

NEWSLETTER

of the

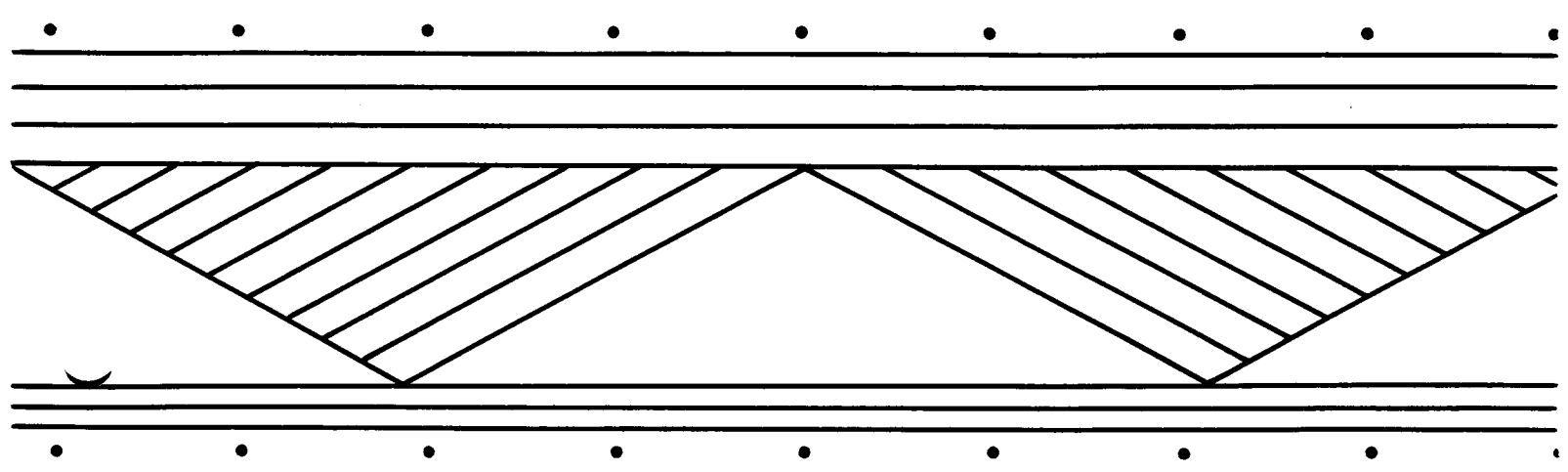
HOUSTON ARCHEOLOGICAL SOCIETY

Number 20

February 1967

"The Indians (as I shall call them), the savages or red men of the forests and prairies of North America, are at this time a subject of great interest and some importance to the civilized world; rendered more particularly so in this age, from their relative position to, and their rapid declension from, the civilized nations of the earth. A numerous nation of human beings, whose origin is beyond the reach of human investigation, - whose early history is lost - whose term of national existence is nearly expired -"

--- George Catlin, Esq.
(From Catlin's Letters and Notes
on the North American Indians - 1891).



The Newsletter is published four times per year by the Houston Archeological Society. Contributions of news items, short articles and information of archeological significance should be sent to the Editor - Alan R. Duke, 1706 Oaks Drive, Pasadena, Texas 77502.

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Officers 1966-67

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Houston, Texas
Sec.-Treas. - Frank J. Brezik, Jr., 1301 Walton Street
Houston, Texas
Directors - Alan R. Duke
William Fullen
William Caskey

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Front Cover

George Catlin was sincere in his belief that the prehistory of the "red men" was forever lost. The science of archeology has made it possible to peer into the past and trace the progress and origins of these "savages".

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Past and Future Programs

December 1966 - Lawrence Aten spoke on "Classification and Typology of the Artifacts from the Jamison Site"

January 1967 - Dr. Charles Bollich lead an interesting discussion on upper Gulf Coast archeology and presented several hypotheses for consideration.

Alan Duke spoke briefly on observations on the provenience of projectile points on the Gulf Coast and Richard Zingula showed microphotographs of tempering material in pottery and presented the theory that in some cases the "tempering" materials were natural occurences in the clay used.

February 1967 - Burney McClurkan T.A.S.P., will discuss several salvage sites.

March 1967 - Richard Ambler, Executive Director, T.A.S.P, will discuss the Wallisville Salvage work.

Nancy Jircik is our new Program Chairman. Please let her know of any potential speakers or items for future programs.

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New Chartering Requirements - Texas Archeological Society

Local societies wishing to join the T.A.S. as chartered members must meet new standards for 1968. Briefly, these considerations are as follows:

1. Twenty five percent of the membership of the applying society must also be TAS members in the year applied for.
2. Ten percent of the membership must have attended a TAS field school.
3. Evidence of scientific standards of practice must be shown to a reviewing committee appointed by the TAS president.

We can start immediately to assure chartered membership in the TAS by getting our individual membership dues (\$5.00) to the new Secretary-Treasurer of the TAS:

C. A. Smith, Jr., 2606 Burlington, Dallas, Texas 75211

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Director's Meeting

Plans for the 1967 annual Texas Archeological Society meeting to be sponsored by the Houston Archeological Society in Houston were discussed. Meeting places, dates, appropriate committees, etc. were reviewed. More on this later. Let your directors know if you would like to serve in some capacity.

Your Editor suggested that the HAS might like to sponsor a symposium on Gulf Coast Archeology this year. It was agreed to bring this up to the membership for consideration. (Note: At the January 1967 meeting, the HAS membership voted to sponsor this symposium.)

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Symposium on Gulf Coast Archeology

Your Editor has been appointed to direct the planning for this symposium. Ardent proponents of this meeting from other areas of the Gulf Coast, fellows like Cecil Calhoun, Charlie Bollich, Virgil Branch and others will be asked to assist in the planning. We want all interested persons to contribute so if you have any good ideas on subject matter, papers, etc. for the meeting please let me know as soon as possible.

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Letters to the Editor

The following letter from Cecil Calhoun is self-explanatory:

205 Candlelight Lane
Port Lavaca, Texas

Dec. 8, 1966

Dear Alan,

In a reprint of a newspaper article from THE VICTORIA ADVOCATE which appeared in the last issue of your newsletter, there was a sentence, "It is believed that 'the moundbuilders,' whose works have been examined near the Guadalupe River south of Victoria, could be the oldest inhabitants of this area." The term, "moundbuilders", was an unfortunate choice of words. There is no valid evidence to date of any moundbuilders anywhere near Victoria. None whatsoever. Some persons, including local Victorians, do believe to the contrary, and, possibly, will never be convinced otherwise. But it seems time that the facts be brought out into the open again, before any more confusion arises and misinformation spreads.

The "works" of the "moundbuilders" undoubtedly refers to several sites situated on elevated knolls and ridges within the floodplain of the Guadalupe River near Victoria. The most well known, and probably the largest of these sites, is the Morhiss Site (or "Morhiss Mound"), south of Victoria. The site was first brought to the attention of professional archeologists by local persons 36 years ago. Some surface collecting and digging had been done prior to this. The site capped a large mound of earth which was assumed to be representative of Mound Builder constructions so common in other localities far to the north and east of Victoria. The terms, "mounds" and "moundbuilders" were likely even more familiar to the public some 30 years ago than they are today, because of the vast amounts of "relics" which were being removed from the earthworks by institutions and undisciplined individuals.

In June of 1932 an extensive test excavation of the site was conducted. The site was described at that time as a "mound --- 610 feet long by 300 feet wide and nearly twenty feet high.". The excavation consisted of "a trench four feet wide and down to hard pan.". The trench cut through the mound "along the short diameter". That same year, 1932, a statement appeared in the BULLETIN OF THE TEXAS ARCHEOLOGICAL AND PALEONTOLOGICAL SOCIETY, viz., "It is very probable that at least one group of the bearers of Mound Builder culture into the Mississippi Valley came up out of Mexico and passed along the Texas coast. The writer hopes to prove that this was the case. He has considerable evidence to that effect already.".

In 1938 to 1940 the site was completely excavated by W.P.A. crews under the supervision of personnel from the University of Texas. This work proved conclusively that the mound is not an artificial tumulus.

The "mound" is simply an isolated remnant of the Pleistocene terrace which borders the Guadalupe River valley locally. Its basal structure is of undisturbed sand and clay of the Lissie Formation, which comprises the most recent terrace of the river in this area. Geologically, it belongs in the category of erosional remnants termed "outliers". More specifically, it is a monadnock. It was probably once part of a high promontory which extended from the terrace into the river's floodplain, and was later cut off from the parent terrace by erosion. As erosion continued, the size of the mound decreased and the terrace retreated from it, until at present nearly $\frac{1}{2}$ mile separates the two features.

A meander of the Guadalupe brings the river within a few hundred feet of the base of the mound. This situation made it a place that was often used as a campsite. And it was, as the extent of the midden deposit atop the natural elevation attests.

Even a cursory examination of the artifact inventory from the Morhiss Site reveals that the "earliest inhabitants of this area" were far removed chronologically from the Mississippian or Woodland peoples. The preponderance of the material is Archaic, and there is also a number of Plainview, Meserve, and Angostura type projectile points.

The first artificial mound between Yucatan, Mexico and the East Texas piney woods has yet to be found. The Morhiss Mound is certainly not it.

References

- Campbell, Thomas N.
1962 Excavations at the Morhiss Site, Victoria County, by the University of Texas, 1938-40. Paper presented at the annual meeting of the Texas Archeological Society in Victoria, Texas, Nov. 3, 1962. Unpublished transcription of a tape recording of this address.
- Campbell, Thomas N.
1963 Excavations at the Morhiss Site, Victoria County, by the University of Texas, 1938-40. Texas Archeology, Vol. 7, No. 1, p. 7. Abstract.
- Pearce, J. E.
1932 The Present Status of Texas Archeology. Bulletin of the Texas Archeological and Paleontological Society, Vol. 4, pp. 44-54.
- Witte, Pat
1965 Excavation Bares Indian History. In, Newsletter of the Houston Archeological Society, No. 19, p. 3.

Houston Lighting and Power Co. Site No. 1 - (41HR72)Alan R. Duke

The time was late April 1836, the place, a small elevated point of land between Peggy Lake and San Jacinto Bay. The Battle of San Jacinto was over the the Mexican Army under Santa Anna had been routed. Casualties among the Mexicans were heavy and their scattered forces were unable to care for the wounded or bury the dead.

It was under these circumstances, so the story is told, that Margaret McCormick, a pioneer resident of the area, contacted General Sam Houston to ask him to do something about bodies in her "front yard" that were creating an air pollution problem. (Harris County Pollution Authorities please note).

Mrs. McCormick had lived in this location with her husband for a number of years before the battle. Her husband, Arthur McCormick, died in 1825 and Mrs. McCormick continued to reside here until 1854 when she died in a fire which destroyed her home. In 1936, the State of Texas commemorated the frontier family by placing a granite and bronze marker on the site.

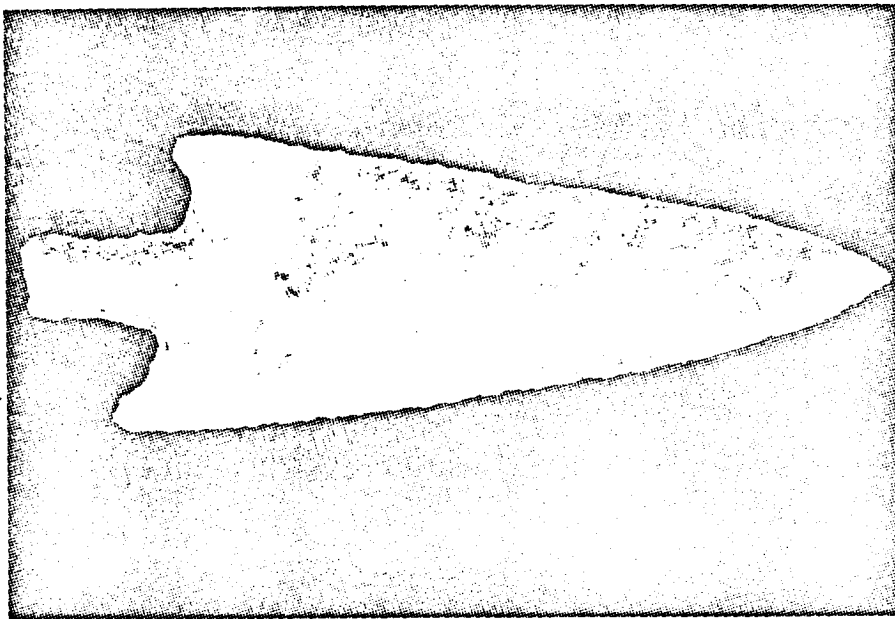
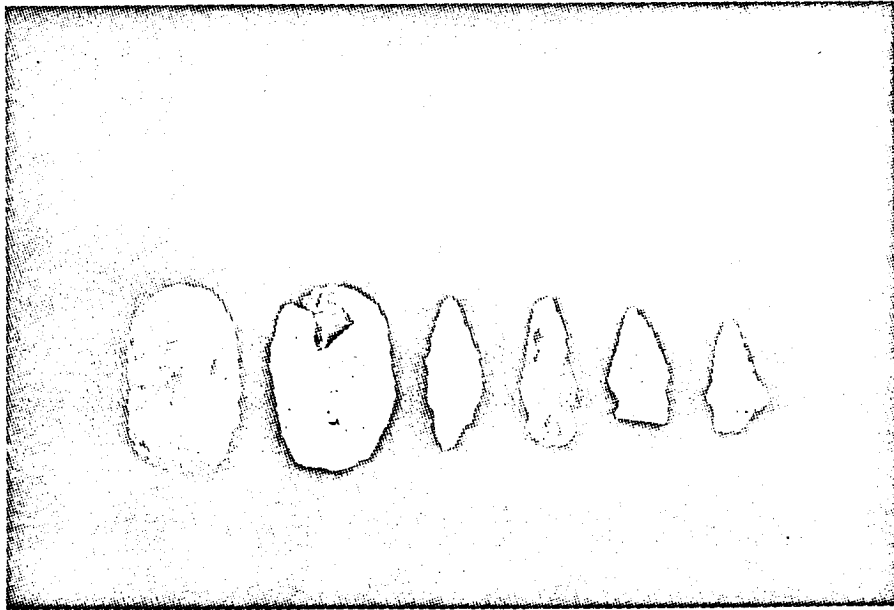
As mentioned earlier, the McCormick homestead stood on a ridge of high ground on a small inlet between Peggy Lake and San Jacinto Bay. Examination of the area in October 1966 by the writer and his wife, Ruth, revealed that the historic site showed evidence of prehistoric occupation since there were remnants of a shell midden on the east side of the site - clam shells, potsherds and flint artifacts scattered on the beach below the high ground. Wave action had eliminated any evidence of stratigraphy in the bank itself but the material on the beach confirmed the existence of the prehistoric site.

Artifacts found on the site include 9 sherds of European or early American stoneware, 7 pieces of glass, 9 deer bone fragments, 1 unidentified bone, 74 Goose Creek Plain and 7 Incised potsherds, 2 ovate flint knives, 3 Kent points, 1 unclassified point, 1 piece of old brick and 14 flint flakes. The most unusual artifact, because of its large size and fine workmanship, was an 8-1/2" flint knife picked up by Ruth Duke!!

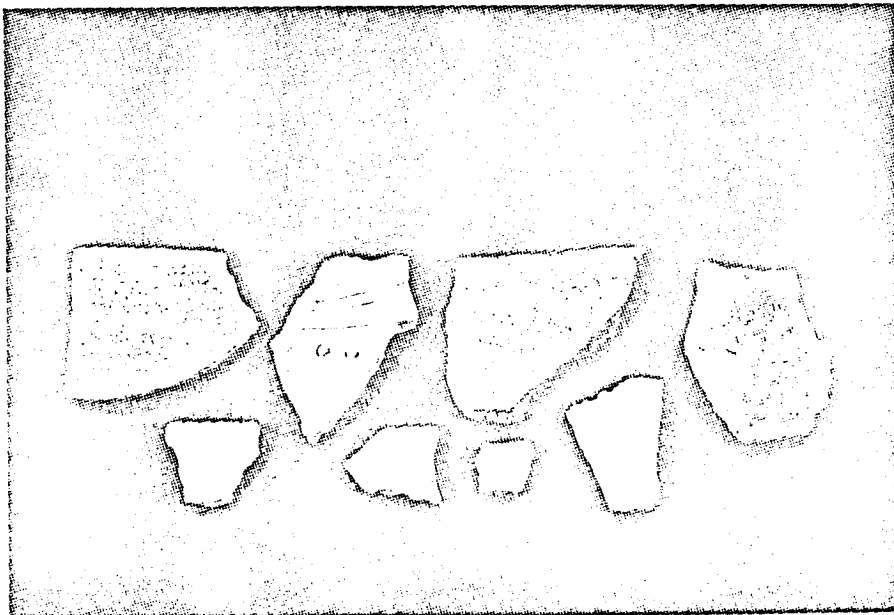
It was fortunate indeed that the site was discovered. One week after the large flint knife was found, the shell beach, on which all the artifacts were located, was completely destroyed by a dragline cutting a ditch for an underwater gas line. This time, at least, the archeologist's guardian angel was on the job.

The author has reported two other sites in close proximity to 41HR72 and currently is conducting a survey of this portion of San Jacinto Bay and, with the permission of the Houston Lighting and Power Company and the DuPont Company is making limited tests to determine stratigraphy and extent of these other shell middens (41HR71 and 41HR73).

ARTIFACTS FROM L1ER72



8.5"



News from other Societies

The South Plains Archeological Society will host the Southwestern Federation of Archeological Societies Third Regional Archeological Symposium for Southeastern New Mexico and Western Texas on April 15, 1967 at Lubbock, Texas.

Among the activities sponsored by the Midland Archeological Society, Midland, Texas, will be a "surface hunt" for the members in January or February.

The Archeological Society of New Mexico is undertaking a Rock Art Survey and is asking societies of states bordering on New Mexico to join them in the work.

Incidentally, the January, 1967 issue of The Mustang, publication of the Texas Memorial Museum, contains a very interesting article on "rock art".

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Wallisville and Livingston Surveys

These activities are still active. The hunting seasons are closed now so let's get out and search for sites!!

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Department of Obscure Information

Sources of lead used by ancient civilizations in producing pots, ingots, etc. now can be determined by measurement of isotopic ratios. Comparison of isotopic compositions of lead artifacts with lead from specific mining areas reveals the source of the ore.

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New Members

Miss Beth Shoemaker, 3812 Audley, Houston 77006

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