

De Soto In Macon County

Tradition Now Proven to be Fact

By Mrs. J. W. C. Johnson

The tradition that Hernando De Soto passed through Macon county on his fateful journey to the Mississippi has now been established as a fact by recent studies of the Bureau of Ethnology of the Smithsonian Institution in Washington. The source of this particular information is the original diary of De Soto's secretary, Rodrigo Ranjel, which sheds new light on this romantic chapter of American history.

Dr. John R. Swanton, ethnologist on the staff of the Institution who has directed the research, informed the writer last April that proofs of the full report were in hand and would soon be printed in a volume as part of the Congressional Record.

In the summer of 1934 Dr. Swanton spent several weeks in Franklin exploring the route described in Ranjel's narrative under the guidance of the late W. B. McGuire, veteran surveyor of this section, who assisted Dr. Swanton in establishing the path of De Soto and his men along the old Indian trail that may still be traced.

The entire route through Georgia and the Carolinas has been established beyond reasonable doubt. The description of the route makes certain that the expedition crossed into North Carolina near the site of Highlands, descended the Cullasagee gorge, and encamped on the plain of the valley of the Little Tennessee which now lies in the vicinity of the Franklin bridge.

Romance Revealed

The purpose of this perilous journey was the quest for gold, De Soto having landed in Florida a few years previous with a considerable number of men and horses, besides elaborate equipment. The dramatic tale of a kidnapped queen who was forced to accompany the party as guide is likewise authenticated. The story goes that this "lady of Cofitachiqui" craftily led the Spaniards in the wrong direction, escaping while they tarried on the banks of the river, accompanied by two of De Soto's men, one of whom she married! This true story is given further color by the incident of "the box of unbored pearls," which De Soto intended to appropriate, had the queen not outwitted him in this also.

Tracing Route

In a pamphlet entitled "Tracing DeSoto's Route" describing some of this field work Dr. Swanton quotes the following passage from Ranjel's diary dated Saturday, April 17, 1540:

"They crossed a very large river, divided into two branches, wider than a long shot from an arquebuse. And the fords were very bad, with many flat stones, and the water came up to the stirrups and in places to the saddlepads. The current was very strong and none of the horsemen dared to take a foot soldier on the croup. The foot soldiers crossed the river further up where it was deeper in this way. They made a line of thirty or forty men tied

together and so they crossed over supporting each other; and although some were in much danger, it pleased God that none was drowned, for the horsemen helped them with their horses and gave them the butt of the lance or the tail of the horse, and in that way they all got out and passed the night on a hill. That day they lost many pigs of those which they had brought tame from Cuba, as they were carried down by the current."

The Route Described

This pamphlet further states: "Identification of De Soto's route from the northwestern section of South Carolina through the Appalachians to the Hiwassee was particularly satisfying. The old Cherokee town, called by De Soto Chroniclers Xuala, Xualla, or Chuala, was evidently on what is now called Towns Hill between Crane and Knox Creeks, Oconee county (S. C.) where numerous Indian remains are constantly being unearthed. On the west face of the hill upon which stood the town is a well-marked trail, and this is connected with an ancient trail whose course is still known by old residents. It ran across the steep mountain ridges to Franklin, via Highlands and down the valley of the Cullasagee river. The Little Tennessee River was forded at Franklin, and the plain of Franklin was evidently where De Soto's army stopped for a day while one of the officers, Alonso Romo, went back in search of a couple of missing men and where the famous "lady of Cofitachiqui" escaped, carrying with her a box of unbored pearls. At Franklin we learned from W. B. McGuire, a surveyor who has spent many years of his life exploring this country, that the main Indian trail west ran up the valley of Cartoogechaye Creek and across Black Gap to the head of Shooting Creek. In fact, Mr. McGuire went out with the investigators and showed them portions of this trail still discernible on the mountain sides.

Route Beyond Macon County

"After descending the mountains the trail continued along Shooting Creek to the Hiwassee and reached old Hiwassee town at the mouth of Peachtree Creek, which there is every reason to believe was the Guasili of the De Soto Chronicles. From there it went on along the north side of the Hiwassee to the mouth of Cinasauga Creek, where a famous war trail from the north crossed and continued southwest into the neighborhood of Chattanooga. This war trail, was picked up by the Spaniards, who continued along it to and down the Tennessee to the southernmost bend of the latter river."

The tragic death of De Soto a year later and his burial in the Mississippi River is recorded in every school history.

LUMBER

If all the lumber cut in the United States for the past 135 years were in a single solid pile, it would make a cube almost exactly one mile in each dimension.

Vermiculite Development Is Becoming Big Industry

Disproving the statement that North Carolina's highly mineralized country is a "Mineral Cabinet" containing many varieties and small quantities of minerals, is the recent development of vermiculite.

This mineral found nowhere else east of Montana is located here in such quantities that the production from it of Vercalite has come to be one of the big industries of Macon county.

Vercalite, in its varying forms, is used in many ways, one of the chief of which is insulation that, in this age of air-conditioning has come to be of the greatest importance.

Differing from all similar products, features of this new mineral development are unusual. The loose-fill form used for filling walls does not "dust," "settle," burn, rot or readily absorb moisture, while rats and mice, unable to tunnel through it, avoid it. Moreover it is harmless. Its insulation efficiency claims to equal or better all other insulation.

As a plastic, Vercalite is used for insulating boilers, hot water tanks, brick or metal ovens and furnaces, steam, water or hot air pipes. One characteristic is that it can be broken up and re-used.

Plaster, used as any sand plaster is another form of Vercalite. With over three times the insulating properties of sand plaster, Vercalite also possesses five times its acoustical properties and is in addition fire resisting.

Concrete blocks for flooring in pre-cast units are also made of Vercalite. These can be sawn, cut with a knife, drilled. Nails, even, may be driven into it. The weight of all is so much less than that of concrete that handling is easy.

Finely ground, Vercalite, both raw and expanded, is used in lacquers, paints, and greases. Pressed, it is used as bricks.

Vermiculite, the raw material, a form of mica, is mined, dried and screened to different finenesses for different uses. The name, vermiculite is derived from the latin word meaning "worm," for when heated, the mineral curls in the manner of a worm.

LIMESTONE WON

For some time K. B. Bryant of Peppers in Mitchell County had debated whether to buy two acres of land to "square" his farm or to buy limestone for the land he now has. The lime won and he purchased 55 tons which will be applied to his 30-acre farm. This will enable him to apply lime and phosphate to all of his soil conserving crops.

MORE ALFALFA

Additional plantings of alfalfa are being made in Transylvania County following success with small plantings made last year. P. A. Morgan of Cherryfield and Mrs. Judd McCrary of Pisgah Forest are making the new seedings.

During the fiscal year ending June 30, the Federal Surplus Commodities Corporation purchased nearly 1,700,000,000 pounds of surplus agricultural commodities at a cost of approximately \$66,000,000.

WEEKLY INCOME

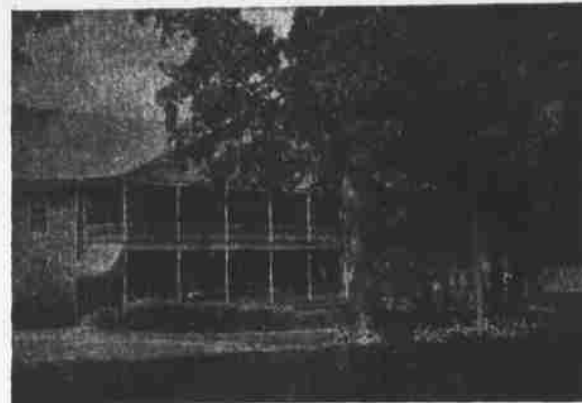
A weekly cash income of from \$15 to \$20 is reported by Henly Carr of Magnolia, Duplin County, from a flock of 150 laying hens. He says the hens have kept him on a cash basis through the past winter and spring.

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