N.C. Native American Place Name Data
Contributing to a Digital Gazetteer of North Carolina

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Background

The NC Gazetteer research project was initiated by the UNC School of Information and Library Science and is currently led by Professor Ryan Shaw. The purpose of this research project is to iterate and improve off the original William S. Powell NC Gazetteer for a final product available for public use. This group focused upon research efforts to catalog North Carolina place name data of Native American origin. The goal is to improve the quality of the developing NC Gazetteer and help preserve historical place name data of North Carolina's Native American peoples.

Methods

The methods of collecting Native American place name data focused upon reviewing maps, datamining text/book documents, using SPARQL Wikidata to query for data, and using Open Refine to scan and sort through the existing gazetteer to determine sources to improve upon. One area of focus was upon historical maps. An example is the 1760-1770's Collet map currently part of the North Carolina collection:

SPARQL Wikidata Query

```
1  SELECT ?place ?placeLabel ?placeDescription ?coordinates ?image
2  #defaultView:Map
3
4  WHERE {
5      ?place wdt:P31/wdt:P279* wd:Q4022;          Q4022; = Wikidata ID for river
6
7      wdt:P131 ?northcarolina ;                   What defines a river? When is a river a creek, or a stream?
8      wdt:P625 ?coordinates .
9                                                  Inconsistency was a major problem we faced
10     ?northcarolina wdt:P131 wd:Q1454 .
11
12     OPTIONAL { ?place wdt:P18 ?image . }
13
14     SERVICE wikibase:label { bd:serviceParam wikibase:language "en" . }
15 }
```

Potential Future Development

Exploration of the shifting boundaries of bodies of water may prove to be a beneficial addition to the gazetteer. Not only could this help establish context to the existing data over a historical timeframe, but it could also reveal potentially hidden Native American data place names through comparison of now Anglicized water features with their currently replaced Native American names. Further conversation and review of historical place name knowledge with N.C. Native American subject matter experts, such as Meherrin, Haliwa-Sapponi, Cherokee, and other tribal members, is also essential.

Conclusions

The process of collecting sources, then comparing, adding and contrasting them to the CSV file based off the original William S. Powell gazetteer is a team effort that significantly contributes toward a digital gazetteer of North Carolina. Two additional takeaways:

1. When observing maps or any geographic depiction of NC one must remain mindful that physical objects/localities organically drift over time. Examples are the Haw and Cape Fear Rivers that have drifted miles from their earliest mapped locations. Such drift can result in confusing or conflicting source information.

2. Some difficulty is experienced querying with SPARQL Wikidata due to inconsistent naming conventions and identifying data. An example is when querying for rivers, all N.C. rivers may not be identified since some rivers are not classified as such if the river's name doesn't contain the word "River," or if the database contains incomplete or improper classifications.

Contributors

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