Chapter 4. NORTHWEST FLORIDA, 2500 B.P.-A.D. 1000

The cultures of northwest Florida during the Woodland period are known as Deptford (2500 B.P.-A.D. 100), Santa Rosa (A.D. 100-300), Swift Creek (A.D. 100-300), and Weeden Island (A.D. 300-900). As elsewhere in the Southeast, these post-Archaic cultures are characterized by the appearance of elaborate ceremonial complexes, mound burial, permanent settlements, population growth, increasing reliance on cultigens, and increasing sociopolitical complexity.

The Setting

Northwest Florida consists of the sixteen counties west of the Aucilla River and includes two distinct physiographic regions: the coastal lowland zone and the interior uplands.

The coast is dominated by open beaches with dune ridges backed by lagoons. The low numbers of older reported archaeological sites on the coast, in contrast to the many more recent sites, may be in part related to the rise in sea level that probably inundated many sites. It is estimated that sea level on the Gulf coast of northern Peninsular Florida has risen two meters over the last 2000 years.

The upland areas in northwest Florida are drained by a number of rivers, the largest of which are the Apalachicola and the Escambia. Most reported Woodland period sites in northwest Florida are associated with riverine and coastal environments, while inland non-riverine areas were thought to be virtually barren of Woodland period occupation (an exception is the Torreya Ravines region). Recent cultural resource management (CRM) surveys in the Apalachicola National Forest have demonstrated that resources associated with the inland pine forests supplemented the subsistence needs of populations in the river valleys to varying degrees through time (Forney 1985; White 1981).

Archaeological Research in Northwest Florida

The first published account of archaeological remains in northwest Florida is found in William Bartram's (1928) description of his travels along the northwest Florida coast in the 1770s. Other early accounts include descriptions of shell mounds at Inerarity's Point near Pensacola (Sternberg 1876) and sites on East Bay and Choctawhatchee Bay (Walker 1880a, 1880b, 1883, 1885). The work of Clarence Moore (1901, 1902, 1903a, 1918) and W.H. Holmes (1903) formed the basis for Gordon Willey's (1949a) classic *Archeology of the Florida Gulf Coast.* Forty years of archaeological investigations by universities and museums in Florida, Alabama, North Carolina, and Ohio, as well as by the Florida Division of Historical Resources and CRM firms, have made northwest Florida one of the most studied areas in the state. Unfortunately, the Woodland period has not been as intensively investigated as the Mississippian and historic periods. Over the last ten years or so, the requirements of CRM-related work have helped to focus attention on some of the lesser known Woodland cultures.

Political boundaries between Florida, Georgia, and Alabama have challenged archaeologists trying to develop a coherent chronological sequence for cultural manifestations located in northwest Florida and its borderlands. Archaeologists are often obligated by their funding sources to be constrained by political boundaries which have little or no relevance to the prehistoric context. Recently, the efforts of Nancy M. White have drawn attention to this (White 1985, 1988). Along with a call for increased integration of the prehistoric cultural history frameworks from the three states, White points out that the "cultures" of Deptford, Santa Rosa, Swift Creek, and Weeden Island are, in effect, pottery assemblages (1985:163, 165). She recommends focusing more on non-pottery tool assemblages, as well as on subsistence strategies, settlement patterns, and social interaction to define the various cultural manifestations of the Woodland period in northwest Florida.

Deptford (2500 B.P.-A.D. 100)

The Early Woodland period in northwest Florida is defined by the Deptford culture (2500 B.C.-A.D. 100). Deptford in Florida follows the general pattern for Early Woodland people elsewhere in eastern North America (i.e., increasing sedentism, population growth, mound burial, and primary reliance on wild foods with increasing importance of domesticates). Over 500 Deptford sites are recorded in northwest Florida.

The origins of Deptford are not clear. Most archaeologists argue for *in situ* development (Tesar 1980:680). There are differing views regarding the chronological divisions for Deptford. Tesar (1980) recognizes three phases (Early, Middle, and Late) based on Sears's (1963) excavations at the Tucker site (8FR4) in Franklin County, while Jenkins (1978) and Walthall (1980) define only Early and Late phases. In this latter framework, Early Deptford is characterized by fabric impressed pottery, which is replaced by simple stamped and cordmarked wares during Late Deptford. While some recent work supports the two-phase division, there is not enough evidence to reject the three-phase division (Thomas and Campbell 1985a:25).

Material culture. Artifacts diagnostic of Deptford occupation are largely pottery types: Deptford Bold Check Stamped, Deptford Check Stamped, Deptford Simple Stamped, and Deptford Linear Check Stamped. Other types whose Deptford affiliation has been debated include Deptford Complicated Stamped, Deptford Cross Stamped and net, dowel, and fabric impressed types. Little is known about the non-pottery Deptford tool assemblage. Milanich and Fairbanks (1980:76) suggest that throwing stones, spears, traps, and nets were used to take game; there is no good evidence for the presence of the bow and arrow. Shell and bone tools are found occasionally at Deptford sites, but so infrequently as to lead Milanich and Fairbanks (1980:77) to argue that perishable wooden tools were preferred. However, recent finds of shell and bone tools at the Pirate's Bay site (8OK83) may change that perception (Thomas and Campbell 1985b:118). The presence of cordage and basketry is inferred from impressions on clay pots (Milanich and Fairbanks 1980:75). Recently, microlithic stone tool industries have been tentatively identified in Deptford components at the Van Horn site (8FR744) in the Apalachicola Valley and the Pirate's Bay site in Okaloosa County.

Late in the Deptford period (or early in the Santa Rosa and Swift Creek periods) exotic items associated with the Yent complex are found at the Yent Mound (8FR5) on Apalachee Bay and Pierce Mound A (8FR14) west of Apalachicola. These items include copper panpipes and cymbal-shaped ornaments, stone plummets, carnivore (bear, wolf, puma) teeth, and rectangular stone gorgets (Sears 1962a:6-8).

Settlement patterns. Only three types of Deptford sites are known in northwest Florida: shell middens, inland middens, and burial mounds.

The most common sites are coastal or estuarine shell middens, such as the Hawkshaw site (8ES1287) in Pensacola and the Pirate's Bay site on Choctawhatchee Bay.

Recent discoveries suggest that non-shell midden Deptford sites may exist in considerable numbers in the interior in a variety of different locations. Interior sites are found around lakes and along rivers in the Tallahassee Hills (Tesar 1980:77) and in the pine flatwoods of the Apalachicola National Forest (Forney 1985:101) to the south. They are also found on past and present river channels of the Upper Apalachicola River (White 1981) and near ponds, rivers, creeks, swamps, and lakes in the Lower Apalachicola River Valley (Henefield and White 1986). Sites occur around springheads on tributaries of streams flowing into Choctawhatchee Bay (Thomas and Campbell 1985a:73) and on tributary streams in the Escambia River Valley (Bense 1985:163). In contrast to the relatively substantial shell middens, interior sites are somewhat ephemeral, often consisting of artifact scatters or shallow middens.

What this distribution of sites represents in terms of settlement patterns is not entirely clear. Milanich has suggested a primary occupation along the coast with sporadic seasonal use of inland sites (1973:56). Recent researchers (White 1986:203; Tesar 1980:78), however, argue for a more intensive interior occupation.

The third Deptford site type is represented by burial mounds. These occur late in the Deptford period, and only a few are known. The Yent Mound and Pierce Mound A are located on the coast (Sears 1962:6); the Oakland Mound (8JE53) is found in inland Jefferson County (Tesar 1980:75). The Yent and Pierce mounds contain large numbers of burials and artifacts associated with the Yent Complex (Sears 1962a:5-8). Both of these mounds may date from the post-Deptford Santa Rosa and Swift Creek periods. The Oakland Mound, however, although approximately the same size as the other two, is clearly of the Deptford period. It yielded only four bundle burials and no Yent complex artifacts (Morrell 1960).

Subsistence. Our knowledge of Deptford subsistence comes almost exclusively from coastal sites. Excavations at the Hawkshaw, Moccasin Mound (8SR85), and Tucker sites indicate that Deptford peoples exploited such estuarine resources as oyster, Rangia, marsh clam, and several species of bony fish (Bense 1985:161; Claassen 1985:128; Milanich 1973:57). Land animals, including deer, small mammals, and reptiles were also used (Bense 1985:161; Milanich 1973:57). At the Hawkshaw site, we have evidence of nut collecting in the form of hickory nuts and acorns (Bense 1985:162). We have no indication of the cultivation of domesticated plants from any Deptford sites in northwest Florida. Our understanding of Deptford subsistence is severely hampered by a lack of data from a range of sites and by the limited number of zooarchaeological and, especially, paleoethnobotanical studies.

Santa Rosa and Swift Creek (A.D. 100-300)

Santa Rosa and Swift Creek represent Middle Woodland period cultural manifestations in northwest Florida and are characterized by innovative pottery technology, mound burial, and a ceremonial complex which appears to have been influenced by cultures to the north. Santa Rosa and Swift Creek are defined both as pottery series and as cultural manifestations. It is thought that Santa Rosa pottery designs are the result of influence from the Lower Mississippi Valley (Marksville) and Mobile Bay, while Swift Creek appears to have originated in Georgia. Santa Rosa and Swift Creek pottery series co-exist west of the Apalachicola Valley (as far as Mobile Bay) where they are referred to as Santa Rosa/Swift Creek; only Swift Creek materials are found east of the Apalachicola Valley, except in mortuary contexts where Santa Rosa ceramics occur as exotic grave goods.

Our knowledge of Santa Rosa and Swift Creek in northwest Florida is extremely limited. Compared to earlier and later periods, fewer sites are known (400 Santa Rosa/Swift Creek compared to over 500 Deptford and almost 1000 Weeden Island sites). Moreover, few excavations have been conducted at Santa Rosa or Swift Creek sites, and many of these are small-scale or took place more than twenty years ago. Compounding the problem, most investigations have been carried out at coastal sites, thus skewing our understanding of the complete picture and leaving us uninformed about the inland manifestation.

Material culture. The Santa Rosa pottery series includes the following types: Alligator Bayou Incised, Basin Bayou Incised, Santa Rosa Stamped, Santa Rosa Punctated, and fine paste, thin-walled plain ware. Swift Creek pottery types include: Swift Creek Complicated Stamped, St. Andrews Complicated Stamped, New River Complicated Stamped, West Florida Cordmarked, and Crooked River Complicated Stamped. Basal sherds with tetrapods and scalloped and/or crenallated-edged rims are also diagnostic of Swift Creek pottery. It was generally thought that the Santa Rosa series predominated in the area west of the Apalachicola, but recent work has located Santa Rosa/Swift Creek components where Santa Rosa types comprise less than 50% of the pottery assemblage.

The Yent Complex artifacts mentioned above in the discussion of Deptford may actually belong to the Santa Rosa and Swift Creek cultures.

Swift Creek lithic assemblages are characterized by imported chert and occasional exotic items, such as fossils and micaceous schist (White 1986:209). Projectile point types include Savannah River and Bakers Creek; both are stemmed. Local raw materials are used as well, but the nonlocal lithic materials are attributed to participation in the Hopewell interaction sphere.

Settlement patterns. Most of our information about Santa Rosa or Swift Creek sites comes from coastal shell middens. These come in various forms and sizes. The larger ones are circular (e.g., Bird Hammock [8WA30]), horseshoe-shaped (e.g., Snow Beach [8WA52]), or rectangular (e.g., 8BY73), with cleared interior areas; smaller ones are often linear (Milanich and Fairbanks 1980:118). Coastal sites may be located directly on the beach (as at Third Gulf Breeze [8SR8]), in estuaries (as at 8BY73 and Depot Creek [8GU56]), or slightly inland in coastal hammocks (as at Bird Hammock).

We know of fewer inland sites, but as Tesar (1980:596) has pointed out, this may be a function of survey coverage. In the Apalachicola River Valley, where we have our most complete information about inland sites, most sites are located near the river (e.g., 8JA205, 8JA227), but some are on high bluffs (e.g., Beaver Dam Creek [8LI208]) or on the edge of swamps (e.g., the Roy Whitfield site [8GU52]) (White 1986:204; Henefield and White 1986:123). In the Tallahassee Hills, Swift Creek sites are commonly located near lakes and swamps (e.g., 8LE471, 8LE484) (Tesar 1980:595).

Burial mounds often occur in conjunction with the larger coastal shell middens (e.g., the Porter's Bar site [8FR1]). Some are characterized by an east side deposit of pottery (Sears 1962a:11, 17; see the Deptford discussion above). Our knowledge of inland mounds is negligible.

Subsistence. What we know of Santa Rosa and Swift Creek subsistence comes from a limited number of coastal sites–Third Gulf Breeze, Snow Beach, Refuge Tower (8WA14) and 8BY73. Their inhabitants seem to have exploited primarily estuarine resources, including oyster, scallops, and various kinds of fish (Phelps 1969:15; Bense and Watson 1979:109). Deer and smaller mammals, reptiles, and birds are also represented at these sites. The faunal assemblages from the Third Gulf Breeze, Refuge Tower, and Snow Beach sites suggest to Phelps (1969:15) a summer exploitation of coastal resources.

Our information about plant foods used by Santa Rosa and Swift Creek peoples is sketchy. Bense and Watson (1979:109) report a few hickory nuts and acorns from 8BY73. Other evidence for the use of wild plant foods is lacking. We have one report of a squash seed (from the Refuge Tower site) (Phelps 1969) but no other evidence of cultigens.

Weeden Island (A.D. 300-1000)

Weeden Island components and sites are more widely represented than any other Woodland period cultural manifestation in northwest Florida; almost 1000 Weeden Island sites are recorded here. The Weeden Island period includes the flourish and decline of Middle Woodland tradition ceremonial complexes and the subsequent population growth and increased sociopolitical complexity associated with the *in situ* development of ranked societies of the Mississippian period. Willey (1949a) initially recognized Weeden Island I and Weeden Island II as representing the Middle Woodland and Late Woodland traditions in Gulf coast Florida. Willey's Weeden Island I includes late Swift Creek. More recent work has delineated five (Percy and Brose 1974) or three (Thomas and Campbell 1985a) divisions for Weeden Island on the basis of varying percentages of Weeden Island pottery types. The Early/Late Weeden Island distinction (White 1986) is similar to Willey's I and II, except Early Weeden Island does not include Swift Creek.

It is generally thought that Weeden Island represents an *in situ* development. Early Weeden Island is characterized by mound burial and elaborate burial goods, usually imported, which in turn are lacking for the more dispersed settlement patterns of Late Weeden Island occupations. The events during the late period which resulted in the development of the Mississippian chiefdoms of northwest Florida are thought by some to have been precipitated by an invasion of Mississippian groups from the north. Others acknowledge the possibility of some migration from the north, but argue that it was internal change influenced by Mississippian groups which resulted in the Mississippianization of Late Weeden Island groups.

Material culture. Weeden Island pottery types include the following: Carrabelle Incised, Carrabelle Punctated, Keith Incised, Weeden Island Incised, Weeden Island Punctated, Wakulla Check Stamped, complicated stamped, and corncob marked. Early Weeden Island is characterized by primarily incised and punctated varieties, including painted and cutout effigy vessels, while Late Weeden Island is represented by predominantly stamped varieties, with none of the finely-crafted effigy vessels of the early period. It has been suggested that the effigy vessels and other fine wares of the early period were made by pottery specialists, but recent investigations of Weeden Island pottery at the McKeithen site (8CO17) in north Florida have found little supporting evidence for this idea (Cordell 1984). As for the stone tool assemblage, a small triangular projectile point with a flat or sometimes concave base appears to be diagnostic of Late Weeden Island. Other types of stone tools include scrapers, choppers, knives, and hammerstones (Milanich 1974:22). In addition, a microlithic tool assemblage has been identified at the Weeden Island Palm Court site (8BY43) in Bay County (Tesar 1965; Morse and Tesar 1974).

Settlement patterns. Weeden Island site types are similar to those of the preceding period: coastal shell middens, inland middens, and burial mounds.

Coastal shell middens are located directly on the coast (such as the Tucker site) or near estuaries and coastal swamps (such as the Mound Field site [8WA8]); they may be accompanied by one or more burial mounds.

Inland middens sometimes have accumulations of freshwater shell (White 1986:208). These sites are located in many different settings including on riverbanks, around lakes, along creeks, and on ridgetops near springs (White 1986:209; Tesar 1980:603; Percy and Brose 1974:18; Percy and Jones 1976:113).

The inland Weeden Island sites may represent small, seasonal villages (Milanich 1974) or year-round settlements which moved every few years (Percy and Brose 1974:20). The Torreya site (8LI8), for example, consists of several houses situated in a crescent around a springhead (Percy and Brose 1974:18). The Sycamore site (8GD13) seems to represent a single household. At Sycamore, Milanich (1974:28) uncovered an oval house about 6 m x 9 m; a nearby structure may have been a summer house.

Mound sites, of which there are many (Willey [1949a:397-401] lists over fifty), are found mainly along the coast and the Apalachicola River, usually in conjunction with habitation sites. One of the most important of these is located inland on the Apalachicola River. The Aspalaga site (8GD1) includes an associated crescent-shaped village, midden, and three or four mounds grouped in a triangle or square (Milanich 1974:1). The Aspalaga site may represent a regional center similar to, though earlier than, the Weeden Island McKeithen site in north Florida (Milanich et al. 1984:191-192).

Subsistence. It has been suggested that Early Weeden Island settlement was more intensive on the coast, while there was a shift to primarily inland settlement during Late Weeden Island times as a result of agricultural activities (particularly maize cultivation) (White 1986:206). Inland soils are better suited for maize horticulture. Others suggest that the apparently less intensive occupation of inland areas during Early Weeden Island is due to the lack of systematic inland surveys; recent work has located significant numbers of inland as well as coastal Early Weeden Island sites (New World Research 1984). It is currently thought that Late Weeden Island subsistence was not based on maize horticulture, but rather on a broad range of aquatic and terrestrial fauna and flora; maize appears to have been a secondary resource.

Freshwater molluscs seem to have been increasingly popular during the Late Weeden Island period; the harvesting intensity of coastal shellfish continues at levels roughly similar to earlier times. The Sycamore site in the upper Apalachicola Valley has yielded evidence of deer, numerous other mammals, shellfish, fish, nuts, acorns, fruits, and maize (Milanich 1974:33). That site, and the Scholz Steam Plant site (8JA1040) (Percy 1976), both contained corncob impressed pottery.

Important Sites

Four Deptford sites are listed on the National Register of Historic Places in northwest Florida: the Fort Walton Mound (8OK6), the Waddells Mill Pond site (8JA65), the Yent Mound (8FR5), and the Pierce site (8FR14). All of these sites also contain later archaeological components. One archaeological district containing Deptford sites, the Thomas Creek Archaeological District (8SR338), is also listed. In addition to these sites, other important Deptford sites include the Trestle Bridge, Hawkshaw, Pirate's Bay, Tucker, Carrabelle (8FR2), and Oakland Mound sites.

Santa Rosa or Swift Creek components are found at all the Deptford sites listed on the National Register. Other Santa Rosa/Swift Creek sites listed include the Porter's Bar, Hartsfield (8LE120A), Yon Mound and Village (8LI2), and Bird Hammock sites. Some other important sites are the Green Point (8FR11), 8BY73, Refuge Tower, Snow Beach, and Third Gulf Breeze sites.

All five Weeden Island sites and one archaeological district listed on the National Register have earlier (and some later) components. The sites are the Porter's Bar, Pierce, Yon Mound and Village, Fort Walton Mound, and Bird Hammock sites. In addition, the Thomas Creek Archaeological District also includes Weeden Island sites. Other important Weeden Island sites are the Aspalaga, Torreya, Sycamore, Refuge Tower, and Tucker sites.

Research Questions

Gaps in the database. Considering the large number of Woodland sites in northwest Florida, the number of excavated sites is exceedingly small. In the last twenty years, the panhandle has received considerable survey coverage (although this is still biased somewhat towards the coastal and riverine environments), but almost no large scale excavations have been undertaken. This limits our ability to make in-depth interpretations of Woodland societies.

Chronology. One basic Woodland research question deals with whether or not there is a "pure" Deptford or a "pure" Swift Creek. As noted earlier, many Woodland sites have components from several time periods; there are few single component sites. Radiocarbon dates from clearly identifiable components would help to clarify the chronology.

Economy. A major problem regarding Woodland subsistence results from the excavation bias towards coastal sites. This is only slightly remedied during Weeden Island times by a few excavations at inland riverine sites (Milanich 1974; Percy and Brose 1974). Seasonality studies would prove useful in answering the question of whether seasonal shifts between coastal and inland sites occurred.

How does coastal resource exploitation change through time? How does inland resource exploitation change through time?

Do coastal and inland sites represent seasonal shifts by one population or several populations adapted to different environments?

When do domesticates first appear in northwest Florida and which are earliest?

Are inland Weeden Island horticultural sites characterized by seasonally shifting settlements or by longer term villages characterized by swidden horticulture?

The nature and quantity of exotic items varies considerably throughout the Woodland period. At present, we have only the sketchiest view of what this means in terms of regional or interregional exchange.

How do the Yent, Green Point, and Weeden Island complexes differ in their material culture? What are their chronological relationships? What are the sources of the exotic goods associated with each?

Is there evidence of craft specialization?

Settlement patterns. Other than site distribution (which is often skewed by survey bias), we have little information on settlement patterns. We have no data on structures, for example, until Weeden Island. Our only information on community pattern comes from coastal Weeden Island sites. Percy and Brose (1974:14) suggest these may be clustered into "communities" composed of several small (three to four nuclear families) sites and a burial mound.

What do Woodland houses look like?

What kinds of public or community structures exist?

What are the sizes of Deptford and Santa Rosa/Swift Creek communities?

How do settlement patterns change through time?

Within a time period, how do settlement patterns vary regionally?

Are there different settlement patterns for coastal populations and for inland populations?

Social and political organization. For lack of information, we have been able to say little about the complexities of Woodland social and political organization. However, the increased survey coverage of recent years and the presence of several burial populations is enough to allow us to attempt to draw some conclusions in this regard.

Are there regional artifact or ritual stylistic boundaries in Northwest Florida over time? Do they reflect social groups? Do they change through time? These questions can be addressed through material culture studies and detailed analyses of site distributions.

What evidence is there for either egalitarian social organization or the beginnings of ranked social organization?

How does political organization change through time? For example, do community sizes change through time? Are there shifts in alliances (represented by shifts in material culture)?

How do political and social organization vary regionally?

Ritual behavior. Different ritual complexes have been postulated for Deptford, Santa Rosa/Swift Creek, and Weeden Island. The Yent, Green Point, and Weeden Island ceremonial complexes vary in their distribution, artifact assemblage, and burial behavior.

Is any, part, or all of the Yent complex, with its exotic items, the result of influence from outside the area?

What do the variations in ritual complexes mean?

How does the Green Point complex relate to the later, somewhat similar, Weeden Island complex?

There are significant changes in mortuary ceremonialism during the Weeden Island period. Late mounds are less elaborate and seem to lack central features and the deposits of mortuary ceramics. Do these changes reflect differences in social organization?

Health and nutrition. Almost no bioarchaeological studies have been conducted to date on northwest Florida Woodland populations. This is unfortunate, for such studies could fill in many gaps in our knowledge.

Does health and nutritional status vary through time? In particular, does health status change at the time domesticates are introduced?

Does health and nutritional status vary between regions (e.g., coastal vs. inland populations)?

Are there dietary differences between populations through time or across regions?

Preservation Goals

Locate unrecorded Woodland sites, especially in the upland areas away from major river valleys and in coastal or riverine areas endangered by development or erosion.

Systematic survey to relocate and evaluate the sites previously excavated by C.B. Moore. The data from these sites are an important database for future work.

Public acquisition and/or protection of important Woodland sites, such as the Aspalaga site.

Excavation of sites of various types, from various time periods.

Nomination to the National Register of sites representing varying types.

Institution of cultural resource management plans by metropolitan areas, government reservations, and state forests.