

800 year old infant taken from a Verona burial mound may finally come home. With one inexplicable — and perhaps illegal — change.

WHOSE BONES ARE THESE? PART 1



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Staunton News Leader

Published 9:22 p.m. ET May 30, 2023

PART ONE — The Mystery of Indian Mound Road

If you ever want to know what it's like to step on someone's grave, then drive south on Indian Mound Road at 55 miles an hour. Cross the short Lewis Creek bridge, all of its three car-lengths. About 65 feet beyond it, the road you'll cover in a fraction of a second is the site of what used to be a burial mound for the Monacan Indians.

In that fraction of a second, you'll have driven over the ground where 500 people were buried. Men and women of all ages. Children, too, dozens of them.

At that point Indian Mound Road, also called state route 792, sits on raised land about 10 feet higher than the floodplain on either side. That actually puts your tires right around the same height the mound was 150 years ago.

It's grave-stepping, American roadster style. Which carries a certain fitting irony: While the mound was poked into countless times by artifact seekers and

even the site of an amateur excavation in the 1930s, it was the desire in 1964 for a new road to cross Lewis Creek and connect Laurel Hill Road to Hermitage Road which led to a construction plan that drove that new road smack through the middle of the Monacan mound.



Dozens of complete skeletons were dug up and packed into boxes. Hundreds of loose bones from the tribe's ceremonial group reburials were packed together in another set of containers. Artifacts found in the individual burial areas such as weapons, tools and decorative or ceremonial objects were collected into another set, without regard for which remains they had been found beside.

In the mid-19th century the mound was higher than a horse. By 1964 the mound's center had been desecrated so many times it stood barely two feet above the ground.

All the human remains and artifacts were cataloged and then taken away.

All except one: an intact skeleton of a 1-year-old child, found near the edge of the mound, surrounded by beads and shells. She was taken 17 miles up Route 11 to Bridgewater College.

This was the one child who, despite the destruction of her people's resting place, has stayed all this time on Monacan land. Who was she?

You slept such a long time.

Tell me again what I missed.

You may not remember much from your days here, but surely you remember the sound of water. The creek by which you were born. The fields of flat rich soil from which maize seemed to sprout overnight, so tall and full in your eyes that would see each season only once, and beyond those stalks swaying in the

breeze stood the steep tree-filled hill, and beyond that more hills, and beyond that the great mountains that broke the sky.

You would have looked up from your mother's breast and seen over her head the arching young tree limbs that supported the walls and ceilings of your longhouse. You would have smelled the smoke that drifted out of the hole in the roof and into the dark night. There'd be fish and rabbit and fruits and nuts the land provided. The maize cultivated ensured a supply of food year round, supported your people as they spread across the valley.

They would glimpse the sun rising over the ancient mountains across the field, and setting over the distant mountains across the river. They saw countless days here. My people's time in this valley is the blink of an eye of yours. Eyes that glimpsed this world 10,000 years before any others.

I can't tell you how you died. That runs beyond my learning and my books and even the people who visit me in my dreams since your story was brought to me. But after you died they took you to the earthen mound to be with your ancestors. You were adorned with necklaces of beads and shells, some of which had been carried hundreds of miles from an ocean you'd never see, and traded here beneath the shoulders of the mountains.

At the edge of the mound they placed you, in a sitting position, knees tucked up, arms hugging your legs. You weren't buried in a group like many of your ancestors were, part of a ritual reburial celebrated every few years to remind us, maybe, that we all are one, all share the same beginnings and endings. You had your own place. Maybe because of who your mother was, maybe just because you'd seen so little life of your own that they wanted to give you a special place looking out at the world you'd missed.

Hundreds of years passed, child. Two hundred, three hundred, five hundred years. They passed but you remained the same. Looking out at those who lived longer lives, died, and joined you.

Whatever head-dress or necklace or ceremonial clothing you wore became part of the mound, as did the flesh of your body. The beads and shells remained, gently sprinkled among your bones. The people who tended the mound, the people who planted the maize, lived and died generation on generation.

During that time the mound of the ancestors grew.

Even as it sank into the floodplain less than a hundred feet from the creek, it grew taller still. Six hundred years after you last scrambled on all fours between the legs of your parents, the mound stood higher than a man on horseback, according to the family of Virginians who'd taken up farming on the very ground where your waterside village once was.

By that time the village was gone. Most local colonial records say the village was not known to colonists, and its people had departed well before the white man came to build here.

But it takes a lot to make a community leave its dead behind. That's a story for another time.

After your people left, the new inhabitants gave the land their own names. They named the running water Lewis Creek, and the town Verona. They took up the plough. The mound continued to sink into the earth. It would grow no higher. One farmer scraped soil off the mound's crown to use as fertilizer.

People came at night with lanterns, in search of pottery, arrowheads, pipes and eagle talons to sell or give to their friends.

Then in broad daylight a group of men came. And they began to dig. They dug through the mound's layers and sifted through the loose dirt and put all the bones together, regardless of where they were found. They sifted through sand for artifacts separated from the dozens of individual burials they found. And they examined the bones and tested the bones, and wrote about the histories they thought the bones offered. After all that, they sent the dead to a museum to be stored. All except you.

You, they took to another place.

But tell me again how I might come home.

The amateur historian adopted a cat, and a mystery. Twelve years later, she's still wrestling with both.

November 4, 2010 was a big day for Rebecca Jarrett. She was driving to pick up the newest member of the family.

Bastet. She'd already determined the name. The Egyptian god of protection, the daughter of the sun-god Ra. The cat-headed woman.

And, after all, the new member of the family was a cat.



From Grottoes she'd driven down the interstate to Verona, all of the quarter of an hour trip with the hulking Blue Ridge mountains so omnipresent to the east that many in that small town of 2,000 people hardly notice them. On this day, November 4, 2010, their peaks were unseeable above the heavy gray clouds threatening rain.

Protection. She might not have thought about Bastet's special power in those moments as much as she thought about the human with a cat's head. Why Rebecca Jarrett was thinking about a cat-headed god at all was her long curiosity about history.

As a child she often played outside, wondering who the first people who lived here were, trying to imagine their lives and relive their adventures. *Who was here before me?* That question never went away, but it was buried by school, then a job, and another, and all that adulthood brought.

Rolling up the exit ramp off Interstate 81, she peered through the drizzle on the windshield for the first right turn off Laurel Hill Road. There it was: Indian Mound Road. And right beyond it, the yellow barn where the god of protection awaited her new companion.

That little girl in her started asking questions. *Indian Mound? Here, in Verona? Well, where is it? Let's go see it!* The child and the historian were momentarily hushed as the business of adopting a cat commenced.

With Bastet safely ensconced in a cat carrier on the passenger seat, Rebecca pulled out of the driveway and stopped at the intersection, she looked up at the street sign once again. *There's a story here,* she thought.

It wasn't an easy story to find. After months of googling she found a reference to "the Lewis Creek Mound" in a publication by a Dr. Holland. The mound had been right there in Verona and was at one point as long as 100 feet and as wide as 50 feet. It was an ancient thing, maybe a thousand years old, based on carbon dating.

This puzzled Rebecca. If there was a burial mound, there were people living around it to bury their families. And if the mound was so huge, it means they were here for generations. So why did so many history books say that the valley was uninhabitable and nobody lived here? Why was the mound not protected as part of our natural history? Why was it gone?

She got to work on those questions. She didn't know it would take her over 12 years to find answers.

And if there was a tribe here that buried its dead in one mound over generations, where did the tribe that made that mound go?

Turns out, some of them never left at all.

The nation that stayed

Lou Branham unlocks the door to the Monacan Museum on the tribe's Bear Mountain land near Amherst and walks to the middle room of the small, three-room rectangular building tucked into the rolling hills of Amherst. She puts down a large tote bag with her name on it, and pulls her ponytail through the back of her red baseball cap with the three-armed tribal logo. "Good morning, guys!" she says.

She's not talking to the reporter and his wife who are following her in. She's talking to two very lifelike and life-sized heads which stare back unblinking from their glass cases. Those heads and faces were built from the skulls of her ancestors, using scientific measurements to project and sculpt their facial features.

The skulls were part of a large collection of Monacan remains returned to the tribe in the early 1990s by the Valentine Museum in Richmond. They acted soon after the passage of NAGPRA, the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act which became law in November of 1990. That law states that institutions, museums and schools that receive public funding had to work to identify the owners of those native remains and artifacts in their possession and make arrangements to repatriate them to their rightful owners.

Until such time as that occurred, the remains and artifacts had to be removed from display as a sign of respect for the dead and their descendants. Under the Act, a Committee was formed to advise those same institutions on next steps should they be unsuccessful in their first efforts to identify the cultural owners of the artifacts.

Private museums like The Valentine were not legally subject to NAGPRA. Still, The Valentine wasted little time in contacting the Monacans and returning the human remains and artifacts that their founder had excavated himself around the turn of the 20th century from another Virginia burial mound.

Branham, the museum director and main public contact for the Monacans — her name is one of the six most important family names in the tribe's modern history, among those who purchased and settled Bear Mountain over a hundred years ago — was 19 when her people got state recognition in 1989. She was instrumental in the work over the next 29 years to gain the tribe its federal recognition.

The modest building housing the Monacan museum stands next to a small one-room schoolhouse where Monacan children were educated for decades in

the 20th century before they were allowed in public schools in 1969. Behind the buildings, wooden walking bridges cross a narrow creek that has carved its path through smooth solid rock leading the way to an Episcopal church owned by the tribe. People here to visit the museum park on a grass slope leading down to the creek.

All around them is the sound of water.

Branham is largely responsible for the operation of the Monacan museum on a daily basis and teaches the historical significance of her people and its history here in VA. Branham has also been instrumental with other tribal members who serve on the Monacan NAGPRA committee, who have led many repatriation efforts since the tribe became federally recognized. Bridgewater is the latest, and like all NAGPRA “negotiations” there’s a sense of the tenuous nature of dealing with a culture that has never abided by its agreements. It’s part of what made the Valentine repatriation so important.

Branham remembers the turn of the last century, when she first saw the completed models sculpted from the skulls that now lay in the tribe’s Bear Mountain burial mound, built specifically to repatriate its people’s remains. She picked one up, felt the fully human features beneath her fingertips, the wide forehead, the cheekbones, the strong jaw line. She closed her eyes. “I’m holding the face of one of my ancestors,” she thought.

She named them Resilience and Pride. They watch over the displays in the room, and the plaques describing the tribe’s 10,000 years of residence in what’s now known as the Valley and Ridge and the Piedmont regions of Virginia.

Resilience and Pride were excavated from one of 13 burial mounds in the area that by the early 1990s were widely known to delineate the territory and range of the Monacan people over a time period of roughly 1000 A.D. to 1600 A.D. The four oldest of these are west of the Blue Ridge and show evidence of having each been used for periods of hundreds of years. The culture of the Monacans would spread east over the Blue Ridge to the Piedmont region, where more mounds were built and maintained.

None of those mounds remain today. Between casual pillaging, amateur “excavations” and academic or institutional digs, there’s nothing left of them.

Rebecca Jarrett’s research would eventually turn up more information on the Lewis Creek mound than even the custodians of the Lewis Creek infant’s remains knew, including a devastating history of decades of the mound’s desecration and of a last-minute excavation to remove the entire mound before the state department of transportation built a road right through it.

In that last excavation, most of the remains and artifacts recovered found their way to the Museum of Natural History in Washington, D.C. The one ancestor who went a different way was the infant. That complete skeleton and the beads and shells found surrounding the body were given to Bridgewater College’s Reuel B. Pritchett Museum in 1964.



The child's skeleton would be on display for nearly three decades, just miles up the road from the mound site. Because the college museum was subject to NAGPRA (the Natural History Museum is not), the location would give Branham and the Monacans a chance to request the repatriation of the child — once they found out about its existence.

That would take a long time to happen. After taking the infant's remains off display in 1992 to comply with NAGPRA, what Bridgewater College did over the next 30 years would complicate repatriation efforts. Years went by without the college reaching out to Monacan people, even though as early as 2010 the Code of Federal Regulations allowed institutions to reach out to non-federally-recognized "tribes that are recognized as aboriginal to the area from which the human remains were removed" when it came to "unidentifiable remains."

Delay wasn't the only problem that kept the 800-year-old infant from returning home.

What is this new place?

It feels like the blink of a bear's eye, so little time has passed, but you've been for 30 years here in this new place. In this strange house called a museum. People have come to look at you. They watch you through walls they can see right through as if the walls were made of air.

You arrived still sitting in a box of the earth that surrounded you, and a few of the beads that adorned you when you were buried, so there's some comfort here, but not much.

But now you're being moved.

Into another container. Smaller than the one your parents stored maize in outside your home. You're not the only one. Something is thrown into your space. Fragmented bones roll like dice beside you and come to rest. You feel

the lives once lived of others, hear strange tongues speaking their confusion. Through the cracked sockets of your skull you sense there are even more, in other containers. Then you're moving.

First slowly, like being carried in your father's arms. A man. He does not relish this job. Then into a dark place, and a sudden jolt and you're going quickly now. A new hum you've never heard, like the earth is singing a song in a low voice, or the mountain's black tongue rolling up beneath you to bring you someplace else and spit you out.

Then there's light. More words from outside the containers you and others are in. Some laughter, maybe. They take you inside. It is a good thing you no longer have your eyes now.

Then all is suddenly still. Another sound you have never heard, like stone on stone. A clicking like a crow tapping its beak on a branch. Then a whoosh, then a sound you do remember. Except much louder, and all around you, like a roar.

The sound of fire.

Destruction of Indian burial remains at Bridgewater could complicate repatriation efforts

WHOSE BONES? PARTS 2 AND 3



Jeff Schwaner Staunton News Leader Published 9:43 p.m. ET May 31, 2023



PART TWO — ‘A sunny pretty day’

Rebecca Jarrett was on a roll.

After years of starts and stops uncovering the fate of the burial mound of Indian Mound Road, she was cleaning her room and pulling books from shelves when her research literally fell into her lap. The four-page set of notes

seemed flimsy next to all the time and thought she'd put into wondering about the former residents of this part of the Shenandoah Valley.

At work, a co-worker told her that she'd lived on Indian Mound Road for a few years and one of her children would stand by the window looking out on the road talking softly. When she asked her son what he was doing, he denied that he was talking to himself. He was talking, he told his mother, to the people who were coming out of the ground.

Rebecca took that as a sign to pick back up her research. She made a silent promise to those people coming out of the ground: if they helped her find the answers, she'd find a way to get the story out to people who lived here now so that the mound, and its people, would not be forgotten.

She reached out to NAGPRA about the Lewis Creek Mound in August 2022. She received a package of documents from the federal agency, detailing the bones, artifacts and nearly two dozen complete skeletons that had been found in the 1964 excavation just before the bulldozed. It appeared that all of those remains had gone, eventually, to the Smithsonian.

The News Leader reported that a replica of the mound would be built after the excavation. That never happened.

Digging further into the notes she saw that one complete skeleton — an infant — had been donated to Bridgewater College in 1964.

That feeling she'd carried with her for over a decade — *there's a story here* — came back stronger than ever. Could there be a way to arrange for that Monacan child's skeleton to get back to its people?

She wrote to Andrew Pearson, the Director of Forrer Learning Commons at Bridgewater College, asking him to confirm that the college still had the infant skeleton.

Pearson wrote back to Jarrett on Tuesday, Sep. 20, 2022: “Yes, Bridgewater College received a donation of an infant skeleton in October 1964 from the Southern Shenandoah Chapter of the Archaeological Society of Virginia. The skeleton was discovered from a bed of soil in a 1963 excavation of the Lewis Creek mound near Verona, Virginia conducted in advance of planned work by the State Highway Department on access roads and ramps to I-81. It was cremated in 1996. It’s currently registered with the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act (NAGPRA). Let me know if you have any other questions.”

“Yes, I have a question,” Jarrett wrote back to Pearson. “Why the hell was it cremated?”

‘The way it was’

It was a “sunny, pretty day” on May 24, 1996 when Terry Barkley, curator for Bridgewater College library and archives, loaded a few plastic bins into his car’s trunk, climbed into the driver’s seat and headed north to Harrisonburg.

The drive up route 11 to the crematorium wouldn’t take more than 10-20 minutes. “It was right there on the main drag by JMU.” He’d called in advance and let them know what he needed.

When he arrived they sent him around to the back. The crematory operator was leaning against a car, eating a sandwich and smoking a cigarette. They unloaded the boxes from the trunk.

In the boxes were bones. Some nearly a thousand years old, from half a dozen sites in Virginia, Arkansas and Tennessee. One box contained the complete skeleton of the infant from the Lewis Creek Mound. Two dozen bones from a burial mound in Tennessee had been mixed in with the infant's remains before the boxes were brought to Harrisonburg.

Barkley says it was not his decision to cremate the human remains. As the curator he reported to Ruth Greenawalt, the longtime director of the library at Bridgewater.

He doesn't remember exactly who made the decision. "But I wouldn't have gone to a funeral home in Harrisonburg on my own, you know, unless I was instructed to. So it was either the president or it was my boss, but it probably filtered down from the top."

Barkley doesn't remember whether he waited or went home then came back to pick up the boxes of ashes. But he did bring them back to the college.

Since retirement, Barkley's written 8 books, mostly local histories. He wrote about an enslaved woman who was burnt at the stake in colonial Lexington and about the final stand of the University of Alabama's corps of cadets in the Civil War, which concluded with the Union Army burning down a large portion of the campus.

Did it bother him as a curator trained at Harvard University that he was transporting human remains to be cremated? The cremation was carried out

five years after NAGPRA required the protection and repatriation of those bones. Did he feel bad mixing the remains and destroying them?

“Well, I did, but if memory serves there was no other alternative,” Barkley said in a phone call on May 28, 2023 from Tuscaloosa.

“At the time, I don't recall anybody wanting the bones,” he said. “Anybody. And it's kind of the way it was. But we knew that we didn't need to have them on hand. And we figured, ‘Well, if we can't have them in this form, we'll cremate them, and then we'll keep the ashes so they'll still be on hand, they'll just be in a different format, so to speak. So that's the way that was.’”

Barkley says the Bridgewater remains were part of a large and strange collection of materials of dubious provenance that the college was not sure what to do with about the time that Barkley left his role in 2005 to go care for his ailing father in Alabama after his mother died.

“Andrew inherited this mess,” Barkley said, speaking Andrew Pearson, the director of Forrer Learning Commons at Bridgewater.

That mess was the Reuel B. Pritchett museum, which for many years occupied a space beneath the college's auditorium in Cole Hall. The museum's holdings were Pritchett's personal collection, given to the museum by Pritchett himself, as well as additional gifts received over the years, including the Lewis Creek Mound infant skeleton.

“There were some real fine pieces in there that Reuel Pritchett had collected. Especially from churches of the Brethren and things like that. But then a lot of it was just like borderline junk. Yeah, it's like 50 pairs of salt and pepper shakers and crap like that.”

Barkley said the veracity of the sources of many of the items Pritchett himself brought to the museum was shaky at best. Some of those items were human remains Pritchett found on his own or that others had donated to him personally, and others like the Lewis Creek Mound infant skeleton were donated to Bridgewater in the decades following the Pritchett Museum's establishment.

Barkley didn't remember hearing anything about the Lewis Creek Mound specifically. But he did remember the infant skeleton. It was the only complete skeleton in the collection.

*

Bridgewater College cremated the remains of more than just the Lewis Creek Mound's one-year-old Monacan skeleton, according to their own records submitted to NAGPRA in 2015.

They cremated human remains from sites in at least five counties in three states:

- Human remains, including 23 unspecified bone fragments and associated funerary objects from an "unknown location" in Washington County, Tennessee, were cremated with the Lewis Creek Mound infant skeleton.
- Human remains (11 human bones) and associated funerary objects from the "Jones Cave," possibly the Jones Saltpeter Cave near Ewing, Virginia, in Lee County, were cremated. Before cremation, these remains were mixed with:
- Human remains from an "unknown location" in Jefferson County, Tennessee, including 26 human bones, including fragments of skulls, pelvis, thigh bones and arm bones;

- Human remains including at least two, and likely three, Native American human bones, including a fragment of a broken femur, from a spot near Fisher, Arkansas, in Poinsett County, Arkansas; and “possibly,”
- A deer antler from a Native American grave in Cliff Cave (or Cloff Cave) in Cumberland County Tennessee.

A hand passes over the ashes you have become.

Words are spoken, some that may sound almost familiar, and voices that stir like water over river stones.

Have they found me? They are so close. Am I coming home?

Then they are gone.

Committed to compliance?

In January 2022 several members of the Monacan tribe visited Bridgewater and said prayers over the box of remains of the cremated infant.

Andrew Pearson would not respond directly to questions about the Lewis Creek remains. Abbie Parkhurst, the vice president of marketing and communications, would only confirm that the college is in the process of negotiating a claim by the Monacan people. “The Monacan Indian Nation has formally requested the repatriation of specific human remains and other culturally affiliated items within the College’s possession,” Parkhurst wrote in a May 17 email.

“Bridgewater College is committed to fully complying with NAGPRA regulations,” Parkhurst wrote.

But Bridgewater College has been out of compliance with NAGPRA since 1996, when they mixed remains from multiple burial sites, and then cremated those remains.

Melanie O’Brien, manager of the national NAGPRA program, was asked in a May 12 email if there is any legitimate reason for remains to be destroyed, cremated or otherwise materially changed.

“No. Again, if remains and artifacts are subject to NAGPRA, the only option is to repatriate under the Act,” she responded. “Any other action outside of NAGPRA is a failure to comply with the Act.

“A failure to comply with the Act is a civil violation. If the action that occurred ... is a sale, use for profit, or transport for sale or profit, this may be a criminal violation.”

Seventeen months after the Monacans saw what was left of the infant skeleton taken from the Lewis Creek Mound, the box still sits in a vault beyond the archive room.

PART THREE — Whose bones are these?

“As I stood by the opened mound and looked on the large number of human bones thrown out with dirt excavated and others protruding out of sides of bank around the excavation, I asked myself, ‘Whose bones are these and from whence, and how came they here?’”

The Rev. David F. Glovier wrote this as part of an essay for The Staunton News Leader's May 17, 1932 edition.

The chaos of what he saw was not the first time what has come to be called the Lewis Creek Mound had been disturbed.

There were also brief moments when the mound was protected.

Lewis Gibson, a man whose life straddled the turn of the 20th century, worked for decades on the farm where the mound was located. In 1857 Jacob Myers bought the farm. According to what Gibson told Glovier, "Mr. Myers sought in every way to protect and preserve this mound. One one occasion when some bones were discovered on top of the mound, he hauled dirt enough to cover them from sight. This was about the year 1870."

Sometime around 1894 Gibson made his own discovery at the mound: about four feet above the base he found "a row of skulls laying side by side, and almost against each other, extending in a row running north and south." Gibson told Glovier he thought they were the "skulls of Indians buried in a sitting position looking toward the West."

Euley Glover was next to own and operate the farm. Though he only owned the farm for "two or three years" starting around 1906, he did more damage to it than centuries of erosion and flooding.

Glover repeatedly scraped the rich earth off the top of the mound to use for fertilizer. Lurtle Hawkins, whose father purchased the farm around 1910, was operating it in 1932 when two men, P.C. Manley and George Rusmisse, undertook to open the mound — with the Rev. Glovier witnessing the results of the dig. That foray into the mound in 1932 determined that Euley Glover's

fertilizing efforts had scraped three layers of burials off the crown of the mound.

Rusmisse's credentials were described by the paper as being a man "very much interested in this type of work and (who) has done a considerable amount of it." Manley's qualifications to run a dig were not given at all. Manley promised that the "excavating was not done out of curiosity but from a scientific standpoint... and notes are being made, pictures taken, and drawings made of each discovery, so that a permanent record can be kept of the mound and its contents."

"The entire collection from this mound will be kept intact, he added, and will eventually be displayed in Staunton," according to the paper. No such display happened.

Another third of the way through the 20th century, as the final excavation of the Lewis Creek Mound was underway in 1964, The News Leader reported that all the artifacts from the Manley dig "previously uncovered were sold."

For living Monacans in Virginia in 1932, things weren't that much better. Like their ancestors, their identities were being slowly dug up and destroyed.

An administrator's guide to wiping out a people

From a glass display case filled with examples of pipes, tools and pottery, Resilience and Pride gaze eternally toward the far wall of the middle room of the Monacan Museum on Bear Mountain.

Framed placards display the history of the Monacans as they adapted to the growing colonial presence on their continent: the ampersand-like signature of

Shurenough, King of the Monacans, as it appeared on 1680's Treaty of Middle Plantation; the establishment around 1800 of Oronoco, where they grew tobacco; and the purchase of a large plot of land on Bear Mountain where the tribe established a farming settlement, and where nearly a century later over 250 Monacans lived quietly. Many worked in local orchards; on a sunny day in April 2023 Lou Branham tells the story of how her great grandmother, high up a ladder in an apple tree, realized that her water had broken. She hurried down, returned to her home and gave birth to one of her fifteen children. Then once the baby had been fed and settled down with someone to watch it, she went back to the orchard to continue picking apples.

Monacan children were taught in a one-room schoolhouse on Bear Mountain.

In 1924, Virginia's Director of Vital Statistics, Dr. Walter Plecker, tried to systematically erase the history of tribal people by lobbying the General Assembly to pass the Racial Integrity Act, which prohibited Virginia Indians from marrying whom they chose, and attempted to eliminate recognition of races as anything but "White" or "Black."

Monacans chose to give birth to their children at home rather than have their tribal identity diminished further.

But in the record-keeping rooms of Virginia government, a "paper genocide" was already occurring, said Branham.



By the 1960s when the act was finally revoked and public schools were opened to Indians, the

vital records of thousands of the Monacan people had been changed to wipe out their tribal heritage. This made it difficult for the tribe to find its own members and tell its history using public data when seeking state (and later, federal) recognition.

An exodus from the state had occurred throughout the middle of the 20th century because of Plecker's efforts. Monacans left for more friendly locales such as Pennsylvania, New York, and Canada to the north, and Tennessee to the south.

Through it all, some Monacans remained, choosing to give birth at home so the hospitals would not have control of their birth certificates.

'They walk in two worlds'

The quiet in the museum is broken by a woman coming in. "Are you Lou?" she asks. "I am!" Branham smiles. "It is so nice to finally meet you!" comes the reply, and in flow a group of a dozen visitors from the Lake Monticello area, about an hour away.

Folding chairs are placed in an oval around the room and Lou Branham sits with the group, Resilience and Pride over either shoulder, and talks about all things Monacan.

Like how family lineage is traced along the female line; how the Siouan-speaking people wandered Southeast across the country, following the bison, until they found a home around the Blue Ridge Mountains; how they moved from spear-wielding to bow-and-arrow hunters, and how cultivating corn gave them the stability to grow on both sides of the mountain range.

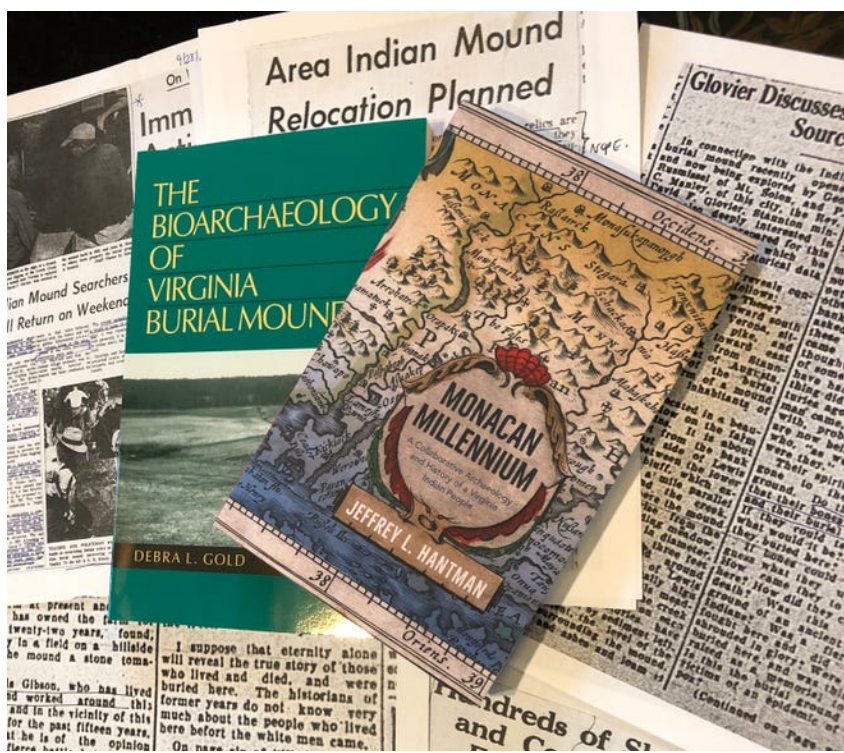
How when Monacan children finally were allowed into public schools in the 1960s, the school bus used to pass by them without picking them up. How Branham, who hosts supplemental Monacan history and culture classes for today's Monacan teens, says of them, "They feel like they walk in two worlds."

One retired teacher wonders if Branham's ancestors lived in longhouses and not teepees. Branham confirms it. Longhouses and wigwams, she says. She also tells the group that the valley Monacans did not have horses, even though most Hollywood depictions of Indians include the warriors on horseback.

If everything Hollywood said about Indians was true, she says to the visitors, "I should be riding buck-naked on a horse! But sure, I would love to have a teepee. A nice teepee by the river."

Even as they prepare for their annual Pow-wow the first weekend in June, the Monacans wait to receive the final word that they will be getting back the remains of the infant taken from the Lewis Creek mound.

That the mound belonged to the Monacan people was well known even in the 1990s.



In 1988 The University of Virginia undertook fieldwork “under a court order issued for the scientific excavation and study of the human remains and requiring the reinterment of those remains with the Monacan Tribe of Virginia,” according to a paper in *American Antiquity* published in 2003 by Gary H. Dunham, Debra L. Gold and Jeffrey L. Hantman.

Gold’s book *The Bioarchaeology of Virginia Burial Mounds* (2004) is just one of several books and articles written about the Monacan people and their burial mounds in Virginia.

Nevertheless, Bridgewater College Executive Vice President Roy W. Ferguson, Jr. wrote in a 2015 letter to NAGPRA, “None of the remains or associated funerary objects in the College’s possession are culturally identifiable.”

Anyone with access to Google and a minute to spare, even in 2015, would disagree.

“It’s unfortunate to refer to the mounds by anything other than their association with the Monacan people,” University of Virginia Anthropology Professor Jeffrey L. Hantman said in an April 28 interview. “The Monacans today live largely in Amherst County, but their ancestral territory pretty much can be defined by these distinctive burial mounds.”

Hantman’s the author of the book *Monacan Millennium* (2018). In the early 1990s, when Bridgewater’s former curator said the college was unable to determine the owners of any of their human remains, Hantman had already worked alongside NAGPRA reviewers and the Monacan Indian Nation to salvage the Rapidan Mound, which was eroding into the river.

Hantman says the existence of the mounds also helps to dispel the idea that the Shenandoah Valley was somehow devoid of native settlements when the first Europeans began to explore the area.

“At least half of the Monocan mounds had burial populations of one thousand or more, which suggests a span of use of fifteen to twenty generations, or three to four centuries,” he writes in *Monacan Millennium*. The mounds were initially placed in the site of older villages, which shows an even deeper history of inhabitants in the valley.

Hantman was surprised to find out that Bridgewater had cremated the human remains of the Lewis Creek infant. “There is law protecting unmarked human remains, unmarked graves, and that law’s been on the books since the early 1990s.”

What will be done?

In the coming months the Monacan Indian Nation may finally get back the infant remains from the Lewis Creek Mound. Or it may not.

Bridgewater may face repercussions for the destruction of human remains. Or they may not.

If the Lewis Creek infant comes home, it won’t be to Verona and the site of the bulldozed mound. It will be to Bear Mountain and the Monacan land trust, where a reburial mound awaits it.

Lou Branham has indicated that if the child’s remains are repatriated, the Monacans may visit the original mound site for a ceremony after the child is reburied with its people.

Amateur historian Rebecca Jarrett plans to work on an application for a state highway marker on Indian Mound Road. The next round of applications are due August 1, 2023.

She's glad the story of the burial mound and the infant will reach people, and hopes to hear that the Monacans have finally recovered their ancestor. She wonders what the child's mother would think if she knew in her grief that hundreds of years later people would be trying to do the right thing for her child.

There's still a lot of unfinished business, she notes. Not the least of which, she thinks, is some acknowledgment from Bridgewater College that they did serious damage to multiple tribes over 25 years ago.

"An apology is the least that should happen," she said.

"I could go into all the excuses people have for disturbing these sacred places," Prof. Hantman said in April. "They wouldn't have disturbed them if they were white cemeteries."

*

There's a photo in the Monacan museum of one-year-old Kenneth W. Branham.

In this small oval black and white picture of infant Kenneth, tucked into a family album like any photo of a one-year-old might be, like any photo of you or me as a child, the boy's eyes are bright and full of life.

Performing a mental experiment not quite as impressive as the physical reconstruction of Resilience and Pride, looking at the photograph one can almost start to see the face of another one-year-old, the child who lived over 800 years ago in a place not far from where you live, whose remains still are so far away from being home.

At the Bridgewater College visitor's parking area, a minute's walk from where that child's remains are locked up in a vault, a grass embankment leads to a concrete river bed. It guides a small runoff stream through campus to the widening North River. Near the lot, a pedestrian bridge leads visitors over the stream and onto the campus.

Where there's water, and people willing to guide a lost child, there's a way back home.

Read Part One here: 800 year old infant taken from a Verona burial mound may finally come home. With one inexplicable — and perhaps illegal — change.

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Recognize the road name ‘Indian Mound Road’ in Verona? Here's why it got that name.



Jeff Schwaner



This story was updated on July 29, 2023 to add information about a July 18 public notice in the Federal Register.

Recognize the road name ‘Indian Mound Road’ in Verona? Here’s the story behind it—and how an 800-year-old infant may finally be returned to her people.

Verona was once home to a Monacan burial mound.

- *Located on the southeast shore of Lewis Creek, it was at least 45 feet in diameter and over 12 feet high, and contained the remains of hundreds of members of the tribe that made its home around floodplains at the edge of rivers.*
- *A woman told The News Leader in 1930 that if two men rode on either side of the mound on horseback they could see the top of the other's hat over the mound.*
- *The mound was one of the oldest of 13 such burial mounds that archaeology shows were sacred spaces for the Monacan people.*
- *Unlike a common myth about Virginia tribes 'disappearing' before European settlement, the Monacans tended their mounds even to Jefferson's time.*
- *The Monacans are in fact Virginia's largest tribe, one of a handful recognized by the state as early as 1989, and finally recognized federally in 2018.*

Why can't I see the burial mound on Indian Mound Road?

- *The mound was located in land used for farming for generations of European settlers.*
- *At one point near the turn of the century, a farmer regularly scraped earth off the top of the mound to use for fertilizer.*
- *In the 1930s two local men dug into the mound's crown for artifacts and found human remains. The remains and artifacts were to be put*

on display in a Staunton museum, they told The News Leader; but 30 years later the paper was told that all the artifacts had been sold.

- *In the 1960s the state planned to build a new road directly through the remnants of the mound, which had sunk over the course of hundreds of years into the floodplain field, still at that point in private hands. The landowner promised to build a replica of the mound so that the history of the state's earliest people could be preserved. It never happened.*
- *An excavation was quickly organized to remove all the remains and artifacts in the mound. Over 3 dozen intact skeletons were found around the edges of the mound. Most of what was dug up was sent to the Smithsonian.*
- *But one complete skeleton — an infant child thought to be 800 years old, was sent to Bridgewater College, where it was displayed in a museum for nearly 3 decades.*
- *The new road, route 792, was named “Indian Mound Road.” There’s no replica mound or even historical sign to mark the spot where the mound once sat, about 65 feet from the bridge over Lewis Creek, where most cars speed by at 55 mph.*

Why was the infant not returned to the Monacan people in the 1990s when a federal law was passed?

- *Bridgewater was aware of NAGPRA (the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act) which passed in 1990; in 1992 they took the infant skeleton off display at the Reuel B. Pritchett Museum, where it had been on display since October 1964.*
- *A note from that year said they were in negotiations to repatriate the remains. That didn't happen. And then things took a strange turn.*

- *In 1996 the college's curator took the infant's skeleton — and the human remains from at least four other sites in Virginia, Tennessee and Arkansas — to be cremated.*
- *Prior to cremation, they also mixed some of those remains together, meaning that it would be impossible to separate them if, for instance, two tribes from Arkansas and Tennessee tried to claim their remains under their NAGPRA rights.*
- *That information was found by local historian Rebecca Jarrett, who has been researching the mound's history for over twelve years.*

What's next?

- *The Monacans may finally receive the cremated remains of the Lewis Creek Mound infant, though no date is set yet for its return.*
- *On July 18, 2023 a Notice was published in the Federal Register in which Bridgewater released its determination that "There is a relationship of shared group identity that can be reasonably traced between the human remains and associated funerary objects described in this notice and the Monacan Indian Nation."*
- *The remains may be repatriated to the Monacans on or after August 17, 2023.*
- *The infant's ashes will likely be reburied in a mound on the tribe's land on Bear Mountain, near Amherst, Virginia, in a reburial mound created specifically to welcome back the remains of Monacan ancestors.*
- *Bridgewater College has yet to face any disciplinary action for each act of destroying the remains.*

- *Rebecca Jarrett plans on applying for a state highway marker at the site of the Lewis Creek Mound in Verona.*