Thursday, November 21st, 2019, at 6:30 p.m.
“Dumped and Forgotten: Civil War Artifacts Under the Milam Street Bridge”
Joshua Farrar

The November meeting of the Houston Archeological Society will be held on Thursday, November 21st at 6:30 p.m. at the Trini Mendenhall Community Center located at 1414 Wirt Road in West Houston. HAS member and current Texas A & M University doctoral student, Joshua Farrar, will present a program highlighting activities in Houston during the Civil War entitled Dumped and Forgotten: Civil War Artifacts Under the Milam Street Bridge. The meeting is free of charge and open to the public.

Buffalo Bayou has connected Houston, Texas to Galveston Bay and the Gulf of Mexico since Houston’s founding in 1837. During the American Civil War of 1861-65, Houston served as a storehouse for weapons, ammunition, food, clothing, and other supplies destined for the war effort in Galveston and the rest of the Confederacy. Near the end or soon after the Civil War ended, Confederate material supplies were lost or abandoned in Buffalo Bayou under the Milam Street Bridge in Houston.

In 1968, the Southwestern Historical Exploration Society (SHES) recovered around 1000 artifacts with an 80-ton dragline crane operated off the Milam Street Bridge. About 650 artifacts from this collection were recently rediscovered in file boxes at the Heritage Society at Sam Houston Park and processed and catalogued by members of the Houston Archeological Society. Josh Farrar is writing his dissertation on this collection which is entitled The Milam Street Bridge Artifact Assemblage: An Artifact and Document-Based Study and Presentation of Lessons-Learned Concerning the American Civil War and the City of Houston, Texas. This dissertation explores Houston’s Civil War past. As part of his dissertation research, Josh conserved the Milam Street Bridge artifacts at the Texas A & M Conservation Lab for a museum exhibit at the Heritage Society Museum at Sam Houston Park entitled Dumped and Forgotten Below the Milam Street Bridge which utilized the Milam Street Bridge Artifact Assemblage as a centerpiece for exploring Civil War-era Houston. Some of these artifacts are currently on display at the Bullock Texas State History Museum in Austin.

This presentation serves as an artifact and document-based study using newspaper accounts, sworn statements, and archaeological reports to reconstruct the history of the Civil War in Houston and of the Milam Street Artifact Assemblage – from abandonment in the bayou to rediscovery at the Heritage Society at Sam Houston Park. Through document and GIS map analysis, three theories are proposed and critically analyzed concerning how and why these artifacts were lost in Buffalo Bayou. Issues and ethical stances surrounding the documentation, preservation, conservation, and continued collections management of historical artifacts are presented based on lessons-learned during work on this artifact assemblage.

Josh Farrar is an Instructor of Anthropology at Blinn Community College and Lecturer/PhD Candidate at Texas A&M University. Additionally, Josh is an officer in the Texas Army National Guard and a member of the Houston Archeological Society. Josh lives in Bryan, Texas with his wife and two daughters.

Our monthly “Show and Tell” display will begin at 6:30 p.m. and will include a display of Civil War artifacts recovered in the Houston area. The meeting will begin at 7 p.m. Please join us! If you have any questions about this meeting, please contact HAS President, Linda Gorski, at lindagorski@cs.com.
President’s Message – Linda Gorski

Bridging the Gap

One of the greatest challenges facing Texas Archaeology, and for that matter global archaeology, is the rapid pace of destruction of archeological sites. Some of this is done by the advancement of civilization with the construction of new roads, shopping malls, and home sites. But the vast majority of the destruction of prehistoric sites comes at the hand of individual collectors who wish to find “relics”, either for their own personal collection or to sell for profit. Texas, like many but not all states, has a long history of private property rights. Excavation conducted on private property, with the consent of the landowner, is a legal activity. State and Federal lands are strictly protected and excavation for artifacts can only be done legally with a state or Federally issued permit. However, just because an activity is legal, does that make it right?

At the August meeting of the HAS Board of Directors, we had a very animated discussion regarding collectors and how their activities should be treated within the Houston Archeological Society. Both sides of the argument were aired with the value of information being lost weighed versus the value that private collections have brought to archeological research. What we agreed upon is that the Board is unanimously against the willful destruction of archeological sites (meaning the information and knowledge contained therein) as well as the commercialization of artifacts for profit. These values are reflected in our revised proposed society “Pledge.

The issue of collecting artifacts versus archeological excavation is unfortunately not a simple black-and-white subject. If it were, it would be much easier to address. But like many things in life, the subject of collecting artifacts has many shades of gray involved in it. First of all, many of the icons of Texas professional archaeology started off as collectors, usually surface hunting for artifacts when they were young. This hobby led each of them to an increasing interest in the science, which then led to their desire to get advanced degrees and focus their life on trying to extract knowledge rather than just artifacts from sites.

Moreover, even professional archaeologists periodically buy artifacts or collections to aid them in their research and/or to save them from being lost. For example, our own HAS member Dub Crook and his colleague Mark Hughston, purchased two large collections from the families of deceased members of the Dallas Archeological Society to (1) save them from being broken up and sold on eBay by relatives who could not have cared less about them, and (2) because they were also filled with maps, field notes, draft papers, etc. which greatly aided them in their research on the East Fork of the Trinity River. Another example is what Dr. Mike Collins did regarding saving the famous Gault site in Central Texas. In order to save the land that the Gault site is located on, Dr. Collins purchased the property out of his own pocket and look at the valuable information that those efforts generated. Even the State of Israel condones the buying and selling of artifacts (“antiquities”) as long as it conforms to their rigid code of laws governing the business. So, the purchase of artifacts and/or collections in itself can clearly be a beneficial activity to science.

Part of the problem between collecting artifacts and archeology as a science has been the wholesale condemnation of collecting by some professional archeologists coupled with the lack of effort to do anything to “bridge the gap” between the two sides.

A problem with labeling all collectors as something akin to the devil is that by and large, most of the collecting community obey state laws which allow for the recovery (by any method) of artifacts as long as it is done on private property by the
land owner or with the land owner’s permission. While there are people who do break the law either by sneaking onto private property without permission or by collecting on State or Federal lands, the vast majority of collectors in our state are law-abiding citizens. And this includes people who sign up for the so-called “pay digs” which are also legally operated. In this regard, avocational or even professional archeologists are not granted “Police Status”. It is not our job to condemn others who are collecting in a state-sanctioned legal manner.

A number of the HAS Board members now participate on the Facebook forum known as “Texas Chert”. We do this for two reasons: (1) so we can monitor what is being found and where which otherwise would be unknown to archeology, and (2) to periodically try and step in and educate the people on the forum about archeology and archeological methods. In participating in “Texas Chert”, we have learned two things about the artifact digging and collector community. First and foremost, there is an immense air of distrust regarding archeologists. Despite being constantly told otherwise, most collectors believe that archeologists are solely out to “take their artifacts away”. There are horror stories, mostly false, about archeologists having the police seize private collections so the collecting community is openly wary and there is little to no trust between the two sides. Secondly, the collectors’ major complaint when they have asked archeologists to come to their property is that the artifacts are taken away, studied, and then stored in some Indiana Jones-type warehouse never to see the light of day again. Additionally, they complain results of the excavation are either never published or if they are, they (the collectors) cannot understand any of the reports when they read them. To them, the artifacts should be displayed and the information more widely dispersed rather than in some obscure report in a scientific journal. In this regard, the collectors are often correct and failure to publish or communicate the results is one of the major failings in archeology today which is why we have inserted “timely publication and sharing of data obtained from excavations” into our revised Society pledge. This is also why our Journal editor endeavors to publish every paper he receives in less than a year from its receipt.

The archeological community also needs to recognize the immense value that some collections can provide. Admittedly, gluing artifacts on a display board with many sites represented in a single frame and all provenance lost is not very helpful. But collections like that of the late Mr. Andy Kyle which we have been privileged to work on for the past two years have provided a veritable treasure trove of new information about the prehistory of Southeast Texas. Because Mr. Kyle carefully kept his collection from each site separate, we have been able to gather a lot of information from a wide range of sites that collectively is beginning to give us a much better picture of the archeology of Southeast Texas. When all is said and done, which could be years from now, the Texas archeological community will greatly benefit from over 30 peer-reviewed papers from just this one collection.

So, what avenue is left to us as both the leadership team and members of the Houston Archeological Society? I would argue that we need to practice more patience and understanding of where the collecting community is coming from and earnestly try to “bridge the gap” between the true avocational side and the collecting side. We, your leadership team, need to more frequently demonstrate the value that can be gained from careful, controlled excavations of a site. We need to demonstrate the immense amount of scientific knowledge that can be teased out of a single artifact rather than just placing it on some frame as a perfect “G-10” relic. We need to continue to educate more through our monthly programs, the Newsletter, and the Journal, what true archeological science is all about. We need to instill the desire to pursue knowledge to every member of the society and to the general public as a whole. And as for the membership of the HAS, we WANT you to participate more fully in what the HAS has to offer. Ask more questions from the knowledgeable members. Participate in the society’s activities. Come out and join us in an excavation. If you have a question about an artifact or the function of artifacts, bring it to a meeting and ask during the social period before the program starts. Ask as many questions as you want, and we promise we will give you the best answers we can and help steer you to materials that will help you learn more.

None of the above is an easy proposition and it will require time and patience on everyone’s part. But this is the path I believe we should focus on with the goal of everyone learning and becoming passionate avocational archeologists. I am willing to “Bridge the Gap”. Will you join me?
Welcome New Members and Guests to our meeting location at Trini Mendenhall Community Center (Bob Sewell representing Linda Gorski).

Treasurer’s Report (Bob Sewell): If any member is interested in more information about HAS finances, please see Bob.

Membership (Bob Sewell): As of tonight, our membership totals 244, with one new member being added.

HAS Hats: HAS hats are still available for a $10.00 donation. Only green and blue hats are left.

New Business:

Publications (Dub Crook): Journal #141 came out in Sept 2019, with extra copies distributed tonight. It’s the last one for this year, making a total of 4 publications for 2019. 2020 has 4 special reports planned, as well as an initial publication for the year spotlighting Western US archeology. There will be an issue dedicated to Texas archeology slated for later in the year as well.

Monthly Show and Tell (Larry Golden): Tonight’s display comprises artifacts from McFaddin Beach. Next month the display will be Civil War era artifacts, to accompany the presentation topic for November.

Projects and Events

Emergency Salvage Archeology Project at The Arboretum (Bob Sewell): Initial work began on 10/12. Further work being scheduled includes 2 workdays a week throughout October.

San Felipe de Austin (Bob Sewell/Sarah Chesney): Lab work is being conducted in October. Further testing/excavation are planned for 2020. Sarah Chesney spoke briefly regarding upcoming activities planned for San Felipe. A lab morning is planned for Sunday 10/22. A short project is planned for November in honor of the festivities surrounding Stephen F. Austin’s birthday. Large scale Phase 3 excavations are planned for the Spring, along the Northern aspect of the site, to last 6 weeks and lead up to the TAS Archeology 101 Academy in May.

Lone Oak Site in Frelsburg, Texas (Bob Sewell): The site has been registered and now has a trinomial designation, 41CD168. Artifact processing is underway.

Kleb Woods Nature Center (Ashley Jones): We will again participate in the “Diggin Old Stuff Day” on Saturday, November 2. Both adults and children will be digging with us.

Saturday, October 19th is International Archeology Day at HMNS. Please volunteer to help that day! Set up is at 8:00 a.m.

Saturday, October 26th: Larry Golden and Louis Aulbach will be at the Baytown Heritage Festival, with Bob Sewell at the San Jacinto Battleground. Volunteers welcome.

Dr. Jason Barrett announced that TA calendars are now available for purchase at $10 each.

November program: Joshua Farrar will present “Dumped and Forgotten: Civil War Artifacts Excavated from under the Milam Street Bridge in Houston”

Program tonight: Dr. Dan Worrall will present a program entitled Hunting Bison While Fleeing Sea-Level Rise: A Map Based Synthesis of Southeast Texas Prehistory.”

- Beth Kennedy, Secretary
Notes on Munitions: The Percussion Cap
By Tom Nuckols

The percussion cap was a single-use (designed to be used once and then disposed of) form of ignition for percussion lock equipped muzzle-loading firearms and percussion revolvers.

Percussion caps were made of either brass or copper and were shaped like a small cup. The closed end of the cup contained the primer, a shock-sensitive explosive material such as fulminate of mercury.

In operation, a percussion cap was placed over the hollow metal nipple on a gun barrel. When the gun’s trigger was pulled, it released the hammer that struck the percussion cap, igniting the primer. Flame created by the ignition of the primer traveled through the hollow nipple and ignited the gun powder charge inside the gun barrel (Figure 1).

Credit for the invention of the percussion cap is somewhat obscure, with claims having been made by a long list of English, French, German and Swiss inventors. Joshua Shaw (1776–1860), an English born American immigrant, is generally given credit for inventing the first percussion cap in 1814, although some historians no longer consider this a valid claim. Shaw patented the percussion cap in America in 1822.

The percussion cap was widely used by the 1830s, and eventually displaced the flintlock ignition system by the 1850s. During the American Civil War muzzle-loading guns equipped with the percussion cap ignition system were the predominate type used by both the North and South. By the late 1860s, center-fire cartridges made the percussion cap ignition system obsolete.

Percussion caps were made in two sizes, large and small. Small percussion caps were called “common caps” (Gooding 2019) and used on civilian owned muzzle-loading firearms, such as rifles, shotguns, pistols, derringers and percussion revolvers. Large percussion caps were called “musket caps” and were used on muzzle-loading martial firearms, such as muskets, rifled muskets and rifle muskets (Figure 2).

A common cap had plain or ribbed walls. Ribbed walls allowed the cap to split on firing, which loosened the spent cap on the nipple requiring little effort to extract it. Sometimes caps simply fell away when the pressure of the hammer was removed after the gun had been fired.

A musket cap had a rim or flange at the open end and four equidistant splits on the walls. The splits on the walls kept the cap from sticking on the nipple after the gun was fired and the rim or flange was a gripping point for the shooter’s fingers for removal if the cap failed to fall away when the hammer was lifted after firing.

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1 Percussion revolvers, sometimes called cap and ball revolvers, were both a civilian and martial arm. They were used extensively by both the North and South during the American Civil War. For a depiction of how a percussion revolver works, see Nuckols (2014: 68-70). Available for download here: http://www.txhas.org/PDF/reports/powell/The%20Elizabeth%20Powell%20Site%20Report%20Number%2025%20Part%203%20Indexed.pdf.
2 Musket caps were also called “four flanged caps”, “winged caps” or “top hat caps” (because of their resemblance to a tiny version of a man’s top hat).
3 Muskets had a smooth barrel bore. Rifled muskets were muskets that later had their barrel bores rifled. Rifle muskets were rifles that looked like muskets but were manufactured with a rifled barrel bore.
4 Because of their parallel ridged and furrowed sides, ribbed wall caps were sometimes referred to as corrugated wall caps.
Percussion caps recovered from historic archaeological sites in the Houston area. A musket cap on the left and two common ribbed wall caps. Photo: Moore Archeological Consulting, Coastal Environments, Inc.

References

Aquila Services Group

Gooding, S. James

Nuckols, Thomas L., Elizabeth K. Aucoin, Richard L. Gregg and Robert T. Shelby
One of the distinguishing characteristics of virtually all projectile points in North America from the Pleistocene (Paleoindian period) is the intentional dulling (smoothing) of the lower lateral edges by grinding. In addition to the lower edges, the bases of many early points are also ground, although often not to the same extent as the lateral edges. This tradition extends to virtually every point type and to every part of the continent. Moreover, the process also extends in time past the end of the Pleistocene (ca. 11,12,000 B.P.) and is seen in both Late Paleoindian points and some Early Archaic projectile points before largely disappearing. So the question is why did the early indigenous inhabitants of North America practice edge grinding, what purpose did it serve, and why did it then die out as an accepted technique?

First, what do we mean by “edge grinding”? Grinding is a technique of abrading the edge of a stone tool for the purpose of removing its “sharpness.” This results in an edge that is frequently smooth to the touch. Edge grinding (or smoothing) is different from minor abrading of biface edges for the purpose of flake platform preparation. Specific grinding, sometimes described as smoothing or polishing, was most commonly done along the lower lateral edges on the proximal end of the point where hafting most likely occurred. Grinding extended only about a third the length of some points and as much as 50 percent or more on other types. While edge grinding is a common trait among all Paleo points, the length and degree of edge smoothing varied from individual point to point.

So the real question is ‘why did they feel it necessary to do this?’ For years it was generally assumed by most archeologists that lateral grinding was performed to protect the binding or sinew wrapping that held the point firmly in a wooden haft from the sharp edges of the point. However, this theory is not supported by the successful use of non-ground points and tools throughout prehistory all over the world. The vast majority of Archaic points have little or no edge grinding. Experimental evidence has shown that un-dulled edges of stone projectile points do not appreciably damage sinew wrapping during tests designed to induce breakage in simulated use. Nonetheless it is possible that early knappers perceived the practice was necessary to avoiding reduced haft integrity.

A more recent theory suggests that lateral edge grinding was performed to facilitate the insertion and extraction of the point base into the socket haft of an atlatl dart. In this regard, grinding would remove any high spots on the edge of the point allowing it to be inserted further into the foreshaft, assuming points were inserted into socketed foreshaft and not directly into the end of the dart. Removing high spots on the lower edges would also reduce stress concentrations on the edge of the point thus improving the hafting process. It is also possible that the tradition of edge grinding was a leftover tradition that persisted past the point of transition from socketed foreshafts to non-socketed hafting of points.

How was edge grinding accomplished? It appears from microscopic examination of a number of Paleoindian projectile points that a wide variety of methods and materials were used to accomplish smoothing of a sharp edge. Probably the most common method was simple abrading the point’s edge against a hard rock such as quartz, quartzite, or even a well-cemented sandstone. Micro-scratches can be seen on some projectile points suggesting a simple back-and-forth rubbing action against a hard surface. However, in the case of some Clovis points, edge smoothing was accomplished by using a red ochre abrasive indicating that the process may have had some special spiritual meaning.

Was lateral edge grinding practiced elsewhere outside of North America? The practice of edge grinding is not an exclusive North American tradition. First, it is important to point out that many of the European and western Asian projectiles throughout the Upper Paleolithic to ca. 10,000 years B.P. were composite points made with small inset bladelets, not the single hafted stone projectiles associated with North American Paleo-Indians. Although not employed nearly as much as in the Americas, edge grinding was performed to various degrees on Upper Paleolithic stone tools in Europe. Roughly one-third of Solutrean Laurel Leaf points do exhibit some edge grinding on their proximal end.

The practice of lateral edge grinding on points persisted into at least the initial part of the production of stemmed points in both the Late Paleoindian and Early Archaic periods. Many Texas Early Stemmed (Wilson) and Early Archaic dart points (Hoxie, Gower, Carrollton, Trinity, etc.) have extensive edge grinding. In these early stemmed projectile points, the edge grinding is generally limited to the lateral edges of the stem and sometimes to the base of the point. By the advent of the Middle Archaic (ca. 6000 B.P.) the practice of edge grinding all but disappears.
Lateral edge grinding on Paleoindian projectile points was very nearly a universal practice in North America, to the extent it is used by archeologists today as a discriminating attribute in defining and identifying points of the period. The reasons for the practice are still uncertain. Although the method was used outside of North America in the Upper Paleolithic, it was not used as extensively as on this continent. At the present time, there is no real definitive answer as to why projectile points were ground and then why the practice ceased to be used. Was it a perceived mechanical advantage to prevent breakage of the point or of the binding? Was it to facilitate hafting into a foreshaft? Why was the practice first used and then abandoned during the Archaic? All of these are questions that still need to be answered.

Illustration of various hafted Paleoindian projectile points. Note how smoothing of the lower lateral edges of the point might have prevented breakage of the binding material.
Folsom points from the Kincaide Rockshelter in Uvalde County. Note the small dots on the illustrations which mark the uppermost part of lateral edge grinding. This is one of the ways archeologists signify that the area below the dot has been ground smooth. (Illustration from Texas Beyond History)

Note the series of small dots around the stem on the Wilson point of the left. This is another other way archeologists signify the presence of edge grinding.

In older journals, the areas which have edge grinding are signified by the dashed lines.
International Archeology Day Report

In 2011 the American Institute of Archeology established the third Saturday in October as International Archeology Day. For the past several years the Houston Archeological Society has celebrated the day at the Houston Museum of Natural Science, sharing our love of archeology with the public and Saturday 26th October, 2019 was no exception. Thanks to a team of volunteers from HAS and several other professional and avocational archeological groups, IAD 2019 was a huge success!!!

Ashley Jones (r) talks to visitors about soil stratigraphy

Sarah Chesney discusses ceramic reconstruction

Geoff Mills explains the prehistoric artifacts display

HAS and TAS member Jenni Kimbell looks after the TAS booth

Our good friend, Chris Ringstaff (TXDoT) was on hand demonstrating flintknapping skills

Tom Nuckols, Erin Phillips, and Gus Costa enjoy staffing the CEI/MAC display
Outreach Activities

HAS members represented HAS in two outreach activities on Saturday 26th October, 2019.

Baytown Heritage Festival

Larry Golden and Louis Aulbach were at the Baytown Historical Preservation Association’s Heritage Festival in Baytown. They had a display of artifacts that Larry and his father recovered from the mudflats at the site of the town of San Jacinto.

San Jacinto Battleground

Meanwhile, Bob Sewell, Liz Coon-Nguyen, Charlie Gordy and Will Howard presented a display of more artifacts from the San Jacinto townsit at the San Jacinto Battleground. Professional archeological firm CEI/MAC also had a display of munitions from the battleground site.

The Usual Suspects: (l-r): Katelyn Shaver (THC Education/Interpreter), Tom Nuckols (CEI/MAC), Nick Bourgeois (CEI/MAC), Liz Coon-Nguyen (HAS), Bob Sewell (HAS), Charlie Gordy (HAS), and Will Howard (HAS).
Archeological Society
Monthly Meeting Programs for 2019
6:30pm Third Thursday of every month (except June)
Trini Mendenhall Community Center, 1414 Wirt Road

December 2019 – Linda Gorski - Overview of HAS Activities for the year 2019

January 16, 2020 – Dub Crook – Update on Peopling of the Americas

February 20, 2020 – Dr. Sarah Chesney – Update on the San Felipe archeological survey

March 19, 2020 – Gary Pinkerton – Trammels Trace

April 16, 2020 – Jeff Girard – The Caddos and Their Ancestors

May 21, 2020 – Amy Borgens – Boca Chica shipwreck

June – Normally no meeting. If members want a meeting and our June date does not conflict with field school week, Louis and Linda will give a program on Constantine’s Rome

All Houston Archeological Society meetings are free of charge and open to the public. For more information about HAS then visit our website at www.txhas.org or email lindagorski@cs.com. You can also join our Facebook page at https://www.facebook.com/groups/123659814324626/

Please submit articles for publication to The Profile Editor Bob Sewell at newsletter@txhas.org. Please submit articles for the December issue no later than 23rd November.
FOR MORE INFORMATION ON ARCHEOLOGY IN THIS AREA, CONTACT THE FOLLOWING:

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