

**THE JOURNEYS OF JAMES NEEDHAM AND GABRIEL ARTHUR IN 1673 AND 1674
THROUGH THE PIEDMONT AND MOUNTAINS OF NORTH CAROLINA
TO ESTABLISH TRADE WITH THE CHEROKEE**

Contained in a letter from Abraham Wood to John Richards
August 22, 1674

Edited Version

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To my Honoured Friend, Mr. Richards in London, present.

That I have been at your charge to the value of two hundred pounds sterling in the discovery of the south or west sea Declaro; and what my endeavors were in two years you were made sensible of by the hands of Thomas Batt and Robert Fallam in part. At my own charge the effects of this present year, I am now to give you an account of in as much brevity as I can.

About the 10th of April, 1673, I sent out two Englishmen and eight Indians with accommodations for three months, but by misfortune and unwillingness of the Indians before the mountains that any should discover beyond them, my people returned affecting little, to be short. On the 17th of May, 1673, I sent them out again, with a like number of Indians and four horses. About the 25th of June they met with the Tomahittans as they were journeying from the mountains to the Occhonechees. The Tomahittans told my men that, if an Englishman would stay with them, they would some of them come to my plantation with a letter which eleven of them did accordingly, and about forty of them promised to stay with my men at Occhonechee until the eleven returned. The effect of the letter was they resolved by God's Blessing to go through with the Tomahittans. The eleven resolved to stay at my house three days to rest themselves. I hastened away another Englishman and a horse to Occhonechee to give them intelligence; but by the extremity of rain they could not be expeditious, so that through the instigation of the Occhonechees, and through the doubt they had, as I suppose, of the miscarriage of their men at my

plantations, being so possessed by the other Indians, the Tomahittans went away, and my two men with them. And as since I understand the eleven overtook them, before they came to the mountains, with my letter, which rejoiced the two Englishmen and one Appomattock Indian for no more durst [*sic*] to go along with them.

They journeyed nine days from Occhonechee to Sitteree, west and by south, past nine rivers and creeks which all end in this side the mountains and empty themselves into the east sea. Sitteree being the last town of inhabitation and not any path further until they came within two days' journey of the Tomahittans. They travel from thence up the mountains upon the sun setting all the way, and in four days get to the top, sometimes leading their horses sometimes riding. The ridge upon the top is not above two hundred paces over; the descent better than on this side. In half a day they came to the foot, and then level ground all the way, many slashes upon the heads of small runs. The slashes are full of very great canes and the water runs to the northwest. They pass five rivers and about two hundred paces over the fifth being the middle most half a mile broad all sandy bottoms, with pebble stones, all fordable and all empty themselves northwest, when they travel upon the plains, from the mountains they go down, for several days they see straggly hills on their right hand, as they judge two days journey from them. By this time they have lost all their horses but one, not so much by the badness of the way as by hard travel, not having time to feed. When they lost sight of those hills they see a fog or smoke like a cloud from whence rain falls for several days on their right hand as they travel still towards the sun setting great store of game, all along as turkeys, deer, elk, bear, wolf, and other vermin very tame. At the end of fifteen days from Sitteree they arrive at the Tomahittan's river, being the sixth river from the mountains. This river at the Tomahittan's town seems to run more westerly than the other five. This river they passed in canoes the town being seated in the other side about four hundred paces broad above the town, within sight, the horse they had left waded only a small channel swam, as they were very kindly entertained by them, even to adoration in their ceremonies of courtesies and a stake was set up in the middle of the town to fasten the horse to, and abundance of corn and all manner of pulse with fish, flesh, and bear's oil for the horse to feed upon and a scaffold set up before day for my two men and Appomattock Indian that their people might stand and gaze at them and not offend them by their throng.

This town is seated on the river side, having the cliffs of the river on the one side being very

high for its defence, the other three sides trees of two foot over, pitched on end, twelve feet high, and on the tops scaffolds placed with parapets to defend the walls and offend their enemies which men stand on to fight. Many nations of Indians inhabit down this river, which runs west upon the salts which they are at war with and to that end keep one hundred and fifty canoes under the command of their fort. The least of them will carry twenty men, and made sharp at both ends like a wherry for swiftness. This fort is four square, 300 paces over, and the houses set in streets. Many horns like bulls' horns lay upon their dunghills. Store of fish they have, one sort they have like unto stockfish cured after that manner.

Eight days' journey down this river lives a white people who have long beards and whiskers and wear clothing, and on some of the other rivers live a hairy people. Not many years since the Tomahittans sent twenty men laden with beaver to the white people. They killed ten of them and put the other ten in irons, two of which ten escaped and one of them came with one of my men to my plantation as you will understand.

After a small time of rest one of my men returns with his horse, the Appomatock Indian and 12 Tomahittans, eight men and four women. One of those eight is he which hath been a prisoner with the white people. My other man remains with them until the next return to learn the language. The 10th of September my man with his horse and the twelve Indians arrived at my house, praise be to God. The Tomahittans have about sixty guns. Not such locks as ours be, the steels are long and channelled where the flints strike. The prisoner relates that the white people have a bell which is six foot over which they ring morning and evening, and at that time a great number of people congregate together and talk he knows not what. They have many blacks among them, oysters and many other shellfish, many swine, and cattle. Their building is brick. The Tomahittans have among them many brass pots and kettles from three gallons to thirty. They have two mullato women. All the white and black people they take they put to death since their twenty men were barbarously handled.

After nine days rest, my man with the horse he brought home and the twelve Tomahittans began their journey the 20th of September intending, God blessing him, at the spring of the next year to return with his companion at which time, God sparing my life, I hope to give you and some other friends better satisfaction. All this I presented to the Grand Assembly of Virginia, but not so much as one word in answer or any encouragement or assistance given.

The good successes of the last journey by my men performed gave me great hopes of a good success in the latter for I never heard from nor anything after I employed Mr. James Needham past from Aeno, an Indian town two days' journey beyond Occhonechee, in safety. But now begins the tragic scene of mishap. Upon the 27th of January following, I received a flying report by some Indians that my men were killed by the Tomahittans passing over their river as they were returning. Now daily came variable reports of their miscarriage. All Indians spoke darkly to hide the truth from being discovered for fear the guilt of the murder would be layed upon themselves. I sent another man out to inquire what might be found out of truth in the business, but before his return upon the 25th of February came one Henry Hatcher, an Englishman, to my house who had been at Occhonechee trading with those Indians, and tells me that my man I last sent out was stopped there by the Occhonechees from going any further until Hatcher persuaded them to let my man pass, which they did accordingly. This Hatcher further told me that Mr. James Needham was certainly killed at his going out, but by whom he knew not, but as the Occhonechees said by the Tomahittans that went with him, but said Hatcher I saw the Occhonechee Indian known by the name of John, a fat thick bluff faced fellow, have Mr. James Needham's pistols and gun in his hand, as the Indian himself told Hatcher.

This Indian John by his Indian name is called Hasecoll. Now you are to note that this Indian John was one that went with Mr. James Needham and my man Gabriel Arthur at the first to the Tomahittans and returned with Mr. James Needham to my house where he the said John received a reward to his content and agreed with me to go again with him. And endeavor his protection to the Tomahittans and to return with Mr. James Needham and my man to my house the next spring and to that end received half his pay in hand. The rest he was to receive at his return. My poor man Gabriel Arthur all this while captivated all this time in a strange land, where never Englishman before had set foot, in all likelihood either slain, or at least never likely to return to see the face of an Englishman, but by the great providence and protection of God almighty still survives which just God will not suffer just and honest endeavors to fall quite to the ground. Maugre the devil and all his adherents.

Well, shall now give a relation, what my man hath discovered in all the time that Mr. James Needham left him at the Tomahittans to the 18th of June 74, which was the day Gabriel arrived at my house in safety with a Spanish Indian boy only, with difficulty and hazard. And how Mr.

James Needham came to his end by the hands of the barbarous rogue Indian John that had undertaken his protection and safety. And as brief as I can, give a touch upon the heads of the material matter my man's memory could retain, for he cannot write the greater pity, for should I insert all the particulars it would swell to too great a volume and perhaps seem too tedious to the courteous and charitable Reader, so I beg pardon for ignorant errors, and shall again come to Mr. Needham, where we left him.

From Aeno he journeyed to Sarrah, with his companions the Tomahittans and John the Occhonechee accompanied with more of his countrymen which was to see the tragedy acted as I suppose, it happened as they passed Sarrah river. An Indian let his pack slip into the water. Whether on purpose or by chance I cannot judge. Upon this some words passed between Needham and the Indian. Occhonechee Indian John took up Mr. Needham very short in words and so continued scolding all day until they had passed the Yattken town and so over Yattken river. Not far from the river Mr. Needham alighted it not being far from the foot of the mountains, and there took up their quarters. Still, Indian John continued his wailing and threatening. Mr. Needham took up a hatchet which lay by him, having his sword by him threw the hatchet on the ground by Indian John and said what John are you minded to kill me. Indian John immediately caught up a gun, which he himself had carried to kill meat for them to eat, and shot Mr. Needham near the burr of the ear and killed him. Notwithstanding, all the Tomahittans started up to rescue Needham but Indian John was too quick for them.

So died this heroic Englishman whose fame shall never die if my pen were able to eternalize it which had adventured where never any Englishman had dared to attempt before and with him died one hundred forty-four pounds sterling of my adventure with him. I wish I could have saved his life with ten times the value. Now his companions the Tomahittans all fell a weeping and cried what shall we do now you have killed the Englishman. We shall be cut off by the English. Indian John drew out his knife, stepped across the corpse of Mr. Needham, ripped open his body, drew out his heart, held it up in his hand, and turned and looked to the eastward, toward the English plantations and said he valued not all the English. The Tomahittans replied, how dare you do this, we are all afraid of the English. Indian John replied he was paid for what he had done and had received his reward, and then laid a command upon the Tomahittans that they should dispatch and kill the Englishman which Needham had left at the Tomahittans, and

immediately opened the packs, took what goods he pleased, so much as Needham's horse could carry, and so returned back.

Now we return to my man Gabriel Arthur. The Tomahittans hastened home as fast as they can to tell the news. The King or chief man not being at home, some of the Tomahittans who were great lovers of the Occhonechees went to put Indian John's command in speedy execution and tied Gabriel Arthur to a stake and laid heaps of combustible canes about him to burn him. But before the fire was put to, the King came into the town with a gun upon his shoulder and hearing of the uproar for some were with it and some against it. The King ran with great speed to the place, and said who is that that is going to put fire to the Englishman. A Weesock born started up with a firebrand in his hand and said that am I. The King forthwith cocked his gun and shot the Weesock dead, and ran to Gabriel and with his knife cut the thongs that tied him and had him go to his house and said let me see who dares touch him and all the Weesocks children they take are brought up with them as the Ianesaryes are amongst the Turks. This King came to my house upon the 21st of June, as you will hear in the following discourse.

Now after the tumult was over they made preparation for to manage the war, for that is the course of their living to forage, rob, and spoil other nations. And the king commands Gabriel Arthur to go along with a party that went to rob the Spaniards, promising him that in the next spring he himself would carry him home to his master. Gabriel must now be obedient to their commands. In the deplorable condition he was in was put in arms, gun, tomahawk, and target, and so marched away with the company, being about fifty.

They travelled eight days west and by south as he guessed and came to a town of Negroes, spacious and great, but all wooden buildings. Here, they could not take anything without being seen. The next day they marched along by the side of a great cart path, and about five or six miles as he judged came within sight of the Spanish town, walled about with brick and all brick buildings within. There he saw the steeple wherein hung the bell which Mr. Needham gives relation of and heard it ring in the evening. Here they did not stay but drew off and the next morning layed an ambush in a convenient place near the cart path before mentioned and there lay almost seven days to steal for their sustenance. The 7th day a Spaniard in a genteel habit, accoutered with gun, sword, and pistol. One of the Tomahittans, spying him at a distance, crept up to the path side and shot him to death. In his pocket were two pieces of gold and a small gold chain, which the Tomahittans

gave to Gabriel, but he unfortunately lost it in his venturing as you shall hear by the sequel. Here they hastened to the Negro town where they had the advantage to meet with a lone Negro. After him ran one of the Tomahittans with a dart in his hand, made with a piece of the blade of Needham's sword, and threw it after the Negro, struck him through between his shoulders so he fell down dead. They took from him some toys, which hung in his ears, and bracelets about his neck, and so returned as expeditiously as they could to their own homes.

They rested but a short time before another party was commanded out again and Gabriel Arthur was commanded out again, and this was to Port Royal. Here he refused to go, saying those were Englishmen and he would not fight against his own nation. He had rather be killed. The King told him they intended no harm to the Englishmen, for he had promised Needham at his first coming to him that he would never do violence against any English more but their business was to cut off a town of Indians which lived near the English. I but said Gabriel, what if any English be at that town, a trading? The King swore by the fire which they adore as their god they would not hurt them. So they marched away over the mountains and came upon the head of Port Royal river in six days. There they made perriaugers [*sic*] of bark and so passed down the stream with much swiftness. Next, coming to a convenient place of landing, they went on shore and marched to the eastward of the south, one whole day and part of the night. At length, they brought him to the sight of an English house, and Gabriel with some of the Indians crept up to the house side and listening what they said, they being talking within the house, Gabriel heard one say, pox take such a master that will not allow a servant a bit of meat to eat upon Christmas day. By that means Gabriel knew what time of the year it was, so they drew off secretly and hastened to the Indian town, which was not above six miles thence.

About break of day stole upon the town. The first house Gabriel came to there was an Englishman. He heard him say Lord have mercy upon me. Gabriel said to him run for your life. Said he, which way shall I run? Gabriel replied, which way thou wilt they will not meddle with you. So he ran and the Tomahittans opened and let him pass clear. There they got the Englishman's knapsack with beads, knives, and other petty truck in it. They made a very great slaughter upon the Indians and about sunrise they heard many great guns fired off amongst the English. Then they hastened away with what speed they could and in less than fourteen days arrived at the Tomahittans with their plunder.

Now the king must go to give the Monetons a visit which were his friends, "mony" signifying water and "ton" great in their language. Gabriel must go along with him. They set forth with sixty men and travelled ten days due north and then arrived at the Moneton town situated upon a very great river, at which place the tide ebbs and flows. Gabriel swam in the river several times, being fresh water. This is a great town and a great number of Indians belong to it, and in the same river Mr. Batt and Fallam were upon the head of it as you read in one of my first journals. This river runs northwest and out of the westerly side of it goes another very great river about a day's journey lower where the inhabitants are an innumerable company of Indians, as the Monetons told my man, which is twenty day's journey from one end to the other of the inhabitation, and all these are at war with the Tomahittans. When they had taken their leave of the Monetons, they marched three days out of their way to give a clap to some of that great nation, where they fell on with great courage and were as courageously repulsed by their enemy.

And here Gabriel was shot with two arrows, one of them in his thigh, which stopped his running, and so was taken prisoner, for Indian valor consists most in their heels for he that can run best is accounted the best man. These Indians thought this Gabriel to be no Tomahittan by the length of his hair, for the Tomahittans keep their hair close cut to the end so an enemy may not take an advantage to lay hold of them by it. They took Gabriel and scoured his skin with water and ashes, and when they perceived his skin to be white they made very much of him and admired his knife, gun, and hatchet they took with him. They gave those things to him again. He made signs to them the gun was the Tomahittans' which he had a desire to take with him, but the knife and hatchet he gave to the king. They not knowing the use of guns, the king received it with great shows of thankfulness for they had not any manner of iron instrument that he saw amongst them. While he was there they brought in a fat beaver which they had newly killed and went to swrynge [*sic*] it. Gabriel made signs to them that those skins were good amongst the white people toward the rising sun. They would know by signs how many such skins they would take for such a knife. He told them four and eight for such a hatchet and made signs that if they would let him return, he would bring many things amongst them. They seemed to rejoice at it and carried him to a path that carried to the Tomahittans. They gave him Rockahomony for his journey and so they departed, to be short.

When he came to the Tomahittans, the king had one short voyage more before he could

bring in Gabriel and that was down the river they live upon, in perriaugers [*sic*], to kill hogs, bears, and sturgeon which they did incontinent by five days and nights. They went down the river and came to the mouth of the salts where they could not see land but the water was not above three feet deep hard sand. By this means we know this is not the river the Spaniards live upon as Mr. Needham thought. Here they killed many swine, sturgeon, and beavers and barbecued them, so returned, and were fifteen days running up against the stream but no mountainous land to be seen but all level.

After they had made an end of costing of it about the 10th day of May 1674, the king with eighteen more of his people laden with goods began their journey to come to Fort Henry at the falls of Appomattock river in Charles City County in Virginia. They were not disturbed in all their travels until they came to Sarrah, where the Occhonechees were as I told you before to wait Gabriel's coming. There were but four Occhonechee Indians there so that they did not adventure to attempt any violent action by day. Here they say they saw the small truck lying under foot that Indian John had scattered and thrown about when he had killed Mr. Needham. When it grew pretty late in the night the Occhonechees began to work their plot and made an alarm by a hubbub, crying out the town was beset with innumerable company of strange Indians. This put the town people into a sudden fright, many being between sleeping and waking. Away run the Tomahittans and leave all behind them, and amongst the rest was Gabriel's two pieces of gold and chain in an Indian bag. Away slipped Gabriel and the Spanish Indian boy which he brought with him and hid themselves in the bushes.

After the Tomahittans were gone the four Occhonechees, for there came no more to disturb them, made diligent search for Gabriel. The moon shining bright Gabriel saw them, but he lying under cover of the bushes could not be seen by those Indians. In the morning the Occhonechees, having missed of their acme, passed home and Gabriel came into the town again and four of the Tomahittan's packs hired four Sarrah Indians to carry them to Aeno. Here he met with my man I had sent out so long ago before to inquire for news desperately sick of the flux. Here he could not get any to go forth with his packs for fear of the Occhonechees, so he left them and adventured himself with the Spanish Indian boy. The next day came before night in sight of the Occhonechee town undiscovered and there hid himself until it was dark, and then waded over onto the island where the Occhonechees are seated, strongly fortified by nature and that makes them so insolent for

they are but a handful of people, besides what vagabonds repair to them it being a receptacle for rogues. Gabriel escaped clearly through them and so waded out on this side and ran for it all night. Their food was huckleberries, which the woods were full of at that time and on the 18th of June with the boy arrived at my house, praise be to God for it.

Now we come again to the king of the Tomahittans. With his two sons and one more who took their packs with them and came along by Toteru under the foot of the mountains, until they met with James river and there made a canoe of bark and came down the river to the Manikins. From thence to Powetan by land, and across the neck and on the 20th of July at night arrived at my house and gave certain relation how Mr. James Needham came by his death. This king I received with much joy and kind entertainment, and much joy there was between Gabriel and the king, that once more they were met again. I gave the king a good reward for his high favor in preserving my man's life. He stayed with me a few days, promising to be with me again at the fall of the leaf with a party that would not be frightened by the way, and doubt not but he will come if he be not intercepted by self ended traders for they have strove what they could to block up the design from the beginning. Which were here too tedious to relate.

Thus ends the tragedy. I hope yet to live to write comminically [*sic*] of the business. If I could have the countenance of some person of honour in England to curb and bridle the obstructers here for there is no encouragement at all to be had for him that is Sir Your humble servant.

AB WOOD

From Fort Henry, August the 22nd, 1674.