coharie canoe existed, it was only new to modern day people. Additionally, “abandonment” is likely not the reason that it was left in the South River. Even today, after being submerged for six hundred and fifty years, it is in excellent condition. There is no way that anyone six hundred and fifty years ago would have simply abandoned it. People during that time period made sure that nothing was wasted. A canoe that no longer floated could be used for other purposes so a canoe that had no problems floating would have continued to have been used. Finally, the words “artifact” and “object” were avoided because they remove the human aspect from the belonging. Calling it a “belonging” reminds people that it did or does belong to someone. It makes the item personable and brings the people into its narrative.

### *Further Research*

If this thesis were to continue there are several steps that could be taken to further the research. The most important step would be to consult more tribal members about the history of

the Coharie Tribe, the impact that they feel the Coharie canoe has on them and the rest of the tribe, and about their identity as River People and Stewards of the River. Many of the younger community members have only recently connected with that part of their Coharie identity and it would be beneficial in the future to get their perspective on it. The reason that more tribal members were not interviewed to begin with is because the Corona Virus limited in-person interactions early on in the research process and the researcher did not feel it was right to interview people without first building a personal relationship with them. The researcher did not want them to feel like they were subjects being studied; they are the masters of the information being shared.

Another route to further the research would be to run a similar study on the impacts of the canoe repatriated to the Waccamaw Siouan Tribe. As the only other canoe to have been repatriated in the State of North Carolina, it can offer more information as to the impacts that the repatriation of belongings such as these have on tribal communities. These two stories told side-by-side can have lasting impacts in the way that archaeologists approach studies that include Native American material culture.

Studying dugout canoes can also change people's perspectives about Native Americans being a strictly terrestrial people. Further research on the way that Native communities have traditionally used waterways such as the Coharie River and the South River can change the way many people view the Native American past. The Coharie people settled where they did because of the Coharie River. Their lives revolved around their relationship with the river and the give-and-take that took place there. Their relationship with the river was as fluid as the currents they are named after.



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## APPENDIX

### Coharie canoe (SOR0001) Timeline

As of August 8, 2022

Courtesy of Nathan Henry, North Carolina Office of State Archaeology Underwater Branch

About 650 Years Ago

- Coharie canoe constructed
- Coharie canoe left in the South River for the last time

May 15, 2018

- Nancy Fields, UNC Pembroke Museum of the Southeastern Indian, alerted the UAB that the canoe had been discovered.
- Bruce Daws, City of Fayetteville Transportation Museum, alerted the Samson County Sherriff that the canoe was being illegally recovered. Bruce put together a crew to finalize the recovery and took the canoe to his museum. He covered it in towels and plastic and contacted UAB.

May 18, 2018

- UAB personnel transports the canoe to UAB facilities at Kure Beach
- Made contact with Greg Jacobs, Administrator with the Coharie Indian Tribe, Samson Co.

May 24, 2018

- Developed a treatment plan to bulk the canoe wood with SP-11 waterlogged wood treatment that had been donated to UAB by the USA Corps of Engineers at Falls Lake, NC.
- Received price estimate for Radiocarbon dating of a wood sample
- Set up canoe in plastic envelope with water/Boric Acid solution (fungicide)

May 25, 2018

- Responded to Phil Feagan, NCDNCR attorney concerning canoe.

May 29, 2018

- Beta Analytic receives wood sample from canoe

June 13, 2018

- Indian delegation visits the canoe at UAB including Greg Jacobs (Coharie) Greg Richardson (NC Indian Affairs), Danny Bell (Coharie)

June 20, 2018

- Received Radiocarbon Date from Beta-Analytic, 640 +/- 30 BP

June 25, 2018

- Set up canoe in envelope with SP-11, began spraying SP-11 daily.

July 5, 2018

- Spraying SP-11 daily

September 7, 2018

- Nathan Henry's knee surgery - sick leave – SP-11 treatment ends
- Hurricane Florence heading toward NC
- Canoe is transported to Spencer Shops State Historic Site, Spencer, NC

September 12, 2018

- Hurricane Florence
- UAB is in bad condition after the hurricane - work on building rehab begins

November 5, 2018

- QAR staff pick up canoe from Spencer Shops and take to lab in Greenville

February 28, 2019

- UAB staff pick up canoe and bring it back to UAB facility, Kure Beach.
- Begin final dry indoors

April 17, 2019

- Slow dry nearly complete

September 1, 2019

- Delivered canoe to Coharie Tribal center for Pow Wow and display.

October 23, 2019

- Transported to Dunn Historical Museum for display

February 19, 2020

- Transported back to UAB

July 14, 2021

- Transported to the Coharie Tribal Center where it is located today.



