Pre-colonial Western South Carolina
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      In the mid-18th Century, when written history began for Laurens County, the area was often described as a wilderness that had ancient forests without the clutter of undergrowth, large savannas, rivers of cane, and bountiful wildlife. Putting aside the hype that accompanies all land developments, the area was probably very beautiful and bountiful. However, this was not the primeval state of the area. With the development of large-scale agriculture by Native Americans the 11th and 12th Centuries, the nature of the land began changing in dramatic ways. Before agriculture, the land would have been covered overwhelmingly by ancient forests. Native Americans began clearing fertile river bottomland for planting maize, beans, and squash. They harvested lumber to build their homes and burned forests to make them more productive. To allow their agricultural fields to restore fertility, they allowed fields to go fallow for years and then burned the new growth. This practice most likely resulted in the growth of River Cane during the fallow periods. Periodic burning of the forests discouraged growth of sapling trees and allowed explosions of herbaceous plants and grasses. All these changes increased wildlife populations and may have attracted some non-native species such as Bison, Elk, and Passenger Pigeons.

      With the development of large-scale agriculture, Native American populations increased, and construction of larger villages and cities was made practical. To maintain political harmony, the centers of population were usually spaced more than a hundred miles apart. The "between-areas" were sparsely populated and used for buffer zones and hunting grounds. In the mid-18th Century, the western Piedmont of South Carolina was such a between-area. Today, many Native American artifacts are found in Laurens County, but very few are from the 18th Century.

Figure 1. This constructed image illustrates what early pioneers may have seen in western South Carolina.