

**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

Sources:

The First Explorations of the Trans-Allegheny Region by the Virginians, 1650-1674, by Clarence W. Alvord and Lee Bidgood, The Arthur H. Clark Co., Cleveland, 1912, pp 209-226.

The Travels of James Needham and Gabriel Arthur through Virginia, North Carolina, and Beyond, 1673-1674, edited by R. P. Stephen Davis, Jr. *Southern Indian Studies* 39:31-55, 1990.

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

That I have been att ye charge to the value of two hundered pounds starling in ye discovery of ye south or west sea Declaro: and what my indevors were in two yeares you was made sencible of by ye handes of Thomas Batt and Robert Fallam in part: att my owne charge ye effects of this present yeare I am now to give you an account of in as much brevitie as I can. About ye 10th of Aprill: 1673: I sent out two English men and eight Indians, with accommidation for three moneths, but by misfortune and unwillingness of ye Indians before the mountaines, that any should discover beyond them my people returned effecting little, to be short, on ye 17th of May: 1673 I sent them out againe, with ye like number of Indians and four horses. about ye 25th of June they mett with ye Tomahitans as they were journeying from ye mountains to ye Occhonechees. The Tomahitans told my men that if an English man would stay with them they would some of them com to my plantation with a letter which a eleven of them did accordingly, and about fourty of them promised to stay with my men att Occhonechee untill ye eleven returned: ye effect of ye letter was they resolved by Gods Blessing to goe through with ye Tomahitans. ye eleven resolve to stay at my house three dayes to rest themselves. I hastend away another English man and a horse to Occhonechee to give them intelligence; but by the extremity of raine they could not bee expeditious, so that through ye instigation of ye Occhonechees, and through ye doubt they had, as I suppose, of ye miscarrge of theire men att my plantations, being soe possest by the other Indians,

ye Tomahitans went away, and my two men with them, and as since I understand ye eleven over tooke them, before they came to ye mountains, with my letter, which rejoyced ye two English men and one Appomattecke Indian for noe more durst to go a long with them; they jornied nine days from Occhonechee to Sitteree: west and by south, past nine rivers and creeks which all end in this side ye mountains and emty them selves into ye east sea. Sitteree being the last towne of inhabitation and not any path further untill they came within two days journey of ye Tomahitans; they travell from thence up the mountaines upon ye sun setting all ye way, and in foure dayes gett to ye toppe, sometimes leading their horses sometimes rideing. Ye ridge upon ye topp is not above two hundred paces over; ye decent better then on this side. in halfe a day they came to ye foot, and then levell ground all ye way, many slashes upon ye heads of small runns. The slashes are full of very great canes and ye water runnes to ye north west. They pass five rivers and about two hundred paces over ye fifth being ye middle most halfe a mile broad all sandy bottoms, with pebble stones, all foardable and all empties themselves north west, when they travell upon ye plaines, from ye mountaines they goe downe, for severall dayes they see straged 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 ye badness of the way as by hard travell. not having time to feed. when they lost sight of those hilles they see a fogg or smoke like a cloud from whence raine falls for severall days on their right hand as they travell still towards the sun setting great store of game, all along as turkes deere, ellkes, beare, wolfe and other vermin very tame, at ye end of fifteen dayes from Sitteree they arive at ye Tomahitans river, being ye 6th river from ye mountains. this river at ye Tomahitans town seemes to run more westerly than ye other five. This river they past in cannoos ye town being seated in ye other side about foure hundred paces broad above ye town, within sight, ye horse they had left waded only a small channell swam, as they were very kindly entertained by them, even to addoration in their cerrimonies of courtesies and a stake was sett up in ye middle of ye towne to fasten ye horse to, and abundance of corne and all manner of pulse with fish, flesh and beares oyle for ye horse to feed upon and a scaffold sett up before day for my two men and Appomattocke Indian that their people might stand and gaze at them and not offend them by their throng. This towne is seated on ye river side, having ye clefts of ye river on ye one side being very high for its defence, the other three sides trees of two foot over, pitched on end, twelve foot high, and on ye topps scaffolds placed with parrapits to defend the walls and offend their

enemies which men stand on to fight, many nations of Indians inhabitt downe this river, which runs west upon ye salts which they are att warre withe and to that end keepe one hundred and fifty cannoes under ye command of their forte. ye leaste of them will carry twenty men, and made sharpe at both ends like a wherry for swiftness, this forte is foure square; 300: paces over and ye houses sett in streets, many hornes like bulls hornes lye upon their dunghills, store of fish they have, one sort they have like unto stocke - fish cured after that manner. Eight dayes jorny down this river lives a white people which have long beardes and whiskers and weares clothing, and on some of ye other rivers lives a hairey people, not many yeares since ye Tomahittans sent twenty men laden with beaver to ye white people, they killed tenn of them and put ye other tenn in irons, two of which tenn 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 returnes with his horse, ye Appomattock Indian and 12 Tomahittans, eight men and foure women, one of those eight is hee which hath been a prisoner with ye white people, my other man remaines with them untill ye next returne to learne ye language. the 10th of September my man with his horse and ye twelve Indians arived at my house praise bee to God, ye Tomahitans have a bout sixty gunnes, not such locks as oures bee, the steeles are long and channelld where ye flints strike, ye prisoner relates that ye white people have a bell which is six foot over which they ring morning and evening and att that time a great number of people congregate together and talkes he knowes not what. they have many blacks among them. oysters and many other shell-fish, many swine and cattle. Their building is brick, the Tomahittans have a mongest them many brass potts and kettles from three gallons to thirty. they have two mullato women all ye white and black people they take they put to death since their twenty men were barbarously handled. After nine dayes rest, my man with ye horse he brought home and ye twelve Tomahittans began their jorny ye 20th of September intending, God blessing him, at ye spring of ye next yeare to returne with his companion att which time God spareing me life I hope to give you and some other friends better satisfaction. all this I presented to ye Grand Assembly of Virginia, but not soe much as one word in answer or any encouragement or assistance given.

The good suckses of ye last jorney by my men performed gave mee great hopes of a good suckses in ye latter for I never heard from nor any thing after I employed Mr. James Needham past from Aeno an Indian towne two dayes jorny beyond Occhoneeche in safty but now begins ye tragicall scene of bad hap. upon ye 27th of January following I received a flying report by some

Indians that my men were killd by ye Tomahitans passing over their river as they were returning, now daily came variable reports of their miscarriage. All Indians speak darkly to hide the truth from being discovered for fear the guilt of the murder would be laid 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 English man, to my house which had been at Occhonechee a trading with them 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 Occhonechees Indian known by the name of John, a fat thick bluff faced fellow, have Mr. James Needham's pistols and gun in his hands, 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 Gabriell Arthur at first to the Tomahittans and returned with Mr. James Needham to my house where he said John received a reward to his content and agreed with me to go and gain with him. and endeavour 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 Gabriell Arthur all this while captivated all this time in a strange land, where never English man before had set foot, in all likelihood either slain, or at least never likely to return to see the face of an English man, 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. Murtherer 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 Gabriell 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 rascal Indian John that had undertaken his protection and safety and as briefly as I can give a touch upon the heads of the material matter my mans 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.

Needhams, where wee left him. from Aeno hee journied to Sarrah, with his companions ye Tomahitons and John ye Occhoenechee accompanied with more of his country men which was to see ye tragady acted as I suppose, it happened as they past Sarrah river an Indian lett his pack slip into ye water whether on purpose or by chance I canot judge, upon this some words past betwine Needham and ye Indian. Ochenechee Indian John tooke up Mr. Needham very short in words and soe continued scoulding all day untill they had past ye Yattken towne and soe over Yattken river, not far from ye river Mr. Needham alighted it not being far from the foot of ye mountaines, and there tooke up their quarters. Still Indian John continued his wailing and threatening Mr. Needham tooke up a hatchet which lay by him, haveing his sword by him threw ye hatchet on ye ground by Indian John and said what John are you minded to kill me. Indian John imediately caught up a gunn, which hee him selfe had carried to kill meat for them to eate and shot Mr. Needham neare ye burr of ye eare and killd him not withstanding all ye Tomahittans started up to rescue Needham but Indian John was too quick for them, soe died this heroyick English man whose fame shall never die if my penn were able to eternize it which had adventured where never any English man had dared to atempt before and with him died one hundered forty-foure pounds starling of my adventure with him. I wish I could have saved his life with ten times ye vallue. Now his companions ye Tomahittans all fell a weepeing and cried what shall-wee doe now you have killd ye English man wee shall be cut of by ye English. Indian John drew out his knife stept across ye corpes of Mr. Needham, ript open his body, drew out his hart, held it up in his hand and turned and looked to ye eastward, toward ye English plantations and said hee vallued not all ye English. Ye Tomahittans repleyed, how dare you doe this, wee are all afraid of ye English. Indian John repleyed he was paid for what he had done and had receved his rewarde and then laid a command upon ye Tomahittans that they should dispatch and kill ye English man which Needham had left att ye Tomahittans and immediately opened the packs tooke what goods he pleased, soe much as Needham's horse could carry and soe returned backe.

Now wee returne to my man Gabriell Arther. Ye Tomahittans hasten home as fast as they can to tell ye newes ye King or chife man not being att home, some of ye Tomahittans which were great lovers of ye Occhenechees went to put Indian Johns command in speedy execution and tied Gabriell Arther to a stake and laid heaps of combustibile canes a bout him to burne him, but before ye fire was put too ye King came into ye towne with a gunn upon his shoulder and heareing of ye

uprore for some was with it and some against it. ye King ran with great speed to ye place, and said who is that that is going to put fire to ye English man. a Weesock borne started up with a fire brand in his hand said that am I. Ye King forthwith cockt his gunn and shot ye wesock dead, and ran to Gabriell and with his knife cutt ye thongs that tide him and had him goe to his house and said lett me see who dares touch him and all ye wesocks children they take are brought up with them as ye Ianesaries are amongst ye Turkes. this King came to my house upon ye 21st of June as you will heare in ye following discouerse.

Now after ye tumult was over they make preparation for to manage ye warr for that is ye course of their living to forage robb and spoyle other nations and the king commands Gabriell Arther to goe along with a party that went to robb ye Spanyarrd, promising him that in ye next spring hee him selfe would carry him home to his master. Gabriell must now bee obedient to their commands. in ye deplorable condition hee was in was put in armes, gun, tomahauke, and targett and soe marched a way with ye company, beeing about fifty. they travelled eight days west and by south as he guest and came to a town of negroes, spacious and great, but all wooden buildings Heare they could not take any thing without being spied. The next day they marched along by ye side of a great cart path, and about five or six miles as he judgeth came within sight of the Spanish town, walld about with brick and all brick buildings within. There he saw ye steeple where in hung ye bell which Mr. Needham gives relation of and harde it ring in ye eveing. heare they durst not stay but drew off and ye next morning layd an ambush in a convenient place neare ye cart path before mentioned and there lay almost seven dayes to steale for their sustenance. Ye 7th day a Spaniard in a gentille habitt, accoutered with gunn, sword and pistoll. one of ye Tomahittans espieing him at a distance crept up to ye path side and shot him to death. In his pockett were two pices of gold and a small gold chain. which ye Tomahittans gave to Gabriell, but hee unfourtunately lost it in his venturing as you shall heare by ye sequell. Here they hasted to ye negro town where they had ye advantage to meett with a lone negro. After him runs one of the Tomahittans with a dart in his hand, made with a pice of ye blade of Needhams sworde, and threw it after ye negro, struck him through betwene his shoulders soe hee fell downe dead. They tooke from him some toys. which hung in his eares, and bracelets about his neck and soe returned as expeditiously as they could to their owne homes.

They rested but a short time before another party was commanded out a gaine and Gabrielle

Arther was comanded out a gaine, and this was to Porte Royall, Here he refused to goe saying those were English men and he would not fight a gainst his own nation, he had rather be killd. The King tould him they intended noe hurt to ye English men, for he had promised Needham att his first coming to him that he would never doe violence a gainst any English more but their buisness was to cut off a town of Indians which lived neare ye English, I but said Gabriell what if any English be att that towne, a trading, ye King sware by ye fire which they adore as their god they would not hurt them soe they marched a way over ye mountains and came upon ye head of Portt Royall river in six days. There they made perriaugers of bark and soe past down ye streame with much swiftness, next coming to a convenient place of landing they went on shore and marched to ye eastward of ye south, one whole day and part of ye night. At lengeth they brought him to ye sight of an English house, and Gabriell with some of the Indians crept up to ye house side and lisening what they said, they being talkeing with in ye house, Gabriell hard one say, pox take such a master that will not allow a servant a bit of meat to eate upon Christmas day, by that meanes Gabriell knew what time of ye yeare it was, soe they drew of secretly and hasten to ye Indian town, which was not above six miles thence. about breake of day stole upon ye towne. Ye first house Gabriell came too there was an English man. Hee hard him say Lord have mercy upon mee. Gabriell said to him runn for thy life. Said hee which way shall I run. Gabriell repleyed, which way thou wilt they will not meddle with thee. Soe hee rann and ye Tomahittans opend and let him pas cleare there they got ye English mans snapsack with beades, knives and other petty truck in it. They made a very great slaughter upon the Indians and a bout sun riseing they hard many great guns fired off amongst the English. Then they hastened a way with what speed they could and in less then fourteene dayes arived att ye Tomahittns with their plunder.

Now ye king must goe to give ye monetons a visit which were his frends, mony signifying water and ton great in their language Gabriell must goe along with him They gett forth with sixty men and travelled tenn days due north and then arived at ye monyton towne sittuated upon a very great river att which place ye tide ebbs and flowes. Gabriell swom in ye river severall times, being fresh water, this is a great towne and a great number of Indians belong unto it, and in ye same river Mr. Batt and Fallam were upon the head of it as you read in one of my first jornalls. This river runes north west and out of ye westerly side of it goeth another very great river about a days journey lower where the inhabitance are an inumarable company of Indians, as the monytons told

my man which is twenty dayes journey from one end to ye other of ye inhabitance, and all these are at warr with the Tomahitans. when they had taken their leave of ye monytons they marched three days out of thire way to give a clap to some of that great nation, where they fell on with great courage and were as curagiously repulled by their enimes.

And here Gabriell received shott with two arrows, one of them in his thigh, which stopt his running and soe was taken prisoner, for Indian valour consists most in their heeles for he that can run best is accounted ye best man. These Indians thought this Gabriell to be noe Tomahittan by ye length of his haire, for ye Tomahittans keepe their haire close cut to ye end an enime may not take an advantage to lay hold of them by it. They tooke Gabriell and scowered his skin with water and ashes, and when they perceived his skin to be white they made very much of him and admire at his knife gunn and hatchett they tooke with him. They gave those things to him a gaine. He made signes to them the gun was ye Tomahittans which he had a desire to take with him, but ye knife and hatchet he gave to ye king. they not knowing ye use of gunns, the king received it with great shewes of thankfulness for they had not any manner of iron instrument that hee saw amongst them whilst he was there they brought in a fat beaver which they had newly killed and went to swynge [*sic*] it. Gabriell made signes to them that those skins were good amongst the white people toward the sun rising they would know by signes how many such skins they would take for such a knife. He told them foure and eight for such a hatchett and made signes that if they would lett him return, he would bring many things amongst them. they seemed to rejoyce at it and carried him to a path that carried to ye Tomahittans gave him Rokahamony for his journey and soe they departed, to be short. when he came to ye Tomahittans ye king had one short voyage more before hee could bring in Gabriell and that was downe ye river, they live upon in perriougers to kill hoggs, beares and sturgion which they did incontinent by five dayes and nights. They went down ye river and came to ye mouth of ye salts where they could not see land but the water not above three foot deepe hard sand. By this meanes wee know this is not ye river ye Spanyards live upon as Mr. Needham did thinke. Here they killed many swine, sturgin and beavers and barbicued them, soe returned and were fifteen dayes running up a gainst ye streame but noe mountainous land to be seene but all levell.

After they had made an end of costing of it about ye 10th day of May 1674, ye king with eighteen more of his people laden with goods begin their journey to come to Forte Henry at ye

falls of Appomattock river in Charles City County in Virginia, they were not disturbed in all their travels until they came to Sarah, w[h]ere ye Occhenechees weare as I told you before to waite Gabriells coming. There were but foure Occohenechees Indians there soe that they durst not adventure to attempt any violent action by day. Heare they say they saw the small truck lying under foot that Indian John had scattered and thrown about when he had killd Mr. Needham. when it grew pritty late in ye night ye Occhenee began to worke thire plot and made an alaram by an hubbub crying out the towne was besett with in numarable company of strange Indians this puts the towne people into a sodane fright many being betweene sleepeing and wakeing, away rune ye Tomahittans and leave all behind them, and a mongst ye rest was Gabriells two peices of gold and chaine in an Indian bagge away slipe Gabriell and ye Spanish Indian boy which he brought with him and hide themselves in ye bushes.

After ye Tomahittans were gon ye foure Occhenechees for there came no more to disturb them, made diligent search for Gabriell. Ye moone shining bright Gabriell saw them, but he lying under covert of ye bushes could not be seene by that Indians. In ye morning ye Occhenechees haveing mist of thire acme passed home and Gabriell came into ye town againe and foure of ye Tomahittans packs hires foure Sarrah Indians to carry them to Aeno. Here he mett with my man I had sent out soe long ago before to inquire for news desprately sick of ye flux, here hee could not gett any to goe forth with his packs for feare of ye Occhenechees, soe he left them and adventured himselfe with ye Spanish Indian boy. ye next day came before night in sight of ye Occhenechees towne undiscovered and there hid himselfe until it was darke and then waded over into ye iland where ye Occhenechees are seated, strongly fortified by nature and that makes them soe insolent for they are but a handfull of people, besides what vagabonds repaire to them it beeing a receptackle for rogues. Gabriell escapes cleaurely through them and soe wades out on this side and runs for it all night. Their food was huckleburyes, which ye woods were full of att that time and on ye 18th June with ye boy arived att my house, praise be to God for it. now wee come again to ye king of ye Tomahittans. With his two sonns and one more who tooke thire packs with them and comes along by Totero under ye foot of ye mountains, until they mett with James river and there made a cannoe of barke and came downe the river to the Manikins. from thence to Powetan by land, and across the neck and on ye 20th of July at night arived att my house and gives certaine relation how Mr. James Needham came by his death. This king I received with much joy and kind

entertainment and much joy there was betweene Gabriell and ye king, that once more they were met again. I gave the king a good reward for his high favor in preserveing my mans life. Hee staid with me a few dayes promising to bee with mee againe att ye fall of ye leafe with a party that would not be fritted by ye way and doubt not but hee will come if hee bee not intercepted by selfe ended traders for they have strove what they could to block up ye designe from ye beginning. which were here too tedious to relate. Thus endes ye tragedy I hope yett to live to write cominically of ye buisness. If I could have ye countenance of some person of honour in England to curb and bridle ye obstructers here for here is no incouragement att all to be had for him that is Sir
Youre humble servant

AB WOOD.

From Forte Henry, August the 22th, 1674.