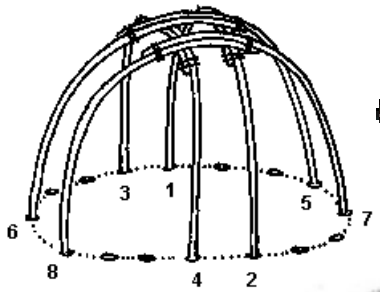


PitHouse
Wigwam

PIT HOUSE

The Yuchi pit house is built by constructing a standard basket type wigwam in a pit that is about 18 inches deep. The upright sappling supports are woven and bent over in arcs spaning the pit with their ends placed in a shallow trench dug around the outside of the pit. Cane footers are woven around the base to hold them in place. More horizontal supports are woven around the structure and then it is covered in woven cane mats and bark. Finally the dirt taken from the pit is backfilled around the outside walls. In the winter sod was sometimes place on the roof for insulation. A small tunnel portico is built over the doorway. Larger versions, sometimes with thatched roofs were built for the communal building. Yuchi wigwams were not only built semisubterranean, but were usually square or nearly so, often about 15-20 feet on a side. While the wigwam in round, square and longhouse varities was used throughout the Eastern Woodlands, only the Yuchi built them semisubterranean. Beds and tables were made around the walls on raised platforms.

The pithouse is one of the oldest Native American building types. It uses earth berming; this will result in houses cooler in summer and warmer in winter. Above grade (meaning above the ground) a framework of wood poles would support mats and a sod roof. Only in recent years has the modern world rediscovered this concept of literally building with the Earth. It works. And a skilled designer can integrate this technique perfectly with passive solar strategies. The Solar Hemicycle House in Wisconsin is probably the single best example, although many buildings reflect the good common sense of building with the land.

Yuchi Tribal Archive ---DKH

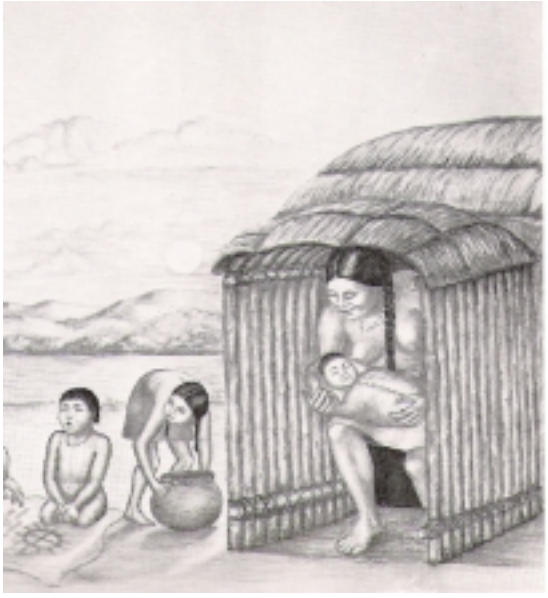
Yuchi Pithouse Wigwam -- A Diagnostic Element of the Yuchi Cultural Footprint

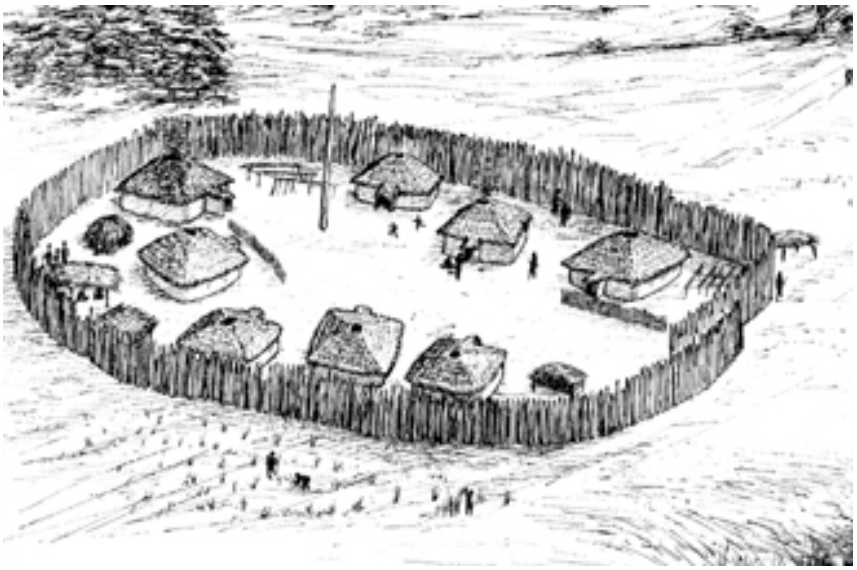
The Wigwam is a fairly simple construction which utilizes small trees or saplings which are bent over and lashed togther to form a framework over which bark or woven mats are tied. The basic idea was used throughout North America with a wide variety of subtle variations. While round designs are most common, they were also built square or rectangular and could be quite long multifamily units. One temperature accommodating design was to build them semisubterranean, that is to dig a pit and build the wigwam in the pit and then partially backfill the walls with the earth -- forming an earthlodge. A less deep version is the pithouse wigwam where the pit rarely exceeded a foot or two deep.

Various tribes had differing traditions on the exact manner to build a wigwam. More subtle variations on the theme might include posts rather than bent saplings, or trenches rather than post holes for setting the frame uprights. The variations, subtle or more pronounced, can often help identify the people who constructed the dwelling.

In the Southeast most differences in construction of the wigwam were fairly subtle, but one people the Yuchi continued the ancient practice of using pithouse construction right up to Contact time. Because they were the only Eastern Woodlands people to so, this forms a very diagnostic trait for identifying Yuchean village sites, and Yuchi houses within a more cosmopolitan site. The use of Pithouse design may link the Yuchi to early roots here as the designs real heyday was thousands of years ago. The only other people to use pithouse design this late were tribes in the far west.

The Mandan Earthlodge was a fully semisubterranean pithouse. The Yuchi wigwam rarely incorporated a pit more than a foot-and-a-half to two feet deep and so are not really semisubterranean -- though they have oft been so described. Other subtle design features such as a trench with a footer lathe rather than just post holes wall anchors is often noted, but the pithouse design is highly diagnostic of Yuchi use here in the Southeast. Like most wigwams in the Southeast, the Yuchi wigwam was usually rectilinear rather then round, and while most family houses were rather squarish, a village usually had one larger, rectangular big house for communal use. Yuchi villages usually had a pallasaded wall around the houses to provide protection from mauraders.





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