N.C. Native American Place Name Data

The UNC School of Information and Library Science initiated the N.C. Digital Gazetteer research project, led by Professor Ryan Shaw. This research is based upon expanding the Gazetteer created by renown UNC history professor William S. Powell, using additions, datamining, and other tools to produce an updated final product that is useful and educational for the public. This project focused on Native American place name data in North Carolina. We reviewed maps both modern and old, used SPARQL Wikidata queries to pull information, datamined from textbooks/documents, and used Open Refine to scan through the existing Gazetteer. We discovered interesting patterns of physical drifting of bodies of water and other geographic features as depicted on maps over the early colonial period, as well as language drift within the use of English writing over the early colonial period to the present. Anglicization of places with original Native American names or word origins occurred frequently. Hundreds of Native American place and geographic feature names are found in the updated Gazetteer. These additions include each entry’s WikiData id, county, alternative labels, feature type, and other forms of alternative data that was typically absent in the much older William S. Powell Gazetteer. The Native American place name data is just one dataset of many potential data additions that could be added in the future fulfilling the vision and the promise of earlier Gazetteer.