

THE NEWSLETTER

of the Houston Archaeological Society

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(This NEWSLETTER will be published from time to time, as the cash in hand and the news worth publishing may determine. Chairman of the Society: Wayne B. Neyland, 4621 Keystone; Editorial Committee: H. Mewhinney, 1229 DuBarry Lane, John J. Dieckman, 5310 Edith.)

Fakes in Houston

(Summarized from notes taken by R. B. Worthington and Wayne B. Neyland)

A man who identifies himself as A. M. Carter, an unemployed carpenter, of 1231½ West Twenty-second Avenue, has been trying since the latter part of July to peddle a quantity of pottery artifacts here.

Dr. T. N. Campbell and Dr. J. F. Epstein of the University of Texas looked at several specimens, sent to them by Neyland, and said all in the shipment were fakes.

Campbell said, in a letter to Neyland:

" . . . we wanted the figurines examined by . . . Epstein, our Mexican specialist."

"Mr. Carter seems to have been the victim of some sort of hoax. Most of these specimens appear to have been made quite recently by someone who is not a very good potter."

"There is nothing in the lot that we can identify with any known prehistoric culture, either in Texas or elsewhere. Dr. Epstein says that the figurines are unlike anything he has ever seen from Mexico."

Neyland mailed Campbell a photograph of several additional specimens. Of these Campbell said:

"The photograph includes projectile points which we understand are made of pottery. This is unique, so far as our knowledge goes The pottery spoons in the photograph also appear to have been made with modern metal spoons in mind."

Carter's collection included pottery figurines of naked women in amorous poses, pottery pipe bowls shaped more or less like men's heads, and a lot of such stuff. Some of the specimens vaguely resembled stone effigies from Tennessee and Alabama but nothing remotely like them has ever been found on the Texas Gulf Coast.

In early September a certain Glen Impelmann of 11502 Bannister, purportedly a brother-in-law of Carter, notified one of the NEWSLETTER's staff that Carter also possessed a handsome Folsom point, made of obsidian and dug from the same site near Moggan's Point where Carter got those effigies of naked women, the pottery spoons and so forth.

This would have been indeed a rarity. So far as the staff member knew, it would have been the first Folsom point ever found in Harris County, the first obsidian projectile point of any style ever found in Harris County, and the first obsidian Folsom point ever found in the world.

Carter first achieved fame, such as it was, on Saturday, August 1, when the Houston Press carried a Page 1 story about his purported excavations. There was also a photograph of some of the pottery effigies.

Later Carter sought out several members of this Society and showed them his pottery, as well as numerous flint projectile points, most of which seemed to be genuine, although of uncertain provenience.

During subsequent weeks, both Neyland and Worthington held numerous talks with Carter, who several times promised to show them the site near Morgan's Point where, he insisted, he had excavated the pottery and many of the flint projectile points.

He never showed them. Worthington tried to find the site, as Carter described it by word of mouth, and decided there was no such place---not even on a salt job basis.

Both Worthington and Neyland kept detailed journals of their successive encounters with Carter. If the Society ever raises enough money, it might be advisable to publish the journals in full---but as a study in abnormal psychology rather than in Gulf Coast archaeology.

The specimens sent by Neyland to Campbell and Epstein for examination were borrowed from A. T. (Cap) McDannald. Carter sold them to McDannald on the understanding that he would get his pay whenever he showed McDannald the actual site.

As of last reports, the site had not been shown.

An Austin County Burial Site
(Charles and Vivian Fleming)

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The Austin County burial site was first noted in mid-July of 1959.

The mound or hill rises nine to ten feet above the level of the surrounding terrain. A cursory examination showed that the hill contained many clam shells, bones and flint chips. The land surrounding the hill had no shells or bones, although several broken projectile points were found on the surface.

On Saturday, October 3, R. B. Worthington was at the site while the owner was taking out fill dirt with a bulldozer. The bulldozer sliced off three or four feet of the hill and showed it to be a burial site.

Members of the Society returned to the site on October 4 and began salvage excavation.

Since that day seven squares, five by five feet, have been excavated to the depth of four and a half feet. This work has uncovered twelve burials.

Two of the skeletons were extended, two partly flexed, three completely flexed and the others had been damaged.

Artifacts have been found with only two of the burials. Eight conch shell conu-
mella beads were found intact near the neck of one skeleton. The beads were from
one inch to three inches long.

There was a projectile point, possibly of the Gary type, among the ribs of the
other skeleton.

Other finds included several projectile points: One Pandora, one Yarborough, two
Garys and one Perdiz. There were also a shell gorget, three split-bone awls and
numerous sandstone abraders. Three or four very small potsherds have been found
on the surface of the hill. No pottery has been found so far with the burials.

Blocks of sandstone have been found about the skull of every skeleton. A burial
custom seems to have been involved.

This report is quite tentative. Detailed data, photographs and drawings will be
available later.

Proper Record Keeping (R. B. Worthington)

A collection of Indian relics in a cigar box may be interesting to people who
know nothing about archaeology but unless the items are catalogued, they are al-
most worthless to science.

Unfortunately, many a collection is not catalogued at all. Though the owner may
have known in the beginning, he eventually forgets where the artifacts were found.

Collections of artifacts found on the surface---with no excavation---can be vastly
useful if they are properly catalogued. If they come from the surface of a camp-
site, they will give the archaeologist an idea of what he can expect to find if
he digs there. And, indeed, in many instances the only information available
about the peoples who may have lived in a large area will consist of deductions
made from surface finds, for archaeologists will not yet have had the time and
the money to conduct excavations.

To catalogue a collection takes no technical knowledge---nothing but a little
time and effort.

Every specimen should be numbered. It is best to write the numbers with India
ink. Labels are not satisfactory. They may fall off or insects may eat them.

The inked numbers can be made quite permanent by brushing varnish over them. Any
object with a surface that is too irregular to be numbered can simply be tagged.

The numbers of the artifacts, with a short description for each, should be en-
tered in a notebook. A notebook with sewn pages is preferable. Sooner or later
the pages in a looseleaf notebook will come loose entirely and be lost.

In general, an artifact should have two numbers: A catalogue number and a site
number.

The catalogue numbers may be in simple arithmetical order: 1, 2, 3, and so on.

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Any of several systems may be used for site numbers but in any event, the notebook should clearly explain the meaning of each number. The writer uses a system of naming sites after features of the landscape, such as Greens Bayou Site 1. Thus the symbol ~~746~~⁷⁴⁶ means Artifact Number 746, found on Greens Bayou Site 1, Harris ~~GREENS BAYOU~~^{GREENS BAYOU} County, Texas. The 41 is the number for Texas when the states are listed alphabetically.

Maps should be kept for accurate listing of sites. The University of Texas uses county road maps for this purpose. On the map, the site may be marked with a dot or an X. The maps may be had from the Texas Highway Department for about 50 cents a sheet.

It does not matter much whether or not a collector's projectile points are classified by name, since all classifications are more or less tentative. It has not been many years since the points now usually called the Clovis type were called Folsom or Folsomoid.

In cataloguing a collection, it is best not to mark a specimen as coming from a certain site unless the collector is absolutely sure that he remembers correctly.

But only by cataloguing can a collection be made meaningful. Otherwise, it is nothing but a bunch of pretty rocks.

Doubtful Mounds Reported

A story in the Houston Chronicle October 12 disclosed that a city park in Spring Branch may, as the Chronicle phrased it, be spotted with ancient Indian burial mounds.

The editors of this NEWSLETTER investigated briefly. There are numerous mounds in the park but there is no evidence that the Indians made them---whether on purpose or accidentally.

It rather looks as if the mounds were made by white men---perhaps thirty-odd or forty-odd years ago---when the white men hauled in a few hundred yards of dirt---perhaps from a drainage ditch, perhaps from the excavation for an industrial plant---and unceremoniously dumped the dirt.

Of course, there are other theories to account for some of these odd-looking piles of dirt down here on the Gulf Coast. Some theorists think they were piled up by the wind during dry years when there was not enough grass to keep the soil from blowing. Other theorists think they were pushed up by natural gas.

But these particular mounds in the little Spring Branch park bear a remarkable resemblance to the numerous mounds that line the banks of Buffalo Bayou, White Oak Bayou, and the other bayous after flood-control crews have excavated dirt from the channels and dumped it alongside.

Indeed, they have some small resemblance to several mounds on the Memorial Park Golf Course, which were made by white men so that cups could be placed on top and balls knocked into the cups.

The Spring Branch mounds differ from the others in that they have been there long enough for fair-sized loblolly pines (*Pinus taeda*) to grow on top of them. These pines seem to be thirty or forty years old.

There is no virgin timber on the mounds.

The number of the mounds depends on the way you count them. If each slight undulation of the surface constitutes a separate mound, there are thirty-odd. But if a series of continuous undulations constitutes a single mound, there are only sixteen.

One of the editors of the NEWSLETTER, accompanied by a photographer, went out to the park to inspect the mounds.

In a cut into one mound, made for streek-building, they found no sign of aboriginal occupation.

Undiscouraged by this lack of evidence, they went to another mound, carrying a sharpshooter shovel, and dug a test pit in the middle of it. This test pit was made like a post hole---only deeper. It was eight inches in diameter and circular in cross-section. It was dug the full depth, or height, of the mound, approximately thirty-seven and three-quarters inches.

The test pit disclosed:

- 1) No bits of bone---whether of *Elephas primigenius*, *Homo sapiens*, *Procyon lotor*, *Canis familiaris*, *Rana catesbiana*, *Ictalurus punctatus*, or any other vertebrate whatsoever.
- 2) No shells of Mollusca.
- 3) No flint artifacts and no scrap-flakes of flint.
- 4) No artifacts of any other kind.
- 5) No flecks of charcoal.
- 6) No ashes.
- 7) No potsherds.
- 8) No stratigraphy. That is to say, on most land where loblolly pines are the dominant timber, you can dig down a foot or two and strike subsoil. The layer of sand or sandy loam ends, either suddenly or gradually, and you strike clay. If the sand were deeper, say three or four feet, you would not have found loblolly pines but chinquapins (*Castanea pumila*), sandjack oaks (*Quercus cinerea*), or something of the sort. If the land were deep gravel, you would have found blackjack oaks (*Quercus marilandica*) and the like. And so on. Every kind of soil on the Gulf Coast has its characteristic trees. But on this particular mound the topsoil layer of sandy loam was three times as thick as is usual for land overgrown with loblolly pines. Also, the thick layer of topsoil was entirely uniform from top to bottom.

This thick and uniform layer of topsoil---with no trace of any kind of occupation by man---therefore may be tentatively taken to indicate that:

- 1) Those things in the park actually are mounds and not mere irregularities in the land surface---whether made by the wind or made by the wind or made by a man with a dump truck.
- 2) But they were not made by Indians.

Indeed, the professional archaeologists contend---and no doubt correctly---that there are no mounds in this part of the Texas Gulf Coast that were intentionally made by Indians. The things we have here are not mounds but middens: The decayed remains of trash piles left where the aborigines camped from time to time. Often, of course, there are burials on these old camp sites.

Similarly, on the Edwards Plateau there are no true mounds but only burnt-rock middens.

The story about the Spring Branch mounds printed in the Houston Chronicle was written by Mel Young. It said a contractor building a road at the edge of the park had found some bones when his excavation sliced through a mound. Whether these were human bones or Cocker Spaniel bones---or whether the contractor would know the difference---was not explained. No photograph of the bones was printed in the paper.

Instead, there was a photograph of a man's hand, holding two flint dart points, a chunk of flint scrap, and a potsherd. The cutlines accompanying the photograph said these artifacts were found near the mounds.

A telephone call from the NEWSLETTER editors brought forth the information that the hand in the photograph was that of Robert A. Vines, formerly director of the Houston Museum of Natural History and now natural science director for the Spring Branch school system.

Vines said the artifacts in his hand came, not from any place near the mounds, but from a drainage ditch a mile and a quarter away. Some Boy Scouts found them in the newly cut drainage ditch a year ago. Their connection with the mounds is therefore not immediately apparent.

The park containing the mounds is on the Conrad-Sauer Road, south of Raritan Drive. The City got it from Roy Hofheinz.

Conclusion: It is possible that further test pits will disclose that these mounds contain numerous Indian burials, including those of Powhatan, Tecumseh, and Rain-in-the-Face. But it seems unlikely.