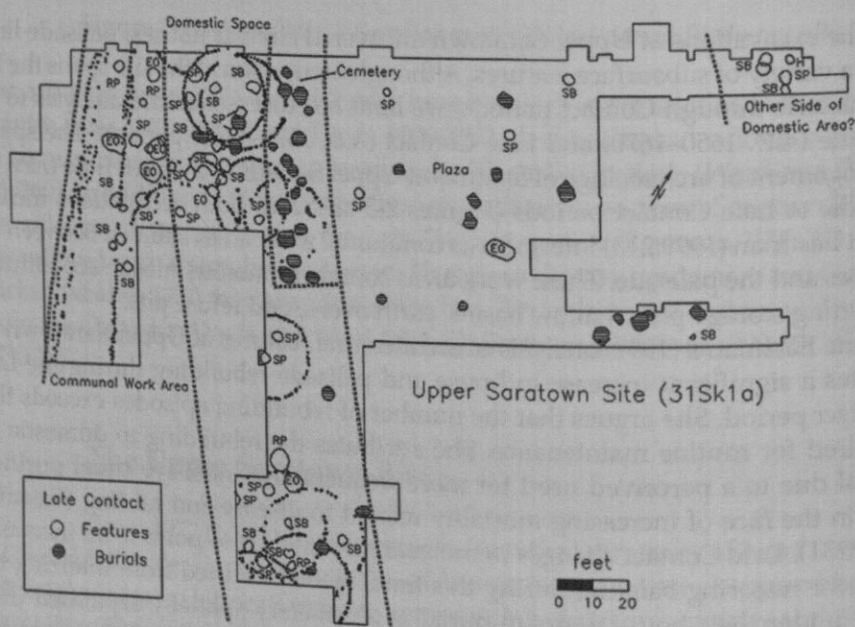


**Figure 2-3.** Plan view of Middle Contact period (A.D. 1650–1670) features at Upper Saratown (EO, earth oven; RP, refuse pit; SB, shallow basin; SP, storage pit).



**Figure 2-4.** Plan view of Late Contact period (A.D. 1670–1710) features at Upper Saratown (EO, earth oven; RP, refuse pit; SB, shallow basin; SP, storage pit).

Analysis of ceramic materials from various feature types at Upper Saratown revealed several instances of cross-mends between sherds recovered from the large shallow basins (or earth ovens) and sherds found in storage pits (Eastman 1996), suggesting that several pits were in use simultaneously and then rapidly filled with trash (Eastman 1996:8). Eastman (1996), Ward (1980, 1993), and Wilson (1977, 1985) contend that the sheer quantity of food remains recovered from these multiple-pit facilities is much too great to represent mere family consumption. Ward (1993:7) suggests that this sequence of pit use and abandonment corresponds with seasonal renewal rituals similar to the busk or mourning ceremonies.

Several lines of evidence from these features provide additional support for the argument that people intensified their renewal activities from the Middle to Late Contact periods at Upper Saratown. Compared with Middle Contact features, Late Contact period features yielded more and larger potsherds that refit into larger vessel sections (Eastman 1996:9). It appears that people intentionally broke these vessels (Eastman 1996:9). In addition, miniature vessels, an artifact type that usually occurs in burial contexts, were also recovered from the Late Contact multiple-pit facilities (Eastman 1996). The inclusion of miniature vessels further suggests a special function for these facilities (Eastman 1996). It seems significant that some vessels were ritually killed in the context of community-level events during a period marked by death and social disruption.

In sum, Eastman's careful analyses of site structure, architecture, feature function, and ceramics support an argument that over time ritual activities were given increasing emphasis at Upper Saratown. As part of these communal events, people cleaned out their storage pits, ritually killed domestic pottery, and ate large quantities of food. The increasing intensity of community-level events at Upper Saratown coincides with increased mortality from disease and raiding. In the face of severe population loss, this increase in ritual activity is perhaps best interpreted as "a more drastic means of purification and renewal" (Eastman 1996:10).

### The Upper Saratown Plant Assemblage

The designation of the multiple-pit clusters as feasting facilities was part of what first attracted our attention to the plant assemblage. To explore whether it is possible to distinguish everyday meals from those of special occasions, we analyzed plant remains recovered from 10 features at Upper Saratown. Five features date to the Middle Contact period; five to the Late Contact period. Some of the features were originally deep, cylindrical storage pits, while others were very large, shallow basins that may have been earth ovens or roasting pits. All were filled with large amounts of pottery, carbonized plants, and animal bones.

The identification of the shallow basins as cooking facilities is far from certain, however, as they lack evidence of *in situ* burning (Davis, personal communication 2004). It is possible that the refuse in these pits is ordinary household debris or that it derives from simultaneous household cleansing, communal feasts pre-

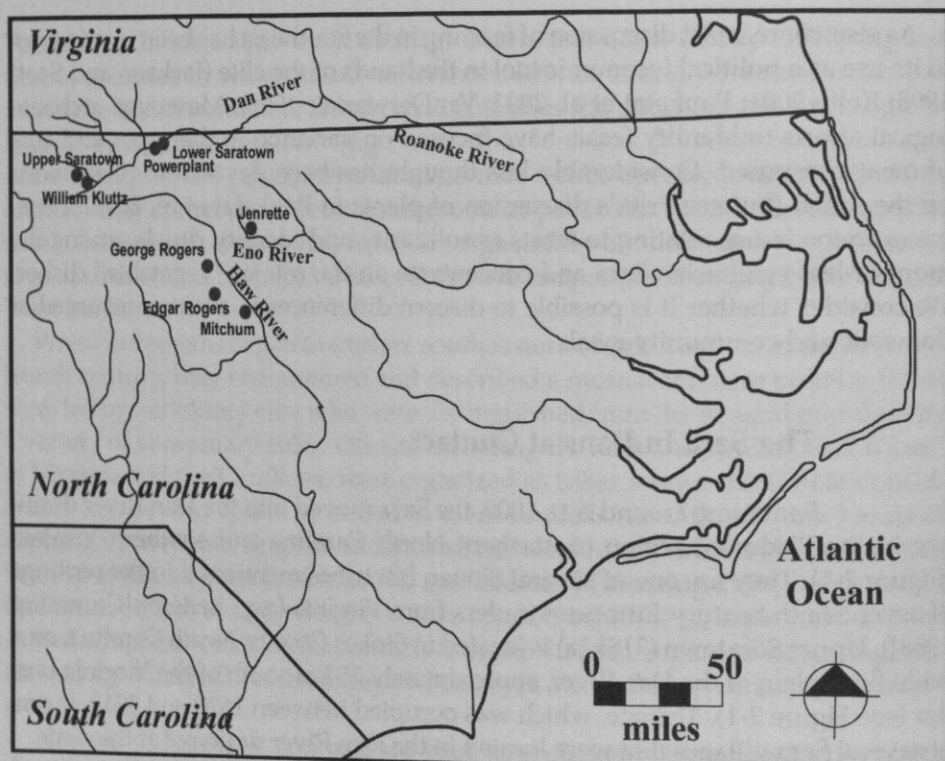


Figure 2-1. Map of North Carolina with Contact period Piedmont sites.

came at a high price. Disease epidemics became much more serious in Sara communities after 1670 (Ward and Davis 1999:257). Archaeological evidence points to a huge increase in Sara graves compared with earlier periods (Ward and Davis 1999:260). In addition to increasing exposure to disease, northern Seneca raids on Sara villages intensified during the Late Contact period (Eastman 1999:39). The Sara suffered such dramatic losses from European disease epidemics and Seneca attacks that after 1710 they abandoned the Dan River drainage and moved south to join the Catawba (Davis and Ward 1991:53; Eastman 1996:5–6, 1999:39; Wilson 1983:128).

### The Upper Saratown Site

From 1972 to 1981, archaeologists from the University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill's Research Laboratories of Archaeology excavated approximately 16,400 square feet of Upper Saratown, representing about one-quarter of the total occupation (Figure 2-2). Research at the site has produced several theses, including a master's thesis (Wilson 1977) and two dissertations (Eastman 1999; Wilson 1983). Both Eastman (1999) and Wilson (1977, 1983) consider changes in Sara identity and material culture throughout the contact era. Their careful research has laid a foundation from which we consider the social uses of plant foods.



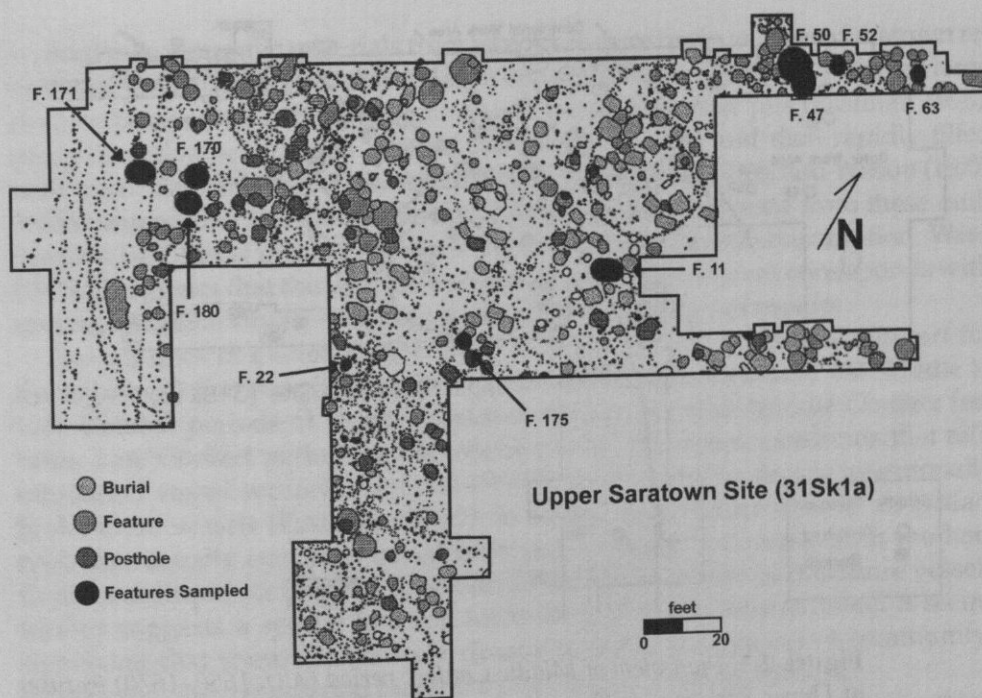


Figure 2-2. Plan view of the Upper Saratown site at subsoil.

The excavations at Upper Saratown uncovered circular houses, palisade lines, and a variety of subsurface features. Although occupation at the site spans the late Prehistoric through Contact periods, we limit our discussion and analysis to the Middle (A.D. 1650–1670) and Late Contact (A.D. 1670–1710) periods. The spatial arrangement of archaeological features at Upper Saratown changed little from the Middle to Late Contact periods (Figures 2-3 and 2-4). Both occupations include what Eastman (1999:215) interprets as communal work areas situated between the houses and the palisade. These work areas contain numerous subsurface features, including storage pits, shallow basins, earth ovens, and refuse pits.

Jane Eastman's (1999) analysis of architectural features at Upper Saratown indicates a significant increase in house and palisade rebuilding during the Late Contact period. She argues that the number of rebuilding episodes exceeds that required for routine maintenance. She attributes the rebuilding to domestic renewal due to a perceived need for more frequent and intensive ritual purification in the face of increasing mortality related to disease and raiding (Eastman 1999:231). Late Contact changes in mortuary practices also point to an increased need for restoring balance; during this time, the Sara shifted from interring the dead under their house floors to burial in a cemetery spatially separated from domestic structures (Eastman 1999:232). By changing the locus of interment, the residents of Upper Saratown may have been attempting to achieve ritual purity by creating a more marked separation between the living and the dead. Eastman's interpretations of ritual renewal and purification are consistent with what we know of native Southeastern cosmology more generally (Hudson 1976).