

WOODLAND

Southeastern archaeologists in the United States generally distinguish the beginning of the Woodland period (ca. 3,200 to 1,050 B.P.) by the introduction and regular use of stamped pottery and increased investment in ceremonial ritual events and mortuary practices. During the Woodland period, the intensification of horticulture, construction of earthworks, and elaboration of artistic expression and burial ritual are all thought to be related to a reorganization of social structure. The Woodland period is further subdivided into three subperiods: Early, Middle, and Late.

Sand-tempered pottery first appears in the area during the Early Woodland period (Ledbetter et al. 2009). The Early Woodland Deptford ceramics were developed in Georgia around 2,800 B.P. out of the Early Woodland Refuge phase and spread north into the Carolinas and south into Florida. Early Woodland ceramic types common within the Okefenokee Basin include Satilla Plain and Satilla Simple Stamped, which are found primarily in the Satilla River drainage and headwaters of the Alapaha River, along the lower Satilla River and south to the St. Marys River estuary. These types contain a blend of fiber and sand as their temper, are thought to represent a Late Archaic to Early Woodland transitional pottery type. Check-stamped Satilla phase pottery (Willacoochee Check-Stamped), however, is not currently known from sites in the Okefenokee Basin as this type may be restricted to the north and west of the interior Coastal Plain (Kirkland and Cook 2007:16).

The Early Woodland period is marked by the popularity of check-stamped ceramics, represented in the Deptford series, and complicated-stamped ceramics with complex, curvilinear patterns known as Swift Creek. Deptford series pottery, dominated by simple stamped with some check-stamped, is found throughout the Okefenokee Basin but in low quantities and associated with sparse chert flakes. This suggests Deptford peoples had limited seasonal use of the area. More permanent occupations are known from large shell middens and a house at Cumberland Island on the lower Georgia Coast (Kirkland and Cook 2007:16). This period also features elaborate burial ceremonialism and artistic expression that is thought to be related to the "Hopewellian Interaction Sphere" (Caldwell 1964), which developed throughout the Southeast and Midwest at this time. Materials associated with this interaction sphere include cut mica, worked galena, copper-covered panpipes, copper ear spools, copper beads, Flint Ridge chalcedony blades, and fine gray-blue flint blades. Swift Creek sites are also limited in the Okefenokee Basin, except for one locale on Trail Ridge with significant quantities of Swift Creek pottery (Trowell 1998a). The low numbers of Swift Creek deposits encountered within the Basin is intriguing given that Swift Creek occupations are prevalent in surrounding areas, including along the Georgia coast, as late as A.D. 850 (Kirkland and Cook 2007:17).

The Middle and Late Woodland periods saw an increase in human occupations attributed to the Weeden Island culture in the Okefenokee Basin based on the presence of larger sites with conical sand mounds beginning ca. A.D. 500. Elliott et al. (1995) described the analytical types associated with Weeden Island assemblages as sand-tempered Carabelle Incised, Carabelle Punctated, Weeden Island Plain, and Weeden Island Red Painted. In many areas in Georgia, Swift Creek ceramics are also found in association with Weeden Island wares. Late Weeden Island ceramic types including Weeden Island Incised, Punctated, and Plain; Carabelle Incised and Punctated; Keith Incised; Tucker Ridge-Pinched; and Wakulla Check-Stamped are found throughout the basin. Villages attributed to the Weeden Island culture appear to have been preferentially placed within oak hammocks and islands within the swamp with a concentration of Weeden Island sites located southwest of the swamp. In the latter half of the Woodland period, the bow and arrow entered into common use. The change in technology allowed greater capability to kill smaller game, but also led to greater conflicts in society as is evidenced by fortifications and mass burials. By A.D. 1000, cord-marked pottery of undetermined cultural affiliation appears in the basin and is commonly located along the eastern rim and within areas of Floyds Island, Billys Island, Jones Island, Hickory Hammock, and Mixons Hammock (Trowell 1998a; Kirkland and Cook 2007:17).