

HAS VOLUNTEERS CONTRIBUTE TO THE FROST TOWN PROJECT, AGAIN!

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In 2016, before Prewitt and Associates, Inc. (PAI) and the Texas Department of Transportation (TxDOT) began the data recovery investigations at the historic Frost Town-Barrio del Alacran site (41HR982), the Houston Archeological Society (HAS) expressed their desire to assist the project in any way possible. Originally, the plan was that volunteers would assist by screening excavated fill from selected archeological deposits and features to help recover artifacts that would otherwise be lost. The agreement also allowed HAS members to assist PAI archeologists in limited hand excavations. Over the next three years, the HAS followed through with their commitment, and their members contributed more volunteer effort than we ever could have imagined.

During the Pre-Demolition Phase of data recovery, in the summer and fall of 2016, HAS members came out in force. Despite the intense heat and humidity that summer, HAS volunteers always showed up with smiles on their faces and ready to work. This effort was discussed in a past issue of *The Profile* (see October 2016, Volume 5, Issue 9, pages 5–7). Due largely to HAS efforts, the project was able to recover a very large artifact sample from three key areas in Block D of old Frost Town. Most of their effort was spent sifting through fill excavated from the yard area of the Steiner household, which was occupied primarily by Irish and German immigrants from the late 1830s until about 1917.

Participation in 2016 was outstanding, but the HAS involvement did not end there. During the downtime in 2017 between data recovery phases, HAS members continued to sift through stockpiles of machine excavated, artifact-rich deposits. They also assisted TxDOT with recording a brick-lined cistern found while monitoring a sewer line trench through Frost Town. Then, when PAI returned for the final Post-Demolition data recovery phase in 2018, HAS members again answered the call for help. Most of the HAS effort this season was spent sifting fill from five brick-lined cisterns. However, HAS volunteers also hand excavated a unit to recover mid-nineteenth-century artifacts within the stratified layers of a deep gully deposit discovered in Block F.

Here are some important numbers that summarize the scale of the volunteer effort by the HAS membership in 2016, 2017, and 2018:

- 2,542 = the total number of HAS volunteer hours spent working at Frost Town
- 317 = the total number of HAS volunteer person-days spent working at Frost Town
- 73 = the total number of calendar days when HAS volunteers worked at Frost Town
- 68 = the total number of HAS members who worked at Frost Town

These numbers are.... well, pretty darned amazing!! When the HAS commits to a project, they are truly dedicated to the effort and they follow through in a big way. I think the HAS has set a new state record for volunteer hours expended by a local archeological society to assist in a Cultural Resources Management project!

Through the volunteer agreement with TxDOT, the HAS has also received some benefits in return for their efforts. Some HAS members used their volunteer hours to help meet their annual obligations as Texas Archeological Stewards under the Texas Historical Commission's stewardship program. The HAS also gained

several new members who joined so they could participate in the Frost Town archeological project. To keep the society informed, the authors presented periodic updates and programs on the Frost Town project at the HAS monthly meetings. Promoting their involvement in the Frost Town project through their website and newsletter, the HAS has certainly enhanced its brand name, solidifying their status as the most dynamic and active local archeological society in the State of Texas!

The table below is a more detailed summary of the volunteer effort by the HAS membership to assist in the Frost Town Archeological Project:

CATEGORY	2016, DURING PHASE I	2017, BETWEEN PHASES I AND II	2018, DURING PHASE II
Months in the Field	July -- November	January and May	March -- August
Total No. of Volunteer Hours	1140	377	1025
Total No. of Volunteer Days	142	47	128
No. of Calendar Days Worked	36	11	26
No. of HAS Volunteers per Day	3 to 16	4 to 12	4 to 14
No. of Days with 10 or more HAS Volunteers On Site	13	3	12
Locations of Machine-Excavated Fill Screened by HAS Volunteers	HAS Areas A, B, C, and D (Steiner House) HAS Area E, NW Corner of Block D HAS Area F, NE Corner of Block D, under MKT Railroad tracks	HAS Areas C and D (Steiner House) NE Corner of Block D, HAS Area F Under MKT Railroad tracks Cistern F865 Deep Gully F801/F804	Cisterns --- F13, F23, F33, F1092, and F1112 Deep Gully F801/F804
Locations Where HAS Volunteers Assisted with Hand Excavations	Cistern F584 (wooden barrel)	none	Deep Gully F801/804

The sheer volume and overall importance of the diagnostic artifacts recovered by the HAS is even more amazing than the extent of their volunteer effort. In any large archeological project, archeologists employ some form of sampling strategy because they simply cannot hand excavate everything and recover each and every artifacts. For the Frost Town project, which in size and scope is the most intensive historic archeological investigation ever completed in Houston, the HAS work allowed us to increase our artifact samples in some key areas that otherwise would not have received as much attention. All of the archeological deposits selected for HAS screening were chosen because they would contain functionally and temporally diagnostic artifacts that can be associated with various time period and households, thus augmenting PAI's sampling strategy. The recovery of diagnostic artifacts from these contexts far exceeded our expectations in every way. In our future studies, these materials will help enrich the stories of the many people who called Frost Town or Alacran home.

In just one example illustrating how a couple of mid-twentieth-century artifacts can become quite important because of their archeological context, HAS volunteers recovered many hundreds of artifacts from the brick-lined cistern (F13) that was built by the Klee family, who were German immigrants that came to Frost Town in the mid-1850s. The cistern was probably built at that time, but it was used to capture and store water well into the twentieth century. The cistern was located directly underneath the Elysian Viaduct roadway, and it appears that it was abandoned and filled in with nearby debris during or shortly before construction of the elevated roadway in the mid-1950s. The fill inside the cistern includes artifacts from all time periods, but it is dominated by twentieth-century artifacts, many dating to the 1930s and 1940s. Among the artifacts recovered from this cistern are an iron button with a stamped anchor design that is probably some type of Merchant Marine button, and an iron disk that is stamped “TODD / GALVESTON / 1318 / DRY DOCKS.” The latter item has been identified as an employee badge issued to a worker at the Todd Galveston Dry Docks, a large shipbuilding company that operated under this company name from 1934 to 1949. These two marine-related artifacts apparently belonged to someone with ties to the shipbuilding industry, and archival research on the block where this cistern is found seems to have revealed this person’s identity. Houston city directories from 1945, 1949, and 1951 identify the tenants at 93 Spruce Street as Peter (Pedro) & Julia Ambriz. The 1945 city directory listed Pedro’s occupation as “Shipfitter.” This connection lends a strong human element to a couple of small artifacts found buried at Frost Town.



Some of the HAS Team at Frost Town

In closing, we would like to say THANK YOU to each and every one of the HAS members who came out to help us at Frost Town, whether it was for one day or for 25 days. And yes, if you are wondering, some HAS members did indeed volunteer for 25 days or more over the last three years. And special thanks to Bob Sewell and Linda Gorski for organizing the HAS volunteers, to Larry Golden for supplying us with artifact identifications and reference citations, and to Louis Aulbach for always sharing his vast knowledge of Frost Town history with us. Louis also participated in most of our videotaped oral history interviews with former Alacran residents and descendants of Frost Town residents.

We also send out a special THANK YOU to some folks who helped out with archeological work in other locations near Frost Town. Louis Aulbach and Sandy Rogers volunteered while we were digging our deep trenches in the Arsenal Block in June 2018! Linda Gorski, Bob Sewell, Louis Aulbach, and Larry Golden spent a cold, wet, and muddy day in January 2018 working along the north edge of Buffalo Bayou doing an emergency salvage documentation of railroad track remnants that were exposed when the water dropped to its lowest level in many years. Turns out, these railroad tracks were part of the old Bayou City Cotton Compress. The track was only exposed for a short time during a rare super low tide, and it disappeared beneath the bayou’s murky waters once again within days of being documented. HAS’s ability to quickly mobilize and complete this effort became even more valuable as the tracks were subsequently buried by tons of rock rubble that was used to shore up the edge of the bayou where the new Elysian bridge is being built. Salvage documentation of these railroad tracks, as well as the society’s endless commitment to helping out whenever and wherever they are needed, perfectly illustrates HAS’s dedication to relentlessly preserving the heritage of their community and state.

Photo Gallery



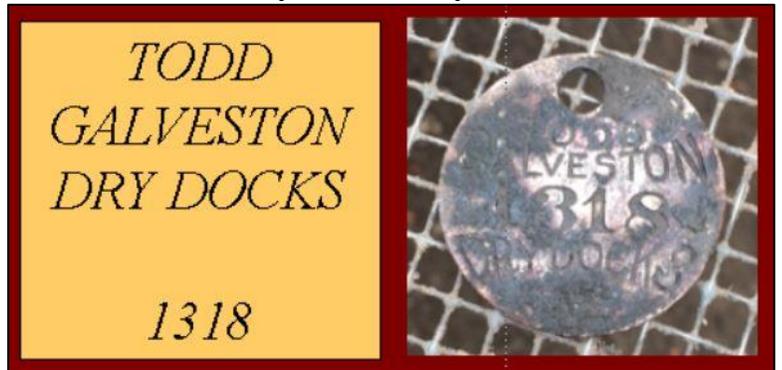
Some of the A Team



Llewyn Pharmacy Bottle



Larry Golden, Doug Boyd, and Jason Barrett examine a bottle



Galveston Dry Docks Badge



Henderson and Walton backstamp and front design



Plastic Poodle Charm



Todd Galveston Dry Docks Badge



“Cheaters” Dice



Sorting washed artifacts



Washed artifacts drying in the sun



Porcelain “Mother Gosse” figurine



Example of marbles recovered from Frost Town



Lamar Hotel Key Fob (Front)



Lamar Hotel Key Fob (Back)



Some of the A Team screening



View of one of the screening areas



Beth Aucoin working the on-site lab



Sharon Menegaz works the on-site lab



Larry Golden and Liz Coon-Nguyen
examine a recovered bottle



Boxing up the final set of artifacts