

**Nicholas Childers and
The Tongue of Time**

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Introduction

During an internet research episode in 2009, I discovered a rare book by Joseph Comstock, entitled, *The Tongue of Time, and Star of the States: a System of Human Nature, with the Phenomena of the Heavens and Earth: American Antiquities, Remains of Giants, Geology, Volcanoes, Egyptian and Indian Magic, Diet, Dress, Drinks, Diseases, Sleep, Somnambulism, Trances, Resuscitation: Also an Account of Persons with Two Souls, and of Five Persons who Told Colors by the Touch*. Comstock's book was first published in 1825. I downloaded a .pdf file of an 1838 edition of the book, which is held in the Yale University Library, through the convenience of Google Books.

Among many other diverse subjects, Comstock's book contains unique and interesting descriptions of aboriginal constructions in central Georgia (Comstock 1838). Comstock's discussion of Georgia antiquities, which is part of a broader discussion of archaeological sites in North America, was based on information gleaned from an article by Dr. Nicholas Childers. Comstock cited Childers' report of 1810, which was published in an obscure New York medical periodical. Dr. Childers witnessed archaeological evidence that Comstock describes in his *Tongue of Time*.... In 2010, again thanks to Google Books, I discovered the original article on the subject of Georgia antiquities written by Nicholas Childers in 1810 and published in 1811 (Childers 1811).

This short monograph accomplishes two goals. First, the early descriptions of aboriginal sites in central Georgia provided by Childers and Comstock are herein transcribed and made available for modern anthropological scholarship. Dr. Nicholas Childers' descriptions of archaeological remains in 1810 are among the earliest for central Georgia and are generally unknown to the present archaeologist community. Comstock's rehash of Childers' writings is included for comparative purposes. Secondly, biographical data concerning the original source of this information, Nicholas Childers, is presented.

Nicholas Childers' Story

The text of *Cursory Observations and Remarks on the Antiquities of Georgia. Addressed to the Editors by Dr. Nicholas Childers, of Baldwin County, (Georgia,) in a communication dated June, 1810* (Childers 1811:146-153), which appeared in the journal, *The Medical Repository*, was downloaded and is transcribed below as unedited text:

Various circumstances combine to render a knowledge of our geological history desirable. Much difference of opinion having existed among the inhabitants of every country, and in every age, respecting the antiquity of the planet we inhabit, it becomes an object of rational curiosity to inquire into the subject with patience and impartiality. In order to this, we must suffer ourselves to be governed by those data, imprinted by the hand of nature on the objects which surround us, as well as by those with which the industry of man has presented us, in the recesses of the forest. These are faithful monuments, unbiassed by the rivalry of authors; untarnished by the conflicting interests of ambitious man.

I have long dwelt in silence on this interesting subject, in the hope, that some person competent to render it ample justice might take up the pen; but in this I have been disappointed, and consequently enter upon the duty 'with all my imperfections on my head,' in the hope of rescuing from oblivion those unequivocal traits of the remote civilization of this 'new country.'

The forests of America are rich in the remains of ancient industry and art. Kentucky, Ohio, New-York, and Virginia, with many other places, have severally presented to

the eye of curiosity, a splendid scene for contemplation; and it is the province of this feeble attempt to shew, that Georgia herself can also furnish her full quota to this collection of useful knowledge.

The State of Georgia may be naturally divided into the upper and lower countries. The lower country extends from the sea-coast many miles on an almost uninterrupted plain, intersected with numerous morasses indicative of its former submersion in the waters of the Atlantic. The upper country extends from this level tract, interspersed with hills, valleys and rivulets, until it intersects the main ledge of mountains which divide the eastern from the western waters. On the last portion of this country I shall bestow the subsequent observations.

There is, near the dividing line between the broken and level portions of this State, an extensive ledge of marine productions, as oyster-shells, &c.; and this ledge reaches quite across the State, on a direction nearly parallel to the sea-coast. This immense depository of marine substances, although in a state of considerable decay, as it respects their organization, forms a fund of lime for building, &c. which is obtained by the usual process of digging and calcination. Plasterers, however, allege, that it has not that consistence and purity necessary to the most perfect workmanship. Thus much I have premised concerning this bed of marine substances, expecting to derive some collateral aid from it in the investigation of the subject before me.

A few miles above this 'limestone tract,' (as it is generally termed,) commence those traits of ancient habitations, and evidences of former civilization, which I am about to describe. The first of these, which I saw, is on the Oakmulgee

river, near the site on which stands Fort Hawkins; here are two *tumuli*, or mounds, of considerable magnitude. The one which I ascended I should judge, (for I did not measure it,) to be not less than 20 feet in perpendicular height, and 150 feet in circumference at its base; and has every appearance of having been the workmanship of some civilized nation. It is situated on the plain extending from the river, which runs at the distance of a quarter of a mile from the mound: there is around it no appearance of hills, or natural irregularities on the surface of the earth, which could induce the slightest suspicion of its being natural. It is in shape a regular cone, with its apex a little flattened, (perhaps from frequent ablation,) and on its summit, as well as sides, grow trees of as large size as any in the adjoining forest; they are of different kinds, as oak, hickory, &c There is another mound, of the same shape and description, a few hundred paces distant from the first, but of a less dimension, near which stands the public store-house. I regret not having it in my power to examine the interior of these mounds, (or barrows) as I am informed their contents are very interesting. In digging into the side of one of them, in order to fix some building belonging to the garrison, (perhaps the magazine,) they found several mutilated remains of guns, the plates of whose locks were much longer than those now in use, and appeared to have had their 'works' on the outside. There have been found also, at or near this place, some remains of farming utensils, as axes and hoes, of a form very different from those of modern times: these have been found in considerable numbers. Added to these, and of much more importance, there has been found here the clapper of a bell, which, after a lapse of time to us unknown, and after undergoing, during this immense length of time, the

influence of oxydizement, now weighs seven pounds. This I have not seen, but am credibly informed it is in the possession of a Mr. Miller of Jones county. At or near the same place has been found a brass medal, with some obscure hieroglyphic figures on it; and on one side, plainly to be distinguished, the word '*fioma*.' This information I received from Dr. Rawlings, formerly of Fort-Hawkins, physician to the troops; a gentleman of intelligence and veracity; and have had it since confirmed by Lieutenant Thomas Spencer, of the United States troops, stationed there. In a conversation with Lieutenant Spencer in the course of last winter, he informed me, as the result of his best observation, that there were strong reasons for believing that the place on which these ancient relics are found, had been garrisoned by an army of 100,000 men.

About fifteen or twenty miles from Fort Hawkins, in the county of Jones, there is another of these mounds of considerable size, and of the same shape. This mound is attached to a fortification of considerable extent. - The fortification is on the north side of the mound, and is perfectly circular: it incloses an area of about twelve acres of land, and has four gate-ways at opposite points. It is an embankment, or earthen wall, regularly thrown up; and is now from three to four feet in perpendicular height, with an entrenchment, not yet obliterated, on the outside. On this wall there are numerous trees, as large as any in the wood surrounding it, with every appearance to induce the belief that they have grown up since the ruin of the fortification. Opposite the northern-most gate-way there is, on the inside of the wall, an oblong elevation of earth, as high or higher than the wall, of perhaps 150 feet by 80: this approaches to within ten feet of the

wall, and appears to have been erected for the protection of the besieged. The mound on the south, is also inclosed by a similar wall or embankment, whose area is about one acre.

On Cedar creek, about ten miles from the aforementioned fortification, there is another still more striking in its appearances. It is situated on the summit of a very high hill; and incloses about seven acres of land. This portion of land is surrounded by a double circular wall of earth thrown up. The wall is formed by two embankments, about 20 feet asunder, of equal height, *which is now at least from six to eight feet*. There are here, as in the other, four gate-ways, nearly at opposite points, and about 20 feet wide. On the inside of the gateway, on the northeast, there is an elevation of earth about 200 by 120 feet, and is at this time eight feet in perpendicular height, at the end next the wall of the fort, and about five feet at the inner end; about midway of its length it falls abruptly about three feet, forming something like the steps of an amphitheatre. On the end of this elevation, next the centre of the fort, the earth is cut into triangular protuberances, about 15 feet in width at their base, the angle projecting towards the centre of the fort, which protuberances form the front of the elevation. There are small mounds, of the same elevation and shape, to guard each gateway, about 20 feet to the right of the passage. On the outside of this wall there is a tumulus, or barrow, which has never been examined, but is supposed to have been the depository of the dead.

The eye of an experienced engineer might trace the design of these elevations and covert ways to their proper objects, and explain the nature and intention of these variations in figure, but I am no engineer. Suffice it to say, that

these fortifications are the products of considerable labour; that they are of immense antiquity; and that this is established by the growth of timber on their ruins. On the last mentioned wall there is an oak, which, agreeably to the generally received opinion respecting their growth, must be three or four hundred years old. Whenever it is cut, I purpose ascertaining the number of concentric circles in its trunk. There are many other fortifications of this kind over the State, but these are sufficient for our present purpose.

Independent of these traces of the ancient civilization of this country, there are others not less convincing. Dispersed over several of the upper and middle counties of this State, there are heaps of ashes to be found, containing from 100 to 150 and some 500 bushels. These heaps are seldom found alone; many are found together on the area of an acre. They contain the remains of a rude manufacture of unglazed earthen-ware, in vessels of different sizes. One piece which I saw must have been the periphery of a circle, whose diameter was at least 20 inches; these vases are carved with various figures on their outside. In these ash-heaps there have been discovered human bones, in a state so nearly decayed as to fall to pieces immediately on their exposure to the air, and assimilate their texture to that of the earth. In one of these heaps have been found weights, the one of the pound, avoirdupoise, the other the quarter of the same pound weight: they are in shape an oblate spheroid, with the poles a little flattened, and pretty well polished: they are formed of a species of impure flint-rock. They are of the same shape and substance, and evidently of the same workmanship. There are no other rocks, of the same species, near the place where these *were* found. They were discovered, on digging into one of these heaps, on

the lands of Col. James Lucas, of Hancock county, and are in careful preservation.

Roads are to be traced in this country of ancient date, in the middle of which the majestic oak now waves his lofty branches. I shall adduce one more fact corroborative of the opinion that this has been anciently a cultivated country.

From the situation and production of the lands, in the most fertile parts of this State, an opinion is generally prevalent among intelligent farmers, that the richest lands in this country have been once cultivated. They draw their inferences from these facts: 1st. That the declivities of the hills possess a very small portion of soil in comparison with their summits, which they suppose to have been removed by the rains, while in cultivation. 2ndly. In many places where the soil is very fertile, there is an appearance of the stones having been gathered into heaps, in the same manner as is done in modern times, to remove them out of the way of the plough, and to facilitate cultivation.

A review of the foregoing facts naturally suggests to our minds several interesting queries. By whom were these mounds of earth thrown up, and for what purpose? Are they, in every instance, an appendage to some fortification, or are they the common depositories of the dead? Are these remains of ancient habitations, exhibiting the vestiges of culinary vessels and commercial weights, the relics of savage or civilized man? If of civilized man, from what nation was he derived, or whither has he fled? Appropriate answers to these queries would furnish valuable materials to the elucidation of our geological history.

Many interesting and well-known facts conspire to induce a belief that these are not the vestiges of savage nations. The first is, that the Indians disclaim any knowledge of them. Interrogate the oldest Indian about the origin of these ash-heaps and fortifications, and he, with all his traditionary lore, exclaims, 'they were not made by Indians.' The next argument against the uncivilized origin of these fortifications, is drawn from the customs, manners, and habits of warfare among the savage tribes of America. Do the savage tribes intrench themselves in forts, and furnish themselves with the requisites for a long siege? They do not. Because implements of war, with which they were originally furnished, did not require the shelter of a bastion, or a pallisade. The friendly oak, or the dark morass, are sufficient for their purpose, and it is to them they resort for protection from their enemies. And because their food, being chiefly derived from the chase in the recesses of the forest, and that in such quantities as the rigid calls of nature only shall dictate, would be but poorly calculated for subsistence during a long siege.

Their parties being small, and generally on the scout, trust to silence and address, as their best fortifications, until the savage war-whoop proclaims the danger to their unsuspecting victims.

If, then, neither tradition, nor the well-known customs of savage life, furnish us with any grounds that these are the works of savage hands, let us turn our attention to the arguments in favour of their origin among civilized people*

There are many reasons for the belief, that the continents of Asia and America were once very nearly approximated to each other; or that the passage across what is now "

Behring's Straits," was easily practicable; and that people did pass from one continent to the other; and that there are still the remains of European settlers interwoven with the savages on the western waters. Added to these, the discovery of four large cities in the province of Campeachy, according to information lately received, almost affords incontestible evidence of the truth of the position, that this 'New World' has anciently been the residence of civilized man.

These fortifications were erected for defence; erected by a people possessed of some knowledge in engineering, as well as tools, and a knowledge how to use them: that these people were numerous, is inferable from their burying places, as discovered on the Scioto. [See Med. Repository, Vol. XII. p. 87.]

The weights found on the site of one of these ancient habitations, prove this people to have been acquainted, not only with commerce, but affords another interesting circumstance, the identity of their weights with the English avoirdupoise pound. The tongue of the large bell, found at or near Fort-Hawkins, with the implements of husbandry discovered at some depth in the earth, afford us undeniable proof that these ancient inhabitants not only understood the use of tools themselves, but pre-supposes the importation of them, or the knowledge of assaying iron ore, tempering the metal, and converting it into tools.

This great bell must have been assigned to some steeple, a place of devotion, or some other magnificent edifice, whose ruins, with that of its inhabitants, the desolating hand of time has swept from the unhallowed view of ungrateful man. Where is the busy crowd who once assembled at the

sound of this massy bell? They are gone 'to that undiscovered country, from whose bourn no traveller returns.'

The brass medal also declares these people not only civilized, but that their erudition had passed into some degree of refinement; medals having been invented to perpetuate some important event in the history of the nation. Whether we consider this medal as having been formed here, or brought from the country with which they had commerce, and from which they migrated, the speculations it gives rise to, are not the less interesting.

What a variety of emotions does the contemplation of these appearances inspire in the philanthropic mind! Retrospecting on the tract of time, we are carried back to that period when the portion of Georgia, now covered with the stately pine, the deep morass, or the flourishing cottonfield, was laved by the restless waves of the Atlantic: a period when these fertile plains we now inhabit, and where, not ten years since,

'Wild in the wood the noble savage ran,' were in a state of high cultivation, and this race of busy beings inhabited the sea-coast, and were treading the ceaseless rounds of commerce; when, perhaps, over these woods fair science spread her richest panoply, contentment and peace warmed every bosom, 'attuning all to love;'—or haply war's wild rage o'erspread this happy country, and man then, as in modern times, was doomed to prostrate his birth-right.

Joseph Comstock's Account

The following transcription is extracted from the 1838 edition of Joseph Comstock's *The Tongue of Time...*, which is available, courtesy of Yale University in full text .pdf format on Google Books (Comstock 1838:132-137). The relevant passages were extracted as plain text and are reproduced below in unedited form:

§ 6. It appears from an account now lying before us, relative to these mounds and fortifications in Georgia, for there, as well as in Virginia and Ohio, where a fortification or inclosure was discovered, there was one or more mounds also, near it; that the mound itself was fortified, by a moat and bank about it, distinct from the main fortification, but near it, or within it. This was not always, but in one instance it was the case; perhaps in more.

Again, upon Cedar Creek, Jones County, Georgia, there is one of these circular forts; and we may here observe, that this is always, or generally their shape. It is situated on a very high hill, and incloses about seven acres of land, with a double moat and wall, about twenty feet from each other, forming two circles of earthen wall, and two of foss or ditch; the wall being now, from six to eight feet in height. There is to this fortification, four gateways, and inside each of them, there is at the distance of about twenty feet to the right, an elevation of earth, which is now about eight feet in height. There cannot possibly be any doubt about the design of these being to protect the gateways, for they are within the fort! They are not circular however; the largest of them which is near the N.E. gateway, being two hundred feet long, by one hundred

and twenty wide; affording a summit, upon which a very considerable body of soldiers might stand, sit or lie. The other three are of similar shape, but much smaller. Exterior to all these works there is a mound or barrow, which is supposed to be a cemetery.

§ 7. The fortification in Georgia, which we have first noticed, contains an area of about twelve acres. It is from fifteen to twenty miles from Fort Hawkins. The elevation of earth within this inclosure, is of an oblong shape, and appeared to be one hundred and fifty feet by eighty. It was evidently intended for a kind of citadel, and here an ancient city might once have stood, near the sea shore, when the shore was as in ancient times, near where the immense bed of oyster shells, with other marine remains, now lie.

This bed of shells, ninety miles in length, with other oceanic exuviae, runs quite through the State of Georgia, whose present sea shore is at a considerable distance from it southerly. And it is to be particularly noticed, that these antiquities are not to be found on the plain and alluvial formation, which constitute the present southerly part of the state, but beyond the ancient seashore, in the upper country, which is not champaign, nor alluvial, but interspersed with hills, vallies, and rivulets.

We are then at liberty to suppose, that these relics of antiquity, are as ancient as the former shore of Georgia; and that they preceded the alluvial formation of the south part of the state, called the lower country.

We have noticed an interesting communication to the Editors of a former periodical, published in New York, from Dr. Nicholas Childers, from which we have

drawn some particulars, respecting the antiquities found in Georgia.*

* Med. Rep. for August, September, and October, 1810, pa. 146.

We may here notice one opinion which has been advanced upon the subject of these American mounds and fortifications; and we do it, because it comes from an authority so high, that it merits notice, although for its most glaring absurdity, it merits none. It even shows that any one who could hold such an opinion, could neither have seen any of them, nor read, nor thought, nor conversed, much about them. It is that they are natural productions!

§ 8. It was our opinion, and the remark has already been made, that it was allowed on all hands, that the present race of Indians could not have constructed these works. We have, however, since observed one writer, who holds the contrary opinion, and thinks that the ancestors of the present savage race, might have been their engineers. He calls in question Dr. Robertson's opinion, who supposes that a nation will not so far degenerate as to lose the necessary arts of life, such as the plough, and the loom afford. But this writer thinks that ploughs and looms were not necessary, or could not be termed the necessary arts of life, in a country where game was so plenty as to afford both food and clothing.* The writer did not reflect, that this singular notion of his, implies the increase of game, and of forests, in a civilized country! He having previously admitted, that the remains of old forts, which he tells us are of an oblong form, and built contiguous to the water, and that fragments of earthen ware found more especially near the forts, but some of them all over the country where he resides, indicate that it was once peopled by

men of very different habits from the present natives. If, therefore, the present race may live upon wild animals, and dress themselves in the skins of wild beasts, their ancestors might have done the same. They might have had their forts in the morass, formed by nature, and their bastions behind the oak, and their citadel in the mountain crag, as now:—besides, if there were not two conflicting nations formerly upon this continent, these military antiquities would point to centuries of constant civil war—a state of things unheard of on earth, among men civilized or savage, who had the art of fortification. One observation of the writer is, however, a very appropriate answer to those who have said that these fortifications were erected by mariners, who were cast on shore, to protect themselves from the savages. It is that they are not erected on the sea coast, but in the interior. This is so much the case that we have never heard of one of these antique structures upon the tide-waters; a very extraordinary and surprising fact indeed!

* A Topographical Description of Jefferson County, N. Y. See Med. Re- pos. for May, June and July, 1810.

§ 9. We are told of the existence of mounds on the Oakmulgee river, in Georgia, upon a plain. Near one of these mounds, Fort Hawkins has since been erected. In digging into the side of one of these eminences or mounds, to erect some building belonging to the garrison, we are told of the workmen finding the remains of guns, whose locks were much longer than of those now in use; and that at or near the same place, farming utensils, such as axes and hoes, were found, but of an unknown shape, and different from those now in use; and also, that the clapper of a bell was discovered, which after the loss it

had sustained by rust, or oxydizing, weighed seven pounds.

But we cannot imagine that these articles could have been of any great antiquity, and not coeval with the age of the large trees which grew on these mounds. We incline upon this subject, to the opinion before adduced, that these articles were of European manufacture; and that the Indians, since the Spanish invasion, sometimes used the ancient cemeteries to inhume modern bodies, and modern articles in, which belonged to the deceased. They, these guns and the farming tools, were probably articles of Spanish, or Portuguese manufacture, which from the migratory habits of the natives, may be easily conceived, as having been brought or handed thus far north from Mexico or Brazil. As to their having been interred into the side of the mound, the reason may have been, that the top of it was encumbered with a tree or trees. The guns were in a state of mutilation and decay.

Dr. Childers mentions an oak, which is on the wall of one of the fortifications, which agreeably to the usual mode of computing the age of trees, by circles, must be three or four hundred years old. But we incline to the opinion, that the age of these ancient fortifications, must be extended back to a period far more distant than the trees indicate, or even the trees that bore their acorns, indicate. We have already advanced the opinion that those ancients who erected the mounds and fortifications on the Kanhawa, in such numbers, were cultivators of the soil, and that they did not, like the present savages, depend upon such a precarious mode of existence as hunting and fishing, or at least, not wholly.

We have a confirmation of this opinion from what we learn of some parts of Georgia, in which

ancient roads may be traced, in the middle of which grow the lofty oak; and in the stones, in some of the most fertile districts, having been gathered, and now found in heaps; and in the soil being thinner upon the declivities of some fertile hills, than upon their tops, from their having been washed by rains whilst under cultivation. Intelligent farmers, who of all mankind are least apt to be visionary, have, as we are told, adopted the opinion generally from these facts, in the most fertile parts of that State, that an ancient race of planters preceded them.

§ 10. Dr. Childers mentions one trait of aboriginal history, which so far as we know, is unique. It is, that in the upper and middle counties of that State, heaps of ashes are found, containing from one hundred to five hundred bushels. He remarks, that when one of these heaps are found, others are found in its neighborhood, and that one heap is seldom found alone, and sometime? many on the area of an acre. It would seem then, that these ancient planters, did not know the use of ashes as a manure, and that they so disposed of them as least to encumber the ground. Or did they, in clearing their plantations of trees, collect them together into immense piles, and then set them on fire

We incline to the opinion that they were culinary ashes, brought out from their dwellings, and thus deposited, from their containing pieces of earthenware. This, Dr. Childers tells us, was of rude manufacture, and unglazed; but carved on the outside with various figures. He saw one piece whose circumference, or periphery of circle, denoted a vessel of at least twenty inches diameter.

But are we right in any of our conjectures about these ash-heaps?

When we were told that human bones were found among these ashes, we thought of their being funeral piles, or piles where the bodies of slain enemies were consumed, which might not be admitted into the mounds with those of the nation; and we thought of widows burning themselves.

But from Indian prejudices, and superstitions, respecting their dead, and from the care which they took of the bodies and bones of their deceased friends and warriors, we incline to the opinion, that the bodies of their enemies might be forbidden their cemeteries, and were therefore disposed of as the ancient Romans disposed of the bodies, both of friends and enemies, burned. The bones found in these heaps appear to have been in the very last stages of decay, and crumbled to dust immediately upon exposure to the air (Comstock 1838:132-137).

Who was Nicholas Childers?

So, who was this Dr. Nicholas Childers—the man who observed these archaeological ruins in central Georgia prior to October, 1810? The following biographical information about Nicholas Childers was provided in large part by one of his descendants, Captain William Andre Childers, who is a great-great-great grandson of Nicholas. The information provided by Mr. Childers is supplemented by the author's historical and genealogical research.

Dr. William Nicholas Childers, Biographical Summary:

- Born in [1776 or 1779] and raised in Virginia.
- Married to Sally Evans Lucas in Georgia, 1806.
- Mentioned in Inferior Court Records, Hancock County, Georgia, 1808.
- Physician at Fort Hawkins 1810 or earlier.
- Published *The Georgia Argus*, a weekly newspaper in Milledgeville, Georgia from late 1811--January, or February, 1814.
- Elected State Representative for Baldwin County, Georgia, 1812.
- Served on Baldwin County Grand Jury, 1814.
- Trustee of Powelton Academy, Hancock County, Georgia, 1815.
- Commissioner of Powelton, Georgia, 1816.
- Incorporator of the academy at Sparta, Hancock County, Georgia, 1818.
- N. Childers enumerated in U.S. Census for Hancock County, Georgia, 1820.
- Upson County land transaction lists Nicholas Childers of Putnam County [Georgia], 1826.
- Elected as a permanent member of the Central Medical Society [Milledgeville] and

a practicing physician in Macon, Georgia, 1829.

- Nicholas, family and his enslaved people were enumerated in U.S. Census for Bibb County, Georgia. 1830.
- Nicholas Childers placed notice in the *Macon Telegraph*, advising of his pending retirement from medical practice in Macon, 1830.
- Nicholas Childers placed advertisements in the *Macon Telegraph* for sale of Montpelier Spring, Monroe County resort, 1831.
- Nicholas Childers practicing medicine at Warm Springs, Georgia, 1832.
- Nicholas Childers' Bibb County property was subjected to Sheriff's Sale in Bibb County, 1837.
- Nicholas Childers named a Trustee of the Ladies Educational Society, Selma, Alabama, 1839.
- Nicholas Childers is listed in U.S. Census for Dallas County, Alabama, 1840.
- Married Catherine Files Cheesborough in Mobile, Alabama, October 17, 1842.
- Nickolas Childers is listed in U.S. Census for Mobile County, Alabama, 1860.
- Childers enslaved 13 people in 1860.
- Nicholas Childers died in Mobile, Alabama, 1860.

William Nicholas Childers was born and raised in Virginia in 1776 or 1779. Little was learned of his early life. The 1790 census included a Nicholas Childers in Halifax County, Virginia. In that household were eight white persons living in one dwelling (Ancestry.com 2010).

Nicholas Childers certainly was living in Georgia by November, 1806, as noted in the following newspaper account. On November 15, 1806, as reported in the November 15th issue of the *Augusta Chronicle*, Nicholas Childers of Powelton [Hancock County, Georgia] married Miss Sally Evans Lucas, daughter of Colonel James Lucas of

Hancock County. He may have been in Georgia several years earlier, possibly in the U.S. Army service as a surgeon or other hospital staff.

Nicholas and Sally Childers had at least three sons, Doctor A .Childers, Winfrey, and John, and one daughter. One of Nicholas' and Sally's sons, Winfrey Childers, married Nancy Hawkins, daughter of Colonel Benjamin Hawkins in December 1834. Sally Childers had apparently died by 1839.

In the late 1830s Nicholas Childers moved from central Georgia to Alabama. Nicholas Childers is enumerated in the Federal census for Dallas County, Alabama in 1840. On October 17, 1842, while living in Dallas County, Alabama, Nicholas Childers was married for a second time to Catherine Ann Files Cheeseborough. Within a few years Nicholas and Catherine Childers had moved to Mobile, Alabama where Nicholas again established his medical practice. Nicholas and Catherine Childers had no children. Their residence was on Conception Street in Mobile. Nicholas had his practice, a pharmacy and a boarding house at 64 St. Louis Street in Mobile. Nicholas owned more than a dozen slaves. Nicholas remained in Mobile until his death in 1860. His and Catherine Childers' remains are buried in Magnolia Cemetery (Section 12, Lot 87) in Mobile (William Andre Childers personal communication June 2, 2009). Andre Childers concluded that his ancestor was, "a man of means and well respected wherever he went".

Several interesting documents were located by this research concerning Nicholas Childers and his life in central Georgia.

Below is reproduced the text of a newspaper advertisement placed in the Macon, Georgia paper by Nicholas Childers:

JUNE 18, 1831

MONTPELIER SPRING,
MONROE COUNTY, GA.

The Undersigned, after great labor and expense, is at length enabled to offer this establishment to the notice of the public.

In a climate like ours, where the enervating influence of long and warm summers is experienced by all, inviting the operation of causes, tending to the production of autumnal disease, it is an object of no trifling import to the community to have recourse to a situation in which the assaults of disease may be prevented, its violence mitigated, and recovery rendered speedy and effectual. Such a place the undersigned honestly believes he is offering in the Montpelier Spring.

Independent of the advantageous location of this establishment; situated in a region unquestionably healthy; the medical qualities of the water, are of a character entitling it to high claims upon the confidence of the community.

The waters of Saratoga and Ballston have, long since, rendered them places of extensive resort, both by invalids and persons of fashion. And the signal benefits derived from their use by persons laboring under chronic disease (especially of the digestive organs) have obtained for them well merited celebrity – and from a pretty accurate analysis, by gentlemen of competent science, comparing the result with the analysis of the waters of Saratoga and Ballston, as published by Dr.

Mead, they find the waters of the Montpelier Spring, to possess, with a trifling exception the same chemical qualities. As a chalybeate containing more iron than the former and less than the latter, with a large proportion of the muriates of soda and lime; the most striking difference being the absence of uncombined fixed air, with which the Saratoga water abounds. Of the beneficial application of this water is disease, the proprietor is enabled to bear ample testimony.

In chronic affections of the liver, spleen, and their concomitant functional derangement of the stomach; he can confidently assert that he has seen no remedy of equal value. In dyspepsia, that hydra of modern times, it is an invaluable remedy, when aided as every remedy must be, by the temperate use of a well selected regime. In diseases of the skin, and particularly tetter in all its variety, it is a certain remedy. In dropsies from visceral obstructions, chronic rheumatism, and that relaxation and debility consequent upon a residence in low, unhealthy situations, its value is not easily estimated. Abundant testimony could be produced to establish the truth of this statement, were it necessary; but an intelligent community will make the experiment and decide for themselves; and with their award the proprietor will cheerfully rest the reputation of the Spring.

The undersigned assures the public that he would not thus recommend the use of the Montpelier water, but having been extensively engaged in the practice of medicine in Georgia for nearly thirty years, claims the right to judge of the remedy he recommends.

This fountain is situated in one of the most healthy and best improved situations of Georgia,

seventeen miles from Macon near the road leading from that place to Thomaston. His building is large, airy and comfortable, situated on an eminence, high and commanding, surrounded by springs of the purest water, and refreshed by an atmosphere pure and invigorating.

The proprietor will be able to accommodate comfortably one hundred regular boarders, and as many transient persons as may favor him with their company; and as interest and liberality are inseparably connected in such business, it is his determination to keep as good a house in every sense of the expression, as is kept elsewhere in the Up Contry. His BAR will be stored with the best; his STABLES well furnished and attended. His Prices will be the same as those charged at Indian Spring.

Comfortable TENTS will be prepared for those who prefer furnishing their own board.
NICHOLAS CHILDERS,
Montpelier, Monroe County, May 18, 1831.

Dr. Childer's desire to sell his Montpelier Springs property was apparently more urgent than his earlier real estate advertisement suggests. In December, 1831, the Sheriff of Monroe County placed this legal advertisement in the *Macon Telegraph*,

Macon Telegraph, Dec. 3, 1831

Will be sold on the first Tuesday in January next...one lot of land, No. 117, in the fifth district of Monroe county – levied on as the property of John Watson to satisfy sundry Fi Fas from a justice's court in favor of Stephen Folson vs. Timothy Brewen and John Watson.

Two negroes, Sarah and her child Anderson – levied on as the property of Jane Ezell to satisfy Fi Fa in favor of Elijah E. Crocher.

Fifty acres of land , on which is the Montpelier Spring, in Monroe county, with all the improvements thereon, the furniture belonging to the house, and four hundred barrels of corn, levied on as the property of Nicholas Childers to satisfy a Fi Fa in favor of Robert Collins for the use of Lawrence Reese & Co., vs. said Childers.

Seven head of Hogs, three head of cattle, eight or ten barrels of corn, and one stock of fodder, ten or eleven acres of standing cotton – all levied on as the property of John Dewberry to satisfy a Fi Fa in favor of Benjamin M. Peeples vs. said Dewberry.

One wagon, three mules, two cows and calves, one Grindstone, one Rifle gun, one shot hag, one man's saddle, one cart, and one yoke of oxen – all levied on as the property of Jared Tapley, deceased to satisfy a Fi Fa in favor of Littleton Atkinson and others – property pointed out by Margaret Tapley, Adm'rx and James May, adm'er of heirs of said estate.

Four months after date, applicationfor leave to sell Lot of land No. 17, in the second district of Carroll county, belonging to the Orphans of Overtun Phelps. Bennet S. Riddle, Guardian.

This Fi Fas sale of Dr. Childers' property indicates that he was in financial distress by 1831. This predicament may have led to his leaving Georgia before 1840. Childers rebounded from his fiscal difficulties, however, and he established a thriving

practice in Alabama. At any rate, the period of Dr. Nicholas Childers' life that most pertains to his archaeological exploits seems to be his early years in the state, circa, 1800-1810. If Childers wrote any more about the archaeological manifestations of Georgia in his later life, these stories remain to be discovered.

Anthropological Significance

Nicholas Childers described several archaeological ruins in central Georgia. His account is one of the earliest descriptions of archaeological sites in Georgia, and his writings are of great import to modern scholars. One of the sites described by Childers is probably a previously known site, 9Bi1, also known as Macon Plateau or Ocmulgee Old Fields. Two sites in Jones County may represent unknown sites. Numerous other sites, described as “ash-heaps” are described for central Georgia but their specific locations cannot be pinpointed. Summaries of these sites are provided below.

CHILDERS’ SITE 1 (9BI1)

Childers described early historic aboriginal occupation from two aboriginal mounds near Fort Hawkins, Georgia, which were disturbed during construction of the fort. The site traits include:

Childers’ Site 1, Mound 1

- More than 20 feet tall
- 150 feet in basal circumference
- Truncated cone shaped
- Located on the plain, one-fourth mile from the Ocmulgee River

Childers’ Site 1, Mound 2

- Smaller than Mound 1
- Truncated cone shaped
- Located within 300 meters of Mound 1, near “the public store-house”

The former residents of the above-described site owned firearms (of an antique vintage), axes, hoes, and a large bell. These items were unearthed during U.S. Army construction activities, which Childers did not personally witness. He learned of these finds from conversations with at least two people who Childers considered reliable sources. Childers did not specify which one of the two mounds yielded the historic objects because this information was beyond his knowledge. He commented, “In digging into the side of one of them, in order to fix some building belonging to the garrison, (perhaps the magazine)” (Childers 1811).

Major archaeological exploration of the Macon Plateau (Ocmulgee Old Fields) took place in the 1930s (Hally 1993).

Comprehensive reporting of this important anthropological work, however, is lacking. An early fortified settlement was discovered by the archaeologists as part of that effort (Figure 1). These discoveries are documented in a short journal article by A.R. Kelly, dissertation research by Carol Mason, and other scholarship (Kelly 1939; Mason 2005; Waselkov 1993).



Figure 1. Aerial View of the Excavated Trading Post at 9Bi1.

Construction of Fort Hawkins began in 1806 and was mostly completed by the time of Childers' writing in 1810 (Elliott and Dean 2007; Elliott 2009). Prior to its construction, the U.S. Army had a military post and Trading Factory at Ocmulgee Old Fields in the first few years of the 19th century. The former presence of aboriginal mounds on the site where Fort Hawkins was constructed is independently verified by land surveyor records. Three mounds were located on the hill top where Fort Hawkins was constructed and two of these were likely situated within the confines of the fort. Upon careful reading and re-reading of Childers' account, Childers' Site 1 is not located at Fort Hawkins, but is more likely at the Ocmulgee Old Fields, which is several miles removed from Fort Hawkins.

Childers' description of the finds near Fort Hawkins is important on several levels. It serves as a time marker for the earliest archaeological discoveries at Ocmulgee

Fields. It predates the 1840s railroad construction through the site, which destroyed an unknown portion of the site. It predates the burial of U.S. Army soldiers in one of the mounds. It predates Charles C. Jones, Jr.'s 1873 account of the site, which many Georgia archaeologists consider to be the birth of archaeological inquiry in this state (Jones 1873). Most importantly, it predates the 1930s excavations, which obliterated many of the site's resources. Childers provides an account of several artifact types not reflected in later excavations at the site. He provides some clues as to the location of several buildings, including the public store house and a U.S. Army magazine.

So, where are the actual cultural resources that Childers described on today's landscape? National Park staff at the Ocmulgee National Monument suggested that the Cornfield Mound was the approximate vicinity of the U.S. Army post or U.S. Trading Factory at Ocmulgee Old Fields. Archaeological confirmation for this assertion, however, has not been proven.

The intent of this monograph is not to fully explicate the wealth of archaeological resources at Ocmulgee Old Fields. That task of scholarship is immense and way beyond the present effort. Childers' account of the site, however, is another important clue about what once existed at this important aboriginal settlement.

CHILDERS' SITE 2

Childers described an aboriginal site in Jones County, Georgia. The traits of Childers Site 2 include:

- Mound “of considerable size”
- Mound is truncated cone shaped
- Mound attached to a perfectly circular fortification
- Mound south of fortification, enclosed by embankment 1 acre in extent
- Fortification is an embankment 3-4 feet tall, 12 acres in extent, with “four gate-ways at opposite points”
- An oblong elevation, 150 feet by 80 feet, located inside of fortification wall, “opposite the northern-most gate-way”
- Site is located 15-20 miles from Fort Hawkins in Jones County

CHILDERS' SITE 3

Childers described an aboriginal earthwork complex covering more than 7 acres on a high hill above Cedar Creek in Jones County, Georgia. The traits of Childers' Site 3 include:

- Aboriginal fortification 7 acres in extent
- Fortification consists of a double circular wall and double ditch, 6-8 feet high
- Fortification walls are 20 feet apart
- Fortification has “four gate-ways, nearly at opposite points” each about 20 feet wide

- Elevation, 200 feet by 120 feet and 5-8 feet high, on inside of northeastern gateway
- Near center of fort, the “earth is cut into triangular protuberances” 15 feet basal width,
- Small mounds, “of the same elevation (8 feet high) and shape” inside each gateway, “about 20 feet to the right of the passage”
- Tumulus or barrow outside of fortification (unexplored but suspected by Childers to be a cemetery)
- Located on summit of a high hill above Cedar Creek in Jones County, Georgia

I conducted a preliminary review of the currently recorded archaeological sites in Jones County for any sites remotely similar to that described by Childers. One site, 9JO208, stands out as a possible candidate. Site 9JO208 was recorded by U.S.D.A. Forest archaeologist, Jill Kingham (1996). She described the site as containing “Prehistoric Swift Creek Mounds and historic cemetery”. The site is located on a knoll-top at the confluence of Big Cedar Creek and Rock Creek (UTM Zone 17 269059E, 3672844N, NAD27). The site's dimensions were given as 280 meters East-West by 80 meters North-South. The northern boundary of the site was not determined by Kingham's survey because it was beyond her study boundary.

Kingham (1996:26-27) wrote: “The prehistoric component consists of a earthen mound, another possible earth mound, and a large surface scatter, the historic component

consists of 10 grave depressions on top of the mound”. She described Mound A as, “an earthen mound, measuring 25 x 25 x 1 m high”. She excavated four shovel tests and one of these revealed a possible midden on the northeast side of the mound. A small quantity of Swift Creek Complicated Stamped pottery was associated with Mound A. Kingham described a second possible mound (Mound B), “Southeast of Mound A and south of the woods road is a second possible mound, Mound B, measuring approximately 85 x 45 x 2 meters. Mound B slopes westward and has been severely impacted by intensive wind row site preparation by previous land owners and machine rowed pine planting”. Kingham excavated a series of shovel tests and one 50 x 50 cm test at Mound B that yielded no artifacts. She recommended 9JO208 as Eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places. Mark Williams completed an updated site form for 9JO208 in 2002. Kingham’s site sketch map of 9JO208 is reproduced in Figure 2.

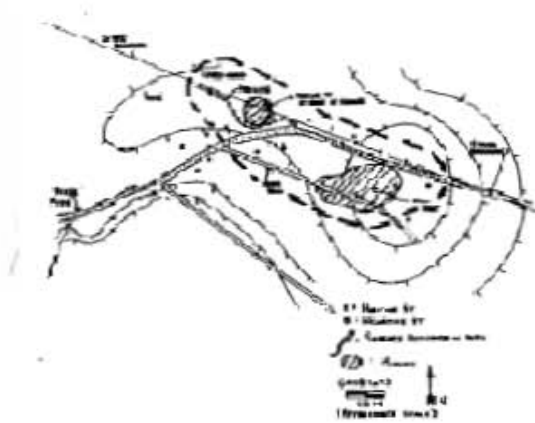


Figure 2. Sketch of 9JO208 (Kingham 1996).

It remains unknown whether site 9JO208 represents one of the Jones County

aboriginal earthwork complexes described by Childers. Several other large upland sites have been located by archaeological surveys in Jones County in addition to Kingham’s 1996 study. Several of these sites are associated with the Vinings phase of the Transitional Mississippian period (Elliott and Wynn 1988). While Vinings phase sites do not appear to be strongly associated with earthworks, the upland aboriginal sites in Jones County have undergone tremendous damage by more than a century of intensive cultivation and soil erosion. Many surface features, such as mounds or embankments, may be largely destroyed.

CHILDERS’ ASH-HEAPS

Childers described numerous ash-heaps “dispersed over several of the upper and middle counties of this State” in central Georgia containing aboriginal pottery and human bones. He provided no specific locations for any of these ash-heaps, although he indicated that the ash-heaps were a widespread cultural practice in the region. Modern archaeological research in the central Oconee River valley may be archaeological verification for this “ash-heap” disposal pattern on late prehistoric sites. Archaeological excavations at dozens of Lamar phase upland farmsteads consistently yield large trash pits containing a mixture of ash, pottery, food bones and other artifacts. These pits occasionally contain human bone fragments, although their primary purpose was not as funerary features. Williams (1983) interpreted these large refuse pit features, based on his study of the Joe Bell site (9MG28) in Morgan

County, Georgia, as reflective of annual busk ceremonies. The busk, as practiced by southeastern tribes, was punctuated by the ritual discard of material belongings from the previous year. Williams suggests that the refuse in these pits are the objects discarded during the annual busk. It is reasonable to project that these were once above-ground discard piles, in addition to subsurface pits, which have been leveled by more than a century of intense agricultural plowing and related soil erosion. When these “ash-heap” sites were first observed by Nicholas Childers, they were likely in a far greater state of preservation than they are today.

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