

Her Group Finds Artifacts that Reveal Texas History

by Lindsay Peyton, *Houston Chronicle*, December 17, 2013



When the Texas Department of Transportation recently needed help sifting through a mountain of sand hiding hundreds of prehistoric human artifacts, staff archeologists knew exactly where to look. The Houston Archeological Society jumped to their aid, offering to search through the sand at the Dimond Knoll site that TxDOT discovered while paving the way for the Grand Parkway. And society members offered to transport the dirt to an adjacent property, allowing more time and more people to join the effort.

Once the artifacts, which included pottery shards, stone weapons and pieces of bone, were unearthed, society members brought their finds to the Montrose home of the group's president, Linda Gorski. Gorski regularly hosts "lab nights" at her home. "I've got a great big kitchen," she said. "We wash the artifacts and then spread them out on a table with microscopes." When members are not gathering for discussions at Gorski's house, they meet regularly in the Archeology Lab in Sewall Hall at Rice University to process artifacts and other collected or excavated materials. The group also offers regular lectures, open to the public, at St. Thomas University on the third Thursday of each month.

The society started in 1959. "It's the oldest in Texas," Gorski said. "We have both professional and avocational archeologists who are highly skilled." Gorski has been involved in archeology for the past 38 years. "And many of our members are even more qualified," she said. "They've just been doing this for such a long time." She makes it her job to stay in the know about historic sites in the area. "We are pretty plugged into what's happening in the city of Houston," Gorski said. That's how she found out about the TxDOT site and made the call to offer her organization's assistance.

Society members have been screening the sand from Dimond Knoll since February. The recovered artifacts from the topsoil date from the Late Prehistoric, as well as Middle and Late Archaic periods, while artifacts recovered from a deeper level date to Early Archaic and Late Paleo-Indian (7120-6650 BC) periods. "This is one of the oldest sites in Harris County," Gorski said. "It's literally rewriting the prehistory of this area." The organization's help was essential in uncovering important data, according to Jason Barrett, environmental specialist for TxDOT, serving in the archeological studies program. "The Houston Archeological Society can best be understood and appreciated as an extraordinarily diverse group of dedicated volunteers, each with vastly divergent professional backgrounds and life experiences, but with a singular, shared passion for discovering the rich history of their community and of the surrounding region," Barrett said. He was impressed with the organization's expertise.



"Very few Houston Archeology Society members are employed professionally as archaeologists, but many have more field experience - particularly in terms of the number of sites they have helped excavate - than most of the professionals I know," Barrett said. The group's members have worked alongside professionals for decades on excavation projects across the state, engaging in fieldwork on many weekends as they investigating sites.

Recent projects have included metal detection at the San Jacinto Battlefield and at the San Felipe de Austin State Historic Site in Austin County, where Stephen F. Austin established his colony in 1823. Members have been working on projects in an area stretching from Galveston Island State Park to Liberty County. "Each archeological project we work on and each artifact we recover gives me a new and exciting glimpse into the history of Houston, Harris County and Texas," Gorski said.

Recent finds include a dart point that dates to the Paleo-Indian period, and a Mexican bayonet that had not seen daylight since 1836. "These artifacts make history come alive - and that's what keeps me digging in the dirt every weekend," Gorski said.

All of the nonprofit's archeological surveys are performed under the guidance of professional archeologists from various groups. The society provides professional archeologists with research, surveys and assessments. The organization speaks at area schools and gives presentations to civic groups, professional organizations and regional archeological societies. The group is seeking new members. "Anyone who is interested in actively researching and preserving the history of Texas would find a home in the Houston Archeological Society," Gorski said. "Being a member of the Houston Archeological Society provides an opportunity to dig up the history of Texas in controlled and monitored excavations - one trowel full at a time."