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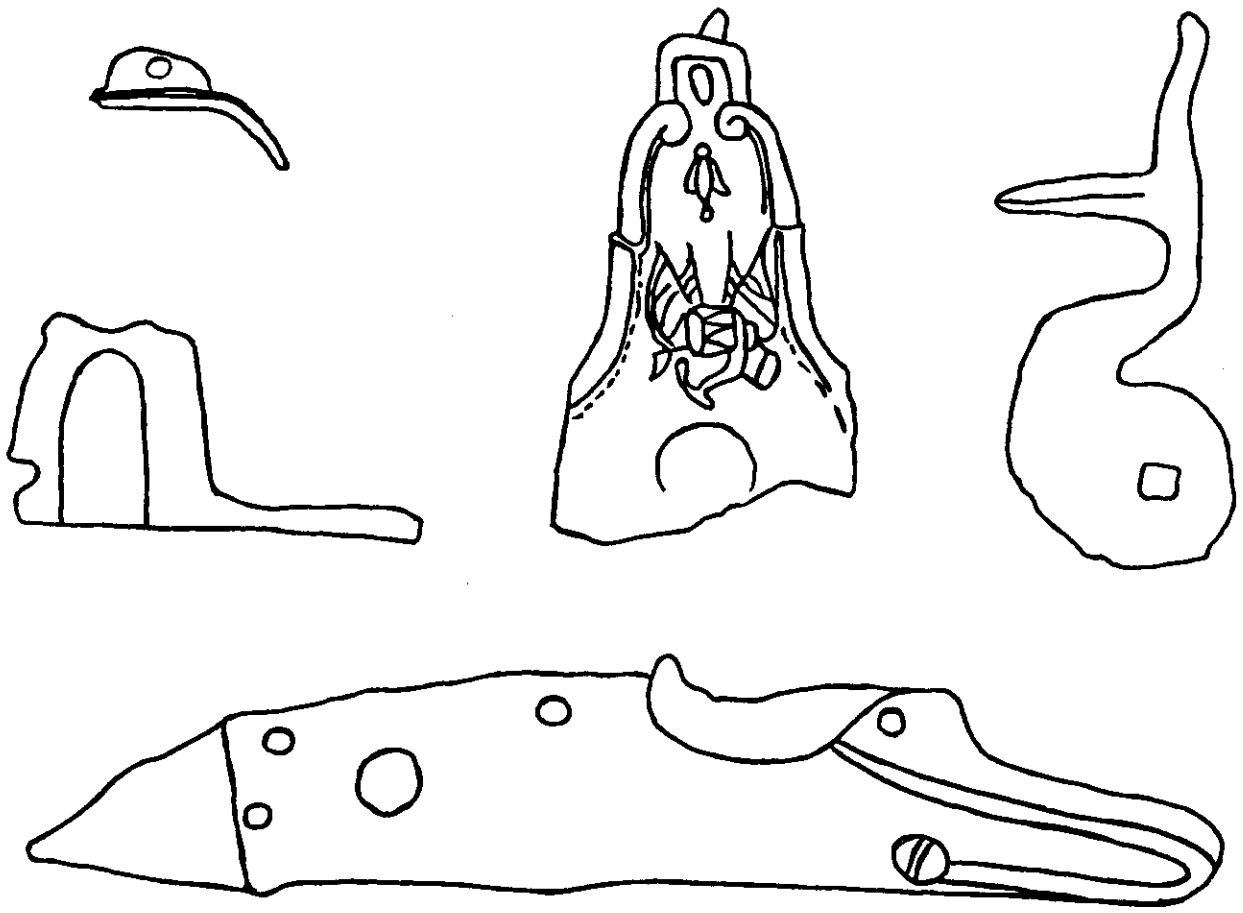

Gun Parts from Site 41CH161

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Flintlock Gun Parts from 41CH161

Sheldon Kindall

In 1991-92, the Houston Archeological Society investigated a prehistoric site in Chambers County and reported the results (Kindall and Patterson 1993). The motivation for looking at that site was a report of some artifacts collected from the site which were clearly of Indian origin but appeared to show some modern influence. One in particular was a ceramic mug handle.

The site turned out to have been occupied longer than anticipated; a carbon date funded by Leland Patterson using Rangia shell from near the bottom (but not at the bottom) of the midden in one of the test pits yielded a date of A.D. 290 (±80 years). But, because the site contained fragments of Archaic time period dart points, the site was estimated by Patterson to possibly date from before the ceramic period.

The interesting aspect of this site is not its start date but its termination date. During the field work in 1991-92, nothing was found that would indicate possible European contact. However, later during the laboratory work, several very small trade beads were found in the fine screen material. These beads, which were of the order of 2 mm in diameter, were reported in this Journal by Melissa May (1993,1994), Houston Archeological Society Laboratory Director.

Once it was clearly established that 41CH161 was a European contact site, the Houston Archeological Society asked the owner for permission to return to the site to see if a better picture of the historic aspect of this site could be obtained. During July and August of 1995, the Houston Archeological Society returned to this site and excavated two additional test pits.

Site Description

This site is owned by Mr. Robert L. Barrow of Baytown. The land has been in the Barrow family for a long time but has been left in a primitive state for hunting and fishing purposes. The Houston Archeological Society is much indebted to Mr. Barrow, not only for giving permission to work on his land two different times, but also for showing extreme patience with how slow the analysis of his artifacts is moving. We are still not finished.

The site is basically a typical coastal shell midden. The main shell midden is now completely submerged due mostly to subsidence, but ceramics erode out of the midden and are deposited along the shoreline. A part of the site extends inland and up an incline. At a point that is about 2 meters higher than the shore, there is a relatively small area where artifacts of all types are especially abundant. It is from this area that the trade beads were found and it is this area that was investigated during the second field season.

Procedure

Two formal 1 meter square test pits were excavated, both in levels of 5 centimeters to a depth of 70 cm. One pit was screened through 1/4-inch mesh screen, but the second was not.

The second test pit requires special discussion: During the first field season, Bill McClure, who does all of the faunal analysis for the Houston Archeological Society, fine-screened a 10 cm by 10 cm column of soil that was extracted from the vicinity of where this second pit was later established (McClure 1994). He recovered an overwhelming number of small bones (and it was this work which first identified the minute trade beads). Because of the results obtained by McClure, the Houston Archeological Society decided to fine-screen the second test pit, one meter square to a depth of 70 cm, and we have been separating small bone ever since.

Before leaving the field, the Houston Archeological Society excavators put in several shovel tests to determine the extent of the site, and the site was mapped.

Results

As indicated, the lab work is not yet complete. The final recovery of bones, lithics, and trade beads is not yet complete, and hence a final report can not yet be submitted. But there were some artifacts found, French flintlock parts, that need to be reported without waiting for the final results.

Flintlock Parts

At a depth of 30 cm in the second pit, several flintlock gun parts were found. There was no order to the cache of parts, they were scattered as if discarded. This depth is out of the effective range of the ordinary metal detector, but it was decided to scan the area with metal detectors, and a few more parts were indeed located within the site boundaries. One item was essentially at the surface and two others were only slightly below the surface. These gun parts are shown in Figures 1 through 5.

Several people have identified the gun parts and there is general agreement. But because Texas is graced by the presence of one person, Mr. Jay Blaine of Allen, Texas, whose opinion on early historic artifacts is accepted by all, it was decided to send the artifacts to Mr. Blaine for identification. Instead of trying to paraphrase Mr. Blaine's words, we reproduce them here verbatim:

> Since I can determine the quality as good, but not fine, this particular design origin in both cases can be said to be French (as you suspected) and the guns manufactured on the European continent. Some better than ordinary quality English guns of the same period can also reflect French fashion. A military origin is not indicated. The most likely period of use would be from between ca. 1740 and ca. 1760 to 1770 in my estimation.
>
> Both gunlocks were stripped for parts. I believe broken or weakened springs, frizzen surface failures, and stripped screw threads probably were the most common causes for eventual failures among these flintlocks.
>
> Both the cock and additional flashpan are a proper size for the larger gunlock. The flashpan would indicate an additional gunlock of the same size and type had been cannibalized somewhere. The size remains atypical for the indicated trade origin but I will continue to look for a similar occurrence. (J. C. Blaine, personal communication 1995)

Source of the Flintlock Parts

Given the context of the gun parts at a depth of 30 cm, there is very little question that they are associated with the Indian site. There is no way to know whether they were the personal property of one or more of the inhabitants of the site or the remains of a French trading post activity, or both. Eugene Bolton (1915) reports significant French trade activity near the mouth of the Trinity River, which is where this site is, as early as 1741. See, for example, the famous story of the founding of Mission Nuestra Senora de la Luz at the spot were the French trader, Joseph Blancpain, was

arrested by Spanish authorities in 1754. It is very doubtful that Blancpain's arrest did much to slow down the French trade with the Indians.

Participants

As with all Houston Archeological Society sites, a large number of people have participated and are still participating in the work on this site. Those who came out to dig in July and August were: Karen Acker, Charles Boyle, Bill Csanyi, Jerry Deal, Richey Ebersole, Dick Gregg, Joe Hudgins, Bill Just, Sheldon Kindall, Mike Marshall, Don McReynolds, Bev Mendenhall, Tommy Nuckols, Lee Patterson, Gary Ryman, Bob Shelby, and Roy Whitney. As far as known, everybody survived.

Acknowledgements

An effort such as this which extends over many months incurs indebtedness to many. Special thanks are due to the land owner, Robert Barrow, who has exhibited concern for historical accuracy by allowing us to do this investigation. Also, the HAS is much indebted to one of its members, Harold Graham, who has transferred images of the flintlock parts to magnetic disks such that they can be readily passed to others for examination. Graham's sketches are the basis for the sketches presented in this report.

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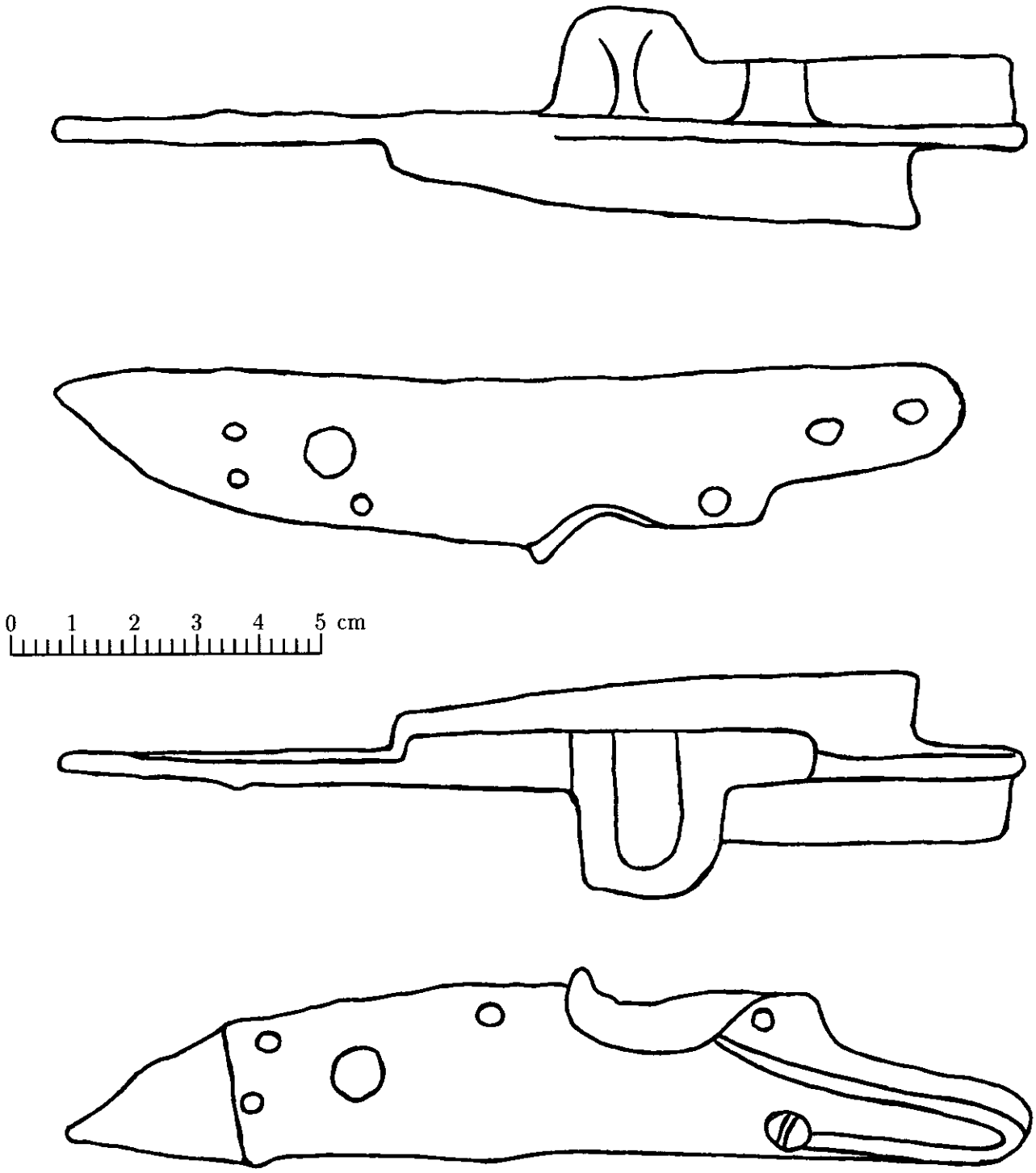

Figure 1. Lockplate A, Four Views

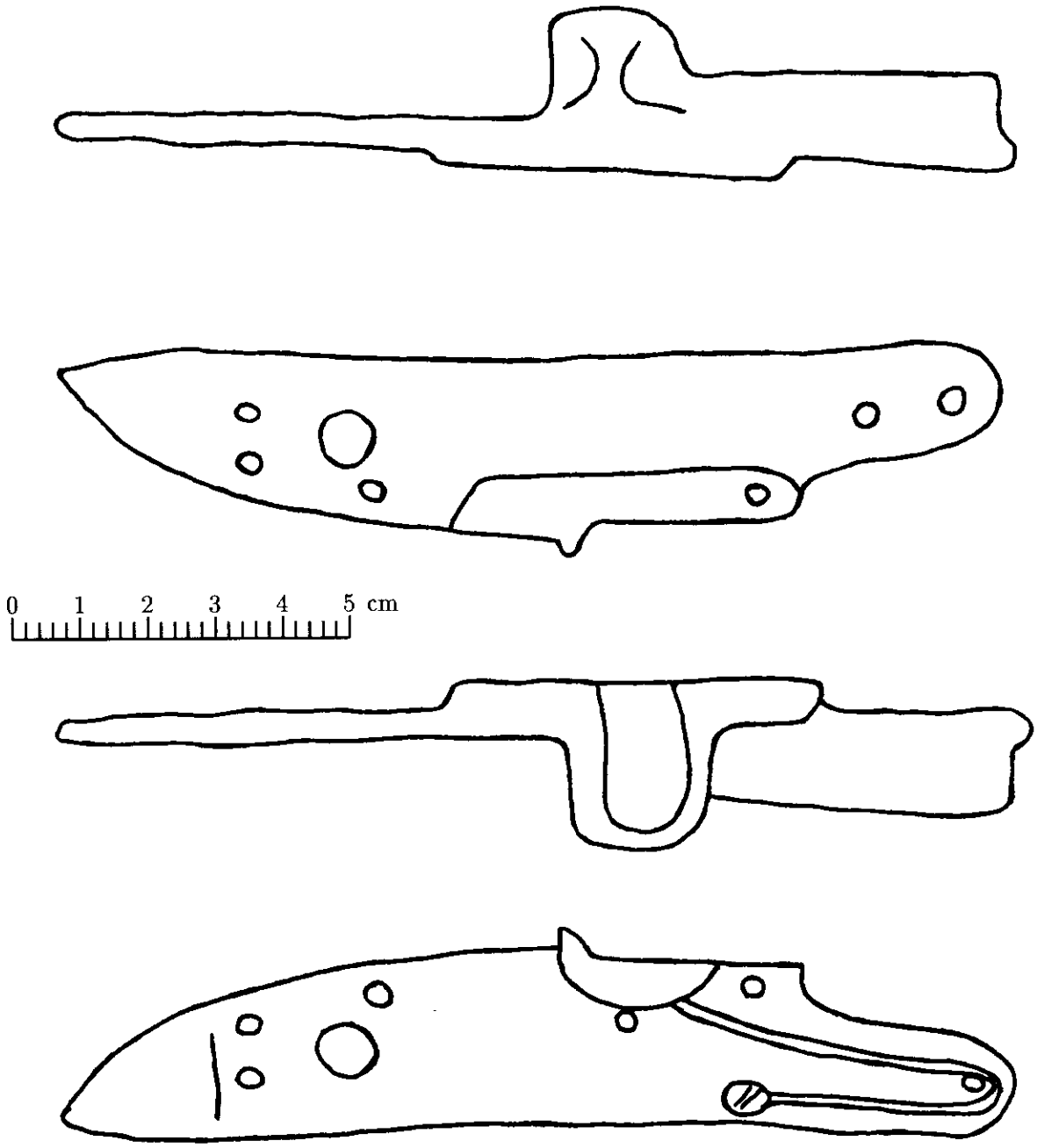

Figure 2. Lockplate B, Four Views

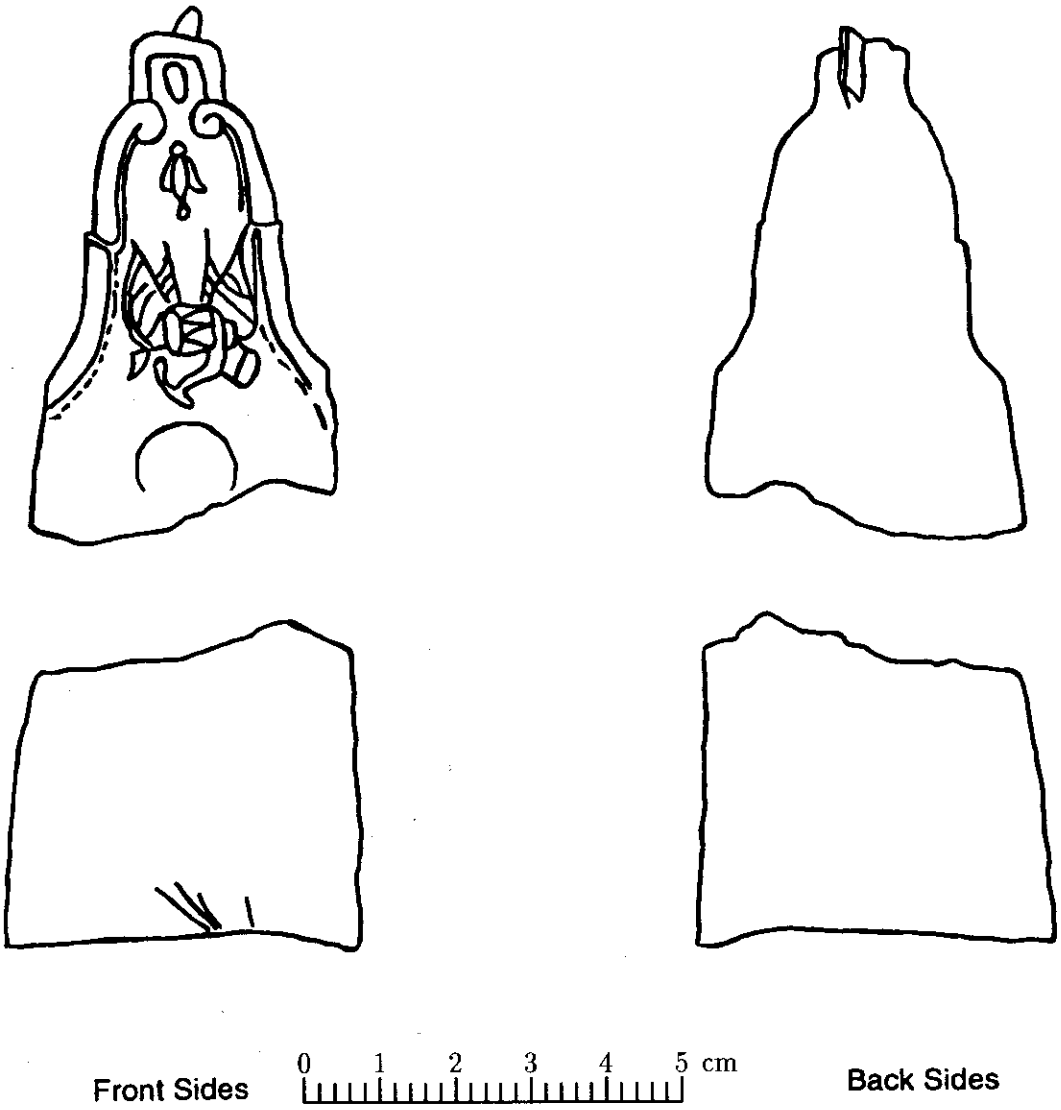

Figure 3. Two Butt Plate Pieces