

Though much of this area's agricultural heritage was based on cotton, the boll weevil's ravenous appetite soon made tobacco king. Harvesting and curing tobacco was a family affair, with neighboring families helping each other. At right, "barning" tobacco at the Barham homestead shows an art form of sorts that technology has made extinct.



American Heritage Dictionary defines "enigma" as puzzling, ambiguous or inexplicable.

If a place can fit such a description, that place would be Archer Lodge.

Not unlike any number of places in Johnston County, and indeed all of North

Carolina, when any comedian tells one of those jokes — about how the place they grew up in was so small that "Welcome" and "Ya'll come back" were printed on the same sign — people from Archer Lodge just roll their eyes and say, "Yep, sounds like home."

The planks are gone, and the farms it led to are dwindling, but even the modern-day span over the Neuse River between Clayton and Archer Lodge still represents . . .

# A Bridge To The Good Life

by j. Kessler Eason & R. Carlton Vinson

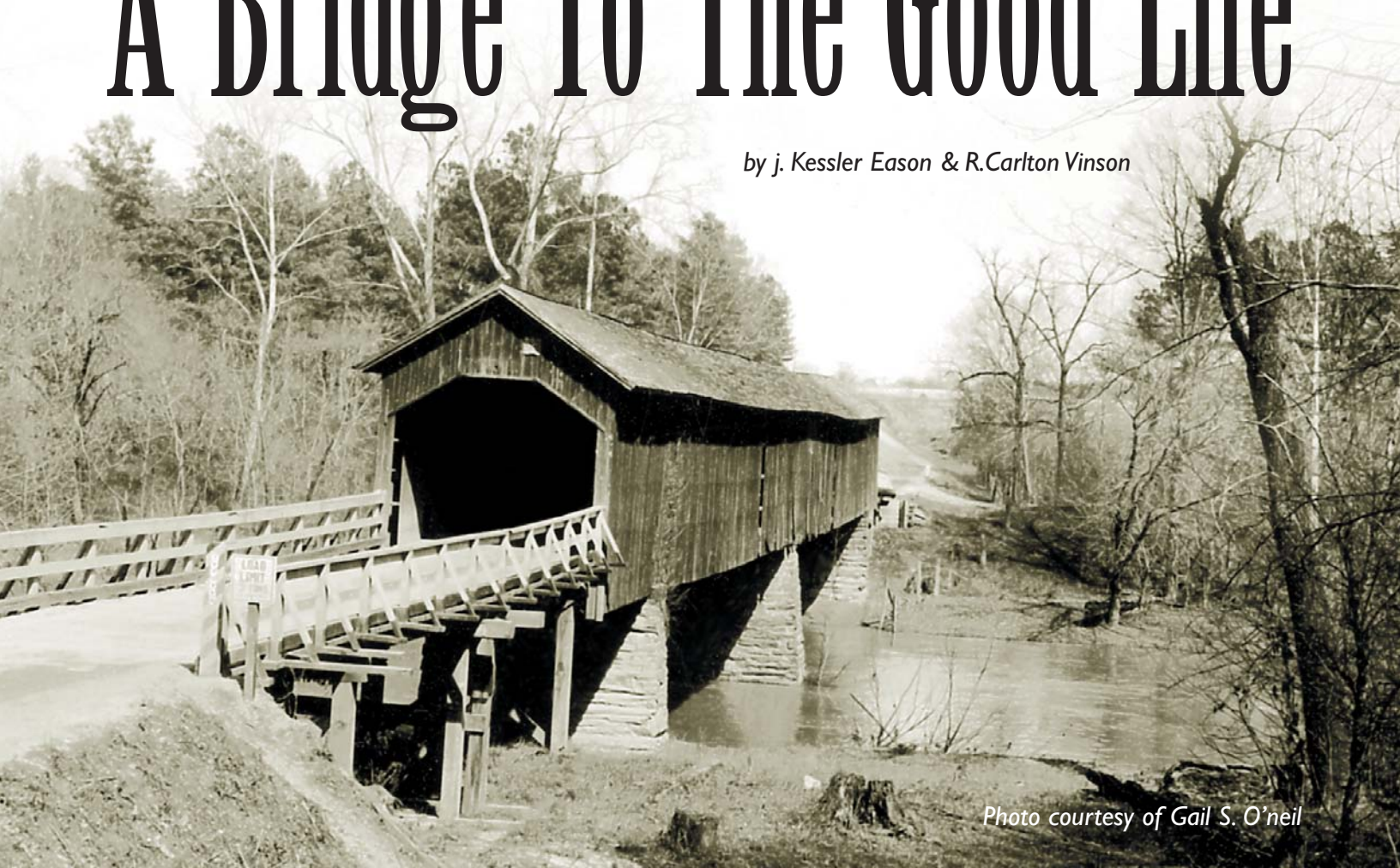


Photo courtesy of Gail S. O'neil

*A look at Archer Lodge history — (1) The first home of White Oak Baptist Church (formerly Archer Lodge Baptist Church) was actually the Masonic Lodge. This building (top photo), completed around 1912, was the first building solely to house the church. (2) The original school building at Archer Lodge was this 2-3 room building that sat on the site of the present day community center. (3) The school building most identified with Archer Lodge was this brick structure completed in 1924. In design much like the school building in Clayton that now houses the Clayton Center, this structure was torn down in 1978. (4) Some individuals shown in this Archer Lodge School photo from the late 20's are still living in the community today.*

Countless variations of that same home town self-deprecation could be apt descriptions for any number of communities in Johnston County, or North Carolina for that matter.

Full of history, Archer Lodge is representative of a time that we all dream about . . . when the pace was a little less hectic

What makes Archer Lodge such an enigma is that it is definitely not a town, yet it is much more than a crossroads. There are no official borders, though the natives will tell you it comprises everything between Wendell and Clayton from Buffalo Creek to the Neuse River.

Even more amazing is that, despite the lack of a city limits and no official government (there is an unofficial mayor elected each year), Archer Lodge and the surrounding area is of the fastest-growing by percentage in the state of North Carolina. Much of that growth is due to the seemingly unbridled expansion of the Research Triangle area, and the “escape mechanism” that drives people out of the city limits and into areas away from the noise and confusion. Well-planned communities such as Riverwood and Flowers Plantation are attracting hundreds of families each year and turning farmers into real estate brokers.

Though some of the generations-deep residents will admit to grimacing occasionally at the influx, they are taking it in stride. Yet one would be hard pressed to find many newcomers who would be willing to trade their new existence for anything.

Beyond the obvious peace, quiet and open space these newcomers hoped for they have discovered something quite unexpected — a warm and gentle spirit of the soul, passed down through the generations in this farming community. Instead of exerting change upon it, they are becoming absorbed in it and enjoying life among neighbors and friends the way they always imagined it was meant to be.

*(Facing page photo) - Covered Bridge Road has its name for a reason. The bridge was indeed one of the last covered bridges in the state of North Carolina. Many local residents still remember when it existed. This is one of the few known photos of the historic bridge. (Photo courtesy of Gail Smith O'Neil.)*





## There Ain't No "S" In The Name

Mild-mannered, forgiving to a fault, and welcoming of the recent influx of new residents, it takes a lot to get under the skin of life-long Archer Lodge natives. But if you want to make their skin crawl, just try calling their home "Archer's Lodge." Chances are your mistake will go uncorrected, but your ignorance will be quietly taken note of.

To prevent committing this faux pas, it is worth while to understand the history of the community.

The proceedings of the Grand Lodge of Ancient, Free and Accepted Masons of North Carolina for the years 1851-1856 record the establishment of a Masonic Lodge, Archer No. 157, at what was then called Creachville, North Carolina on December 6, 1854.

Though many have speculated over the years, no solid evidence has ever been found which identifies the "Archer" for which the Lodge was named.

The lodge building was of stone construction (partially) and was located at the "intersection of Wilson-to -Raleigh and Fayetteville-to-Louisburg Roads." Today this is considered the main intersection at Archer Lodge and is the present site of C. E. (Charles) Barnes Grocery, a modern-day institution in the community.

Colonel Samuel P. Horton was the first Master of Archer Masonic Lodge. Little history, written or otherwise, exists about Horton, but he was a force

in the community. At the time of the establishment of Archer Lodge, he was already serving as the Postmaster of Creachville, a position he held from its likely establishment on May 1, 1851 until W. T. Robertson was appointed in 1858.

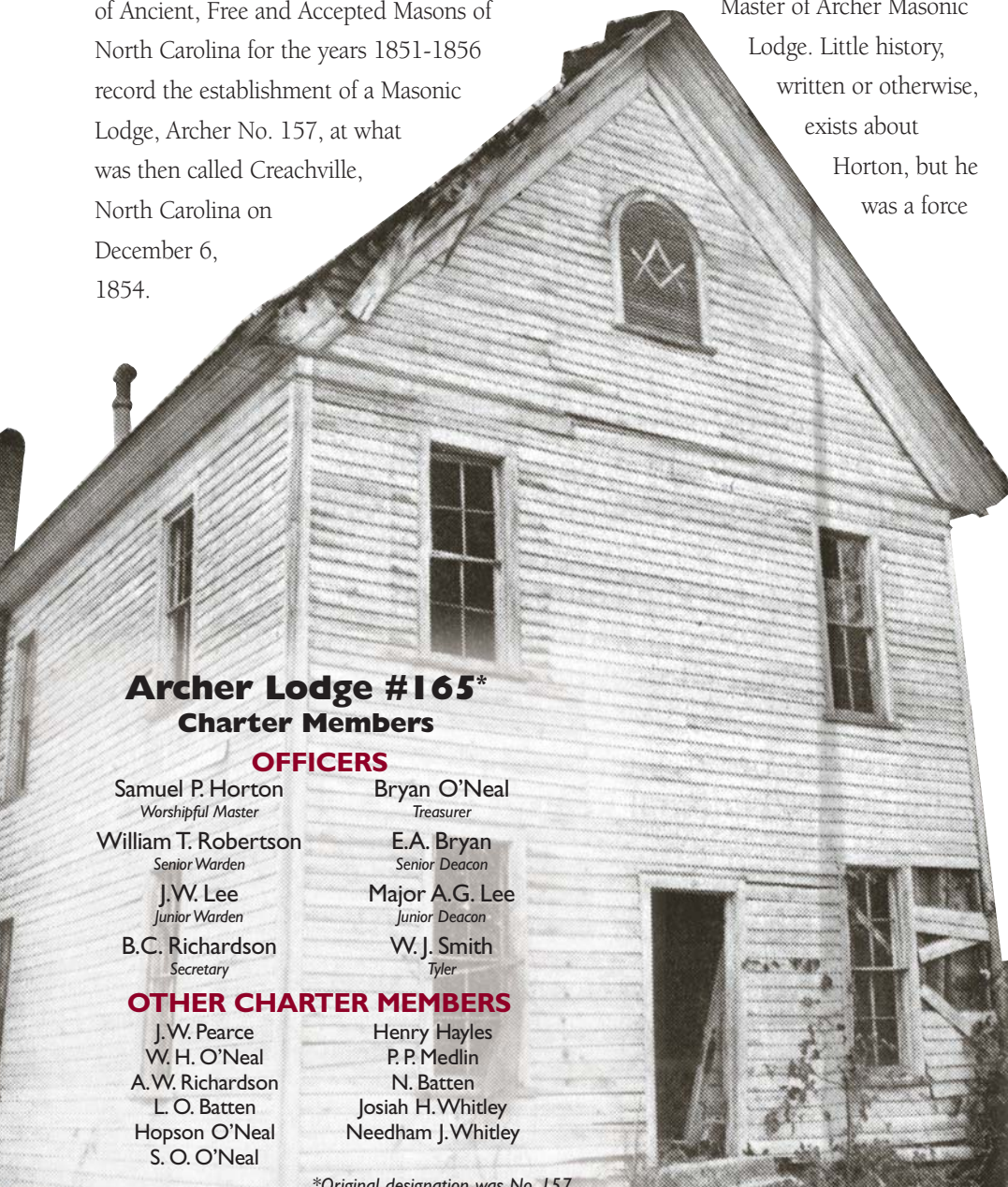
At the end of the Civil War in 1865, Creachville and Archer Lodge No. 157 stood more or less in the path of Gen. William T. Sherman's forces between the Battle of Bentonville and the Union Army's eventual occupation of Raleigh. The Lodge building was razed and the charter destroyed by Union forces during this time. A duplicate charter was issued to the Lodge after the war, but a clerical error resulted in a misnumeration of the Lodge and it was granted the designation Archer Lodge No. 165. Though the meeting place of the lodge was moved to nearby Corinth-Holders community in the 1960s, it still carries the original name.

## Birthing A Church

In 1859, less than ten years after the formation of Archer Lodge No. 165, another entity began sharing space within the lodge building.

The minutes from the Raleigh Baptist Association's Annual Meeting in September, 1959 state: "Petitionary letters were inquired for, upon which a letter from the church at Archer Lodge was handed in and read; and, after due deliberation, on motion, that church was received into our Union, and the Moderator extended to the delegates the right hand of fellowship."

Services for the newly formed Archer Lodge Baptist Church were held once a month in the Masonic



### Archer Lodge #165\* Charter Members

#### OFFICERS

Samuel P. Horton  
*Worshipful Master*

Bryan O'Neal  
*Treasurer*

William T. Robertson  
*Senior Warden*

E.A. Bryan  
*Senior Deacon*

J.W. Lee  
*Junior Warden*

Major A.G. Lee  
*Junior Deacon*

B.C. Richardson  
*Secretary*

W. J. Smith  
*Tyler*

#### OTHER CHARTER MEMBERS

J.W. Pearce  
W. H. O'Neal  
A.W. Richardson  
L. O. Batten  
Hopson O'Neal  
S. O. O'Neal

Henry Hayles  
P. P. Medlin  
N. Batten  
Josiah H. Whitley  
Needham J. Whitley

\*Original designation was No. 157



Lodge Building. Throughout the first 23 years of its existence the church shared space with the Masonic Lodge. Many of its early leaders were also members of the Lodge. J.(John) Robertson, who was listed as one of the first two delegates to the Association Meeting, was an early member of the lodge.

In 1883, the church moved into a permanent home of its own and the name was changed to White Oak Baptist Church, in recognition of the many trees of that variety which adorned the grounds.. In

1910, yet another new church building was completed on the same grounds, one which would continue to house services of the church for nearly 50 years.

White Oak's current home, on the same spot, was dedicated in 1959, celebrating the 100th anniversary of the founding of the original church. Moderate and forward-thinking in philosophy (the first female deacon was ordained in the 1950's), particularly for a rural church, White Oak is proud of its long tradition of its welcoming nature.

"When you join this church, it's like becoming a member of the family," said

John Mark Batchelor, who has served as the pastor of White Oak for nearly ten years.

"I've never experienced a place full of the warmth of Christian compassion such as that which exists here. It's the same spirit that pervades this entire community."

### **Vestiges Of A Bygone Era**

Sadly, many of the landmarks long identified with Archer Lodge are no longer in existence. The brick structure that housed the Archer Lodge School was torn down in 1974. It had opened in

1924, just two years prior to Clayton's school, which was recently renovated and turned into a community showpiece. The Archer Lodge School building might, had it survived to recent times, have been seen as salvageable, like its counterpart.

By that time, however the Archer Lodge School had been closed for well over twenty years and not subject to the regular maintenance which extends the life of any structure. Given the early 1970's struggling economy, a community far less populated than it is today, and the dilapidated condition of the building, the community saw demolition as its only option.

Likewise, the building that housed the very Masonic Lodge which was the community's namesake was, after being vacated in the early 60's, allowed to fall in upon itself, collapsing completely in 1989. To those who understood its importance to the heart and soul of Archer Lodge, it was a slow and agonizing death to watch.

In recent years, the tiny old water tower which served the school, but had survived that demolition thanks to its use by the Archer Lodge Fire Department, was taken down. It sits off to the side of the site today, awaiting some effort at preservation.

Gone too is Talmadge Barnes Grocery, one of the corner stores which not only offered groceries and supplies to the locals, but served as ad hoc community centers and gossip fences. It fell prey to the bulldozer just two years ago.

For those who find comfort in the treasures of the past, however, some rem-



*Owner/Operator Charles & grandson Josh Barnes are among the five generations of Barnes that have manned the counters of stores at the intersection of Wendell, Buffalo and Covered Bridge Roads in Archer Lodge. The letter, dated 1896, is also demonstration of both the existence of a Post Office at Archer Lodge and the store owned by Charles's grandfather Elias G. Barnes, who also served terms as the Postmaster of Archer Lodge.*

# New Schools Sprouted In The Shadow Of Their Predecessor

nants still exist. The building that once housed the Archer Lodge Post Office has served as family home to generations of Thompson children. Inside the house can be found the original cubby holes from which local citizens received mail.

Meanwhile, two country stores still thrive. Complete with everything from Pepsi to plow parts, David Paces Grocery is still the closest thing to an old-fashioned general store as can be found anywhere.

C.E.(Charles) Barnes Grocery still sits in the heart of Archer Lodge, at the intersection of Wendell, Buffalo and Covered Bridge Roads. From his grandfather, Elias, to his uncle, Weldon, and father, Otis, to Charles and his wife Lona Rea, and now son Paul and grandson Josh, a Barnes has been behind the counter of a store at that intersection for over 150 years.

Two remnants of the school still remain. The brick structure that served as home for many of the teachers at the school is still in use as a private residence, while the baseball field on which many a young boy honed his skills still serves as a center of community activity.

Though the heart of Archer Lodge would still be vaguely familiar to most any member of the last three or four generations, travel outward along the many roads that intersect here and the rampant growth would render the area virtually unrecognizable. Archer Lodge is, by most standards, still rural. But the hundreds of homes and thousands of residents that didn't exist here as few as a dozen years ago increasingly require more non-traditional thinking.

**W**hile most people living in the area around Archer Lodge and the Riverwood communities are familiar with Riverwood Elementary and Riverwood Middle Schools, few but the most experienced of locals realize that they are not the first to educate students here. They are merely a rekindling of the same educational spirit that was prominent a century and more ago.

Barnes Crossroads, by which the nearby intersection is known to the locals, was the site of its own school. From 1890 until the consolidation of local programs into Archer Lodge around 1920, students were taught "The Three R's" in a one-room building that stood little more than a couple of hundred yards from the present schools.

Agnes Poole Gay, who attended the Barnes Crossroad School, played the piano for the a dedication ceremony held when the still struc-

turally sound building was moved to its current site on the Johnston Community College campus in Smithfield. "It brought back a lot of memories," said Gay.

The value of education was not lost of Gay, as demonstrated by her whose daughter, Shirley Weaver, who spent her entire career as a teacher in the Clayton schools. 🍌



The original Barnes Crossroads School building now sits preserved on the campus of Johnston Community College.

The Archer Lodge Volunteer Fire Department, founded in 1958 by fathers and grandfathers of many of the men and women who serve the department today, is now in its third building.

For nearly 40 years, the department's responses were primarily to fire call and auto accidents. In March of 1996, the department began assisting Clayton and Wendell Rescue with the establishment of

a First Responder Program.

## "Progressively Rural"

With well over 5,000 people living in the 25 square mile area served by ALFD, the department expects to answer more than 400 calls in 2003.

"When most of our fathers were serving this community, joining the fire department was often no more involved than



*Archer Lodge Fire Department serves a community that covers 25 square miles and numbers more than 5000 citizens. This year the department will answer more than 400 calls.*

showing up to help your fellow farmers save a house or tobacco barn, only with better equipment and some minimum training,” said ALVFD Chief Pete Barnes. “New members are now required to complete approximately 150 hours of training before being placed on active duty, and our department averages approximately 1750 man-hours of training annually.”

Just down the street, on the site of the old school, the Archer Lodge Community Association, still celebrating the completion of a \$75,000 community building, is extremely active in maintaining the sense of pride in Archer Lodge that tradition requires.

Working for the good of the community has traditionally been the role of those in whose families the blood of Archer Lodge runs deepest, but that is changing. Many Archer Lodge neophytes, relishing in the spirit of brotherhood and family values, are jumping on the band wagon.

“You don’t have to listen to us talk for very long to realize we aren’t natives,” said Clyde Maybee, who moved here seven years ago, with his wife, Mary “We immediately found Archer Lodge to be a truly family-oriented community where the people were wonderfully generous in spirit. Our involvement in the church and the Community Association stems from

our desire to see that spirit thrive.”

The annual New Year’s Day breakfast kicks off the community’s year, while the T-ball league helps Archer Lodge cling to a cherished “diamond” tradition.

The biggest tradition for Archer Lodge, however, is the annual Family Fun Day on July 4. The fireworks are the crowning jewel, of course. Put on by the Archer Lodge Fire Department, the display annually rivals that of any municipality in the state, including Raleigh.

But getting to the fireworks is equally as fun. Never letting it be said that a community cannot laugh at itself, the day begins with a Fourth of July parade that features tractors, souped-up cars and pickup trucks, bicycles and, what else but the locally-renowned “lawn chair drill team.”

“We probably have more people in the parade than we do watching it,” said “Mayor” Clyde Castleberry. Speaking of mayors, the annual “mayoral” elections take place in the afternoon, along with games for kids, and the highly-anticipated cake walks and evening talent show.

Many locals anticipate a day when Archer Lodge once again has its own post office. Though it most likely will be a satellite for either Wendell or Clayton, the burgeoning population is likely to require such a move in time.

Though not in the heart of Archer Lodge, Riverwood Elementary and Riverwood Middle have, for three years, seen students attending class on this side of the old Covered Bridge. Another elementary school will open in the fall of 2003 on Buffalo Road on land less than three miles from the site of the old school building.

“There’s a lot of pride in seeing children attending class out here again. In some ways it helps many of us regain a sense of the past we lost when the Archer Lodge School closed,” said Jake Barnes, a multi-generational Archer Lodge fanatic, who with his wife, Sally, also ran a former Clayton institution, Clayton Flower Shop. “All of this growth is overwhelming sometimes, but I believe that the people who move here will come to learn about our history and be as proud as we are to tell someone they’re from Archer Lodge.

And how will Jake know when they truly feel that sense of pride? “Easy,” he said, “When I hear them tell someone else, ‘There ain’t no “S” in the name.’” 🍑

*History fanatic Joseph Kessler Eason is a multi-generational Archer Lodge native now living in Clayton. At 86, he is a former member of Archer Lodge No. 165 and a current member of Granite Lodge No. 91 in Clayton. He has spent more than 20 years researching local history as well as extensive genealogy studies on area families.*

*Carlton Vinson is also a multi-generational native of Archer Lodge and is publisher of Riverwood Today. His father was a past master of Archer Lodge No. 165.*

*Agnes Poole Gay, Mary Lou Barnes, Jake Barnes, Gail Smith O’Neil and Charles Johnson are all proud Archer Lodge natives who contributed photographs or information for this article.*