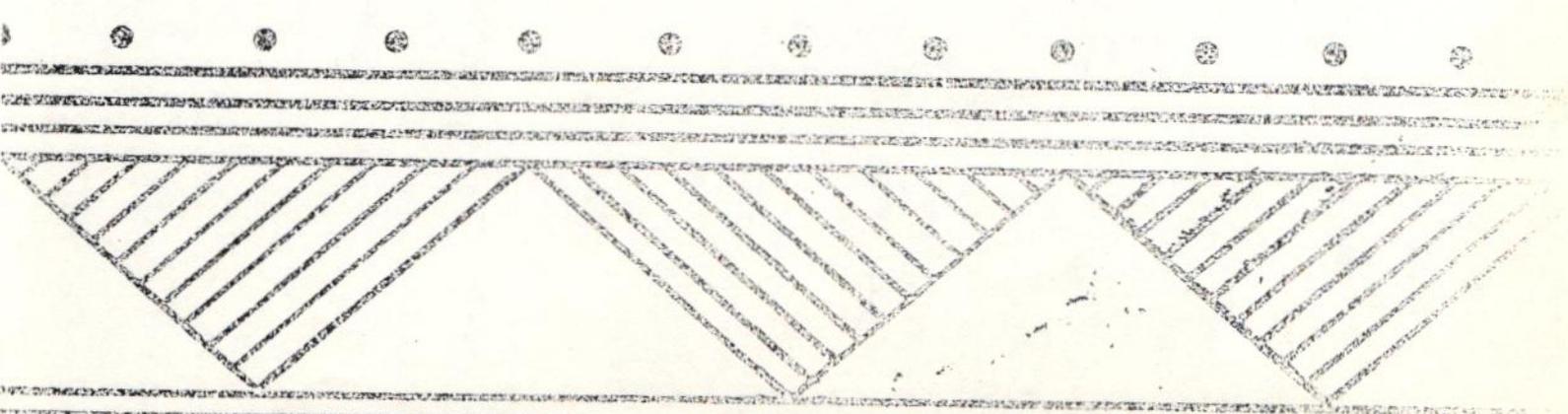
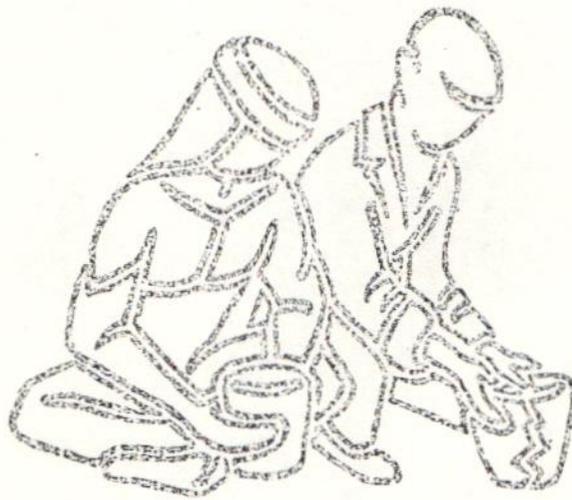


# HOUSTON ARCHEOLOGICAL

# SOCIETY NEWSLETTER

NUMBER 59

APRIL 1978



EL ORCOQUISAC ARCHEOLOGIC DISTRICT, WALLISVILLE RESERVOIR, TEXAS:

PAST, PRESENT AND FUTURE

by William Louis Fullen

The purpose of this paper is an appraisal of the cultural resources known as archeological sites 41 CH 57, the first location of Joseph Blancpain's French Trading Post, Village de Atakapas (1754), the first location of the Spanish Presidio San Agustin de Ahumada (1756-1766) and the first location of Mission Nuestra Senora de La Luz (1756-1759); site 41 CH 54, the second location of Mission La Luz (1759-1771); site 41 CH 22, the Orcoquiza Indian Rancheria associated with the mission and site 41 CH 53, the second location of Presidio Ahumada. This complex of sites along with two historic Indian sites, 41 CH 110 and 41 LB 4 make up the El Orcoquisac Archeologic District as listed on the National Register of Historic Places. Of these only two have been extensively investigated and reported. Site 41 CH 110, an aboriginal shell midden located 2 miles west of El Orcoquisac was investigated and reported by Kathleen Gilmore as representing: "....a continuing occupation from Late Prehistoric through European contact" (Gilmore 1974,ii). Site 41 CH 54, the second location of Presidio Ahumada, which is located on the south shore of Lake Miller, was investigated and reported by Curtis Tunnell and Dick Ambler in 1967. The additional sites have been the subject of limited investigations by the author and have been reported only by letter to the Texas Archeological Survey, The University of Texas and to the State Archeologist. Additional analyses and final manuscript preparation are required before publication of these investigations at 41 CH 57.

About 4500 years ago at the close of the Pleistocene the Gulf of Mexico rose to its present stand and drowned what had been a broad valley formed first by the Brazos River and later by the San Jacinto and Trinity Rivers. By this time the Brazos was entrenched in its present valley many miles to the south and only the San Jacinto and Trinity Rivers emptied into what has become known as Galveston Bay. Soon after this geologic episode, people came to the nearby river deltas and bayous to exploit the major food resources of Rangia clams which require the brackish water environment of these areas. During this time Galveston Island formed along with the other barrier islands of the Texas coast and grew to its present size.

During the last decade over 200 aboriginal occupation sites described as Rangia shell middens have been located and reported within the proposed Wallisville Reservoir area. Many of these prehistoric sites have been extensively investigated and reported by the Texas Archeological Survey as part of the Wallisville Reservoir Project studies but little research has been conducted concerning the early French and Spanish Colonial Period sites.

PAST

In 1528 Cabeza de Vaca along with 85 other Spaniards were shipwrecked somewhere on the Texas coast, probably Galveston

Island. De Vaca recorded in his journal that the island where he landed was occupied by two aboriginal groups. The Capoque Indians on the western half and the Han Indians on the eastern half of the island. He later lived with the Charruco Indians of the forests on the mainland. (Covey 1961). During subsequent contact with other Europeans these groups became known as the Karankawa (Capoque), the Atakapa (Han) and the Orcoquiza (Charruco) Indians.

In 1719 a young French officer, Simars de Bellisle, was stranded on Bolivar Peninsula and became prisoner of the Orcoquiza who lived at the upper end of Galveston Bay and ranged as far south as Galveston Island. He escaped and returned with Bernard de La Harpe to explore the bay and to gather information concerning these Orcoquiza or Caux Indians as he called them. (Folmer 1940). Between 1721 and 1754 the French from New Orleans visited the bay area by ship and by using canoes; went upstream to the Orcoquiza villages on the San Jacinto and Trinity Rivers to trade European goods for furs, skins and bear grease. In May of 1754 Joseph Blancpain, a trader from New Orleans, along with several other families arrived by sloop and established a French trading post near the mouth of the Trinity River. This post, Village de Atakapas, was soon detected by the Spanish, who, with the assistance of the Orcoquiza Indians of Chief Calzones Colorados' village on the Lower Trinity, arrested Blancpain for trespassing on Spanish territory. His trade goods were confiscated by the Spanish who distributed some to the Orcoquiza who also received several canoes at the post, but his sloop was left at the site. He later died in prison and the Spanish returned to establish a permanent outpost at the site of Blancpain's Trading Post to protect their frontier from further French encroachment.

In May of 1756 the Spanish established Presidio San Agustin de Ahumada and Mission Nuestra Senora de La Luz on the site of Village de Atakapas. The presidio was garrisoned by 31 soldiers and the mission was established for the Orcoquiza Indians. By June of 1757 the presidio was completed and included the mission church which consisted of: "... a fairly substantial wooden church, plastered with clay and moss was completed and was later replaced by a better structure (Bolton 1915:78)".

In the fall of 1759 Fray Abad reported to the Viceroy of Mexico by letter that the mission had been moved from the presidio to a more suitable place. "We did not find any place more suitable or nearer the presidio than a hill, something less than a fourth of a league distance to the east from the latter and on the same bank of the lagoon....All these advantages being seen, the mission was erected on this site. It is made of wood, all hewn, and beaten clay mixed with moss, and has four arched portals. This building, because of its strength and arrangement, is the most pleasing in all those lands of the Spaniards and the French (Bolton 1915:349)."

In 1764 the Viceroy of Mexico appointed Captain Rafael Martinez Pacheco as Captain of Presidio Ahumada. This appointment was in response to complaints from the officers of the presidio that the garrison had little supplies of food, clothing and ammunition,

and from Fray Abad who maintained that a commander was needed who could establish and maintain discipline among the soldiers. Captain Pacheco arrived at El Orcoquisac in May of 1764 where he was kind, charitable and effective in providing assistance to the missionaries but cruel and brutal towards his soldiers. "In the history of the Spanish in Texas Pacheco's record of cruelty and brutality is without equal. He cheated the soldiers in pay and purchases. If the soldiers complained or refused to buy goods at exorbitant prices, he would strike them with sufficient force to knock them to the ground. Then he would kick or club them. Some, he would place in stocks to be tormented by the flies and mosquitos, in one instance he had beaten a soldier with such severity that the victim became "foolish". It was his custom to walk or ride with the wives of the soldiers, who were forbidden to accompany them. His arrogance and brutality soon brought their reward. The soldiers deserted and went to the French fort at Natchitoches. From there they petitioned the Governor of Texas to relieve them of their suffering. On September 12, the Governor responded by removing Pacheco from his command, even though he did not have the authority for this unusual act. He ordered Lieutenant Ruiz to proceed to San Agustin de Ahumada with the deserters and to evict Pacheco (Clay 1977:76)."

Pacheco and three followers resisted arrest for five days following Lieutenant don Marcos Ruiz's arrival on October 7 with 22 soldiers. He had fortified his quarters with the arms and ammunition of the presidio including the two cannon which he fired at the arresting force. After several unsuccessful attempts to take Pacheco prisoner, Ruiz ordered the Captain's house set afire. As the roof of the house began to burn a wind came up and spread the fire to a nearby empty barracks and the church. Pacheco and one follower escaped through a trapdoor in the chimney but his house and the barracks were destroyed and the church partially damaged by the blaze. Eventually, Pacheco was cleared of the charges and was reinstated by the Viceroy of Mexico and returned to El Orcoquisac as commander again.

On September 4, 1766 a Gulf hurracaine damaged the buildings of Mission La Luz and destroyed Presidio Ahumada. "Of the mission complex Fray Marenti said, "...of church, house of the Padres and kitchen, there is nothing..." There is little known detail of the damage to the presidio, but it was severe enough that Captain Rivera began building it on much higher ground nearly a mile to the east."

Apparently Fray Marenti rebuilt the mission on its previous site. On May 25, 1768 he delivered his report of progress. "...increase of the religious establishment in my tenure which I began..."

"One church.. 12 varas long and about 7 varas wide-- covered with shingles and plastered mortar and white washed-- with a sacristy covered with the same-- a raised alter with railings-- a choir-- floored and railed-- a pulpit-- a confessional-- a baptistry-- with its (church) square 21 varas wide."

"...A cemetery."

"...A house 23 varas long with a hall and two cells--- a porch with a railing--and an entry all around--both (church and house) plastered and white washed inside--covered with shingles and mortar."

"...A kitchen." (Clay 1977:80-81).

"It is probable that Fray Marenti used the palisado type of

building which was prevalent throughout the more arid lands of New Spain. This type building was constructed by anchoring poles in the ground in the style of a stockade and covering them with mortar. In 1759 Fray Abad was criticized for using horizontal type log construction (Clay 1977:80-81)."

In October of 1767 the Marques de Rubi inspected El Orcoquisac and recommended that the mission and presidio be abandoned. During this inspection Nicolas La Fora, an engineer, drew a scale map of El Orcoquisac which identified the various structures of Presidio Ahumada, the Indian rancheria and Mission La Luz. In February of 1771 the presidio force of soldiers returned to San Antonio de Bexar and the missionaries followed soon afterward leaving El Orcoquisac to the Indians. During the next few years the Orcoquiza utilized El Orcoquisac as a meeting place to trade with the Karankawa and Atakapa Indians of the region but eventually the place was abandoned and the location forgotten for nearly two centuries.

### PRESENT

During the early 20th Century the great scholar, Herbert Eugene Bolton researched the historical record and reported his extensive studies of El Orcoquisac and the Orcoquiza Indians. Following Bolton's work Carlos E. Castaneda wrote extensively about the Orcoquiza. Other historians also wrote of El Orcoquisac but none discovered the location until 1966 when an amateur historian, John V. Clay recognized a map entitled "Del Presidio de S Luis de las Amarillas o del Orcoquiza...." as matching the topography of the south shore of Lake Miller, near Wallisville, Texas and realized he had found the location of El Orcoquisac. John soon correlated the features of the map with those along the shore of Lake Miller and after a site inspection by Curtis Tunnell, State Archeologist and J. Richard Ambler, Director of the Texas Archeological Salvage Project, it was determined that John had indeed found the second locations of Presidio Ahumada and Mission La Luz.

Tunnell and Ambler then conducted archeological investigations at 41 CH 53, the second location of Presidio Ahumada which had been heavily damaged by borrow operations in connection with the construction of Interstate Highway 10 which is nearby. Tunnell and Ambler concluded that: "As limited as our information is in some ways, the excavations at this site have been extremely rewarding. Since this is the first Spanish establishment in East Texas that has been definitely located and excavated, we have gained a great deal of information about the Spanish occupation in East Texas, especially in such fields as trade relations with the French and with the native Indians, food habits, and material culture. We have also gained our first archeological glimpse of contemporary Indian life in the area through the collection of native ceramics and other artifacts. A great deal can yet be learned about both Spanish and native life in the area, and the determination of this site as that of the last presidio location has given us a valuable clue that will be useful in locating other contemporary Spanish and Indian sites. With the scientific excavation of these other locations, the late Eighteenth Century Spanish and Indian cultures of the Galveston Bay area should become among the best documented in the entire state (Tunnell 1967:103-104)."

At the suggestion of Tunnell and Ambler the author undertook an archeological survey with John Clay in order to locate other historic sites mentioned in the historical record. After making controlled surface collections at 41 CH 22, the Indian rancheria and 41 CH 54, the second location of Mission La Luz, we began a search for the first location of El Orcoquisac. By following the clues in Fray Abad's letter describing the construction of the second mission we were able to soon locate a densely wooded area on the edge of the former lagoon at the distance of "something less than a fourth of a league" to the west of the second mission site. A controlled surface collection of the area and several test pits produced a quantity of Spanish and French ceramics and several diagnostic metal artifacts of the French/Spanish period. The site was reported and recorded as 41 CH 57, the first location of El Orcoquisac and Joseph Blancpain's Trading Post, Village de Atakapas.

Further investigations were undertaken in 1969 when the author directed a project of the Houston Archeological Society to test and evaluate the archeological potential of 41 CH 57. This volunteer, non-funded project was carried out in the winter and spring of 1970 and consisted of additional historical research by John Clay, ethnohistorical research by the author, aerial color infrared photography of the several sites at El Orcoquisac, topo mapping, controlled surface collections, metal locator survey, soil coring and test excavations. After completion of the field work, members of the Society cataloged the materials and several volunteer researchers undertook analyses of the artifacts and faunal materials collected at the site. These analyses are still incomplete but several main elements of the project report are in manuscript form.

Though the analyses are not complete and the manuscript is still in preparation, several obvious statements can be made concerning the archeological potential of 41 CH 57 at this time. The historic sites of Blancpain's trading post and El Orcoquisac are located on top of a prehistoric Indian Rangia shell midden that is about 125 centimeters thick. The midden is exposed for about 200 meters along the face of the bank of the backwater swamp that once was part of Lake Miller. The limits of the historic occupation, as determined by surface collections, test excavations and infrared color aerial photos is about 135 meters east-west x 70 meters north-south and extends to the edge of the swamp. A detailed topo map of the site revealed four elevated areas with borrow areas nearby. No structures are present above ground but several shell layers suggest that the Rangia shell was utilized as a sub-floor for several structures. One shell layer was investigated by probing and test excavations and was found to be 35 meters x 15 meters x .25 meters thick. One corner that was excavated revealed a large post hole and several others spaced three varas apart down one side of the shell layer. Along with the artifacts that represent Indian, French and Spanish occupation of the site, a quantity of faunal material was recovered. Small rodent bones and snails are well preserved at the site and some botanical materials were also recovered. In the areas tested the Rangia shell midden has a maximum depth of 125 centimeters and probably represents one of the earliest occupations as well as subsequent occupations through time for the reservoir area. Another area tested was the backwater swamp adjacent to the site. A test trench revealed that the overlying black gumbo of the swamp was covering a clean

layer of sand at the water table. Before these tests could be completed the Trinity River went on its spring rise and flooded these excavations as well as the land to the west of the site. It is probable that somewhere in this sand strata, which represents the lagoon bottom at the time of Spanish occupation, an artifact layer is present that will document such events as the hurricane of 1766 and contain such features as Blancpain's sloop which he purchased in New Orleans for 1500 pesos and perhaps even remains of the dock that is mentioned in the Spanish account of the attempted arrest of Captain Pacheco. Obviously, from these limited tests, much remains to be investigated at 41 CH 57.

Infrared color aerial photos of 41 CH 54 also showed variations which correlate with structures shown on La Fora's map. An inspection of the site indicates that the site is probably buried under a layer of sandy soil reputed to grow the best corn in the county. In 1975 a detailed topo map was made of 41 CH 54 and soil phosphate tests were conducted by the author at the request of Curtis Tunnell. These tests indicate that the church of the mission complex is located on private property while the other two structures are on Federal property.

During the archeological survey of Lake Miller and Lake Charlotte by the Texas Archeological Salvage Project and the Houston Archeological Society 20 archeological sites were located, surveyed and reported. (Ambler 1970). Additional surveys have been conducted upstream along the east bank of the Trinity River in search of the Orcoquiza Indian village of Chief Calzones Colorados whose people played such an important role in the French/Spanish occupation of the area. The most probable location for this permant village appears to be site 41 CH 62, located on the north shore of Lake Charlotte. This site was originally surveyed by the author in 1969 who could not obtain permission from the land owner to survey the adjacent sandy field where the land owner had plowed up many arrowheads in the past. This site, as well as 41 CH 63 which is the site of the earliest Anglo homestead in the area, is located on property designated as the proposed Cedar Hill Park which is the only park planned for this area. Just north of these sites is 41 CH 66, an extensive prehistoric Indian Rangia shell midden, where numerous human burials have been removed by pothunters between 1969 and the present.

The Wallisville Reservoir Project was authorized in 1962, construction started in 1966 and was halted by a lawsuit filed in 1971 which was based on alleged non-compliance with the requirements of the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969. After several studies were completed, including a review of the archeological investigations conducted in the reservoir area, a series of alternative plans have been proposed by the Galveston District of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers to the sponsoring agencies, elected officials and citizens of Chambers County, Texas. Following adoption of Plan 2A by the sponsoring agencies and elected officials, the plan was presented to the public on December 10, 1977, as the most viable plan to follow in completing the Wallisville Lake Project. This plan would create a 5,600 acre lake instead of the originally authorized 19,000 acre reservoir and would flood the Lake Miller-Lake Charlotte area to an additional depth of 4 feet above mean sea level.

## FUTURE

It is probable that plan 2A will be followed after considering the public input generated by the meeting on December 10. It is clear that in regard to the cultural resources in the form of archeological sites that the project as proposed will do more than "accelerate erosion of 4 Indian shell mounds" as stated in the Public Announcement of the Lake Wallisville Project. It is suggested that if additional studies and planning are not undertaken, then significant destruction may result to the historic site 41 CH 57, the first location of El Orcoquisac and to 41 CH 62, the probable location of a historic Orcoquiza Indian village as well as 41 CH 63, the earliest Anglo homestead in the area. Additionally, 7 prehistoric Indian shell midden sites will be destroyed by wave action after being flooded while an additional 8 prehistoric Indian sites will be severely damaged by wave action from the new Lake Wallisville.

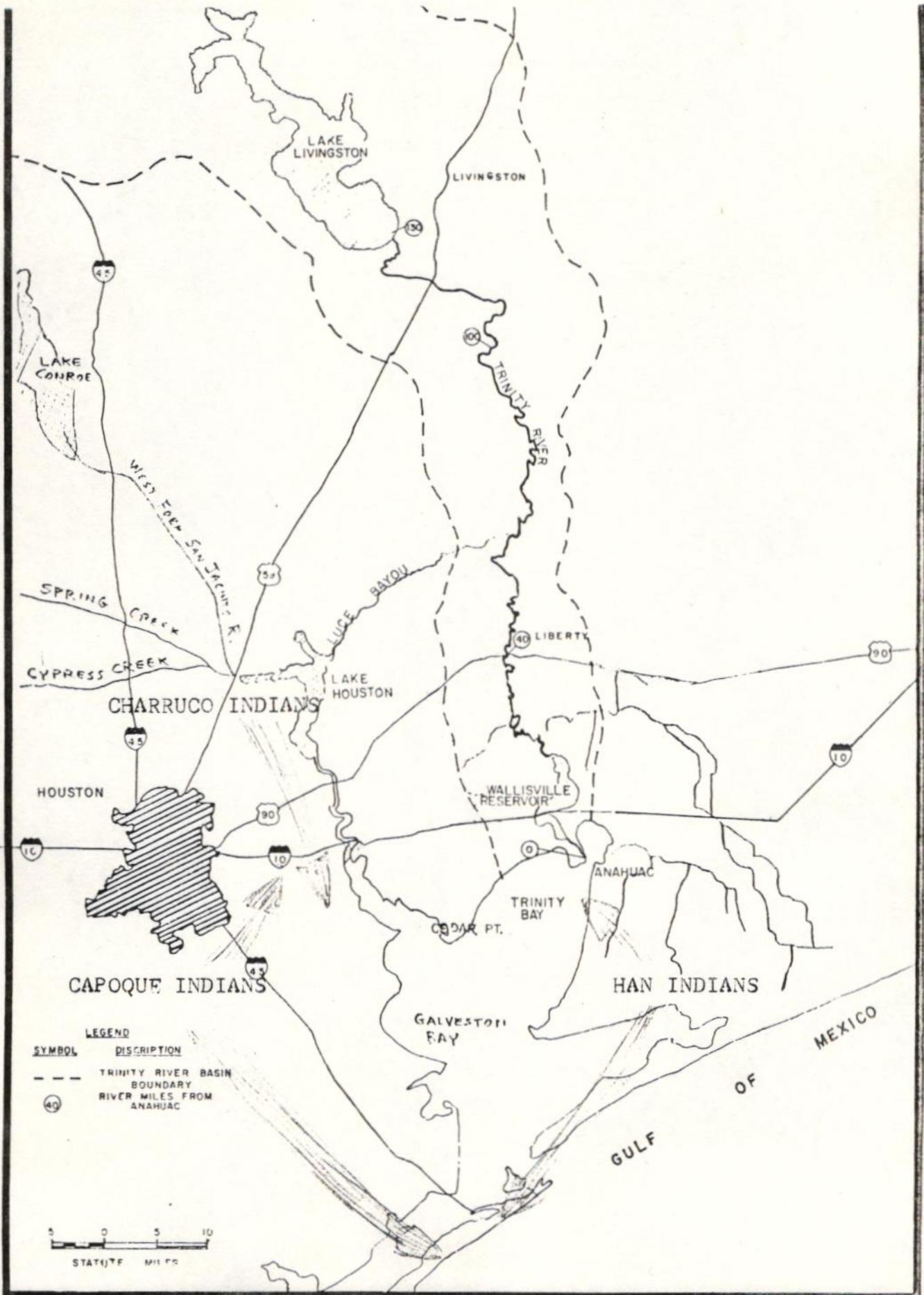
El Orcoquisac Archeologic District is the most significant cultural resource of the French/Spanish Colonial period in Southeast Texas. After additional investigations at 41 CH 57, a plan could be developed to mitigate damage to this important site. This additional archeological data would also be useful in providing the public with a more accurate interpretation of the cultural history of this period. Archeological tests should be conducted at 41 CH 54 and 41 CH 22 to determine if archeological resources will be affected by wave action from the proposed lake. Additional survey and testing of the sites along the north shore of Lake Charlotte should be conducted to determine their archeological potential. Finally, any sites in danger of being destroyed by the lake construction should be adequately sampled before these non-renewable resources are lost forever.

Additional economic and social benefits to the public could be derived by developing El Orcoquisac as an archeological resource. After conducting appropriate historical and archeological investigations the several sites could be reconstructed and utilized as "Living History Interpretive Exhibits" of the French/Spanish Colonial period. The proposed Cedar Hill Park on the north shore of Lake Charlotte could be planned around the archeological resources and could also include an archeological exhibit as part of the park facilities.

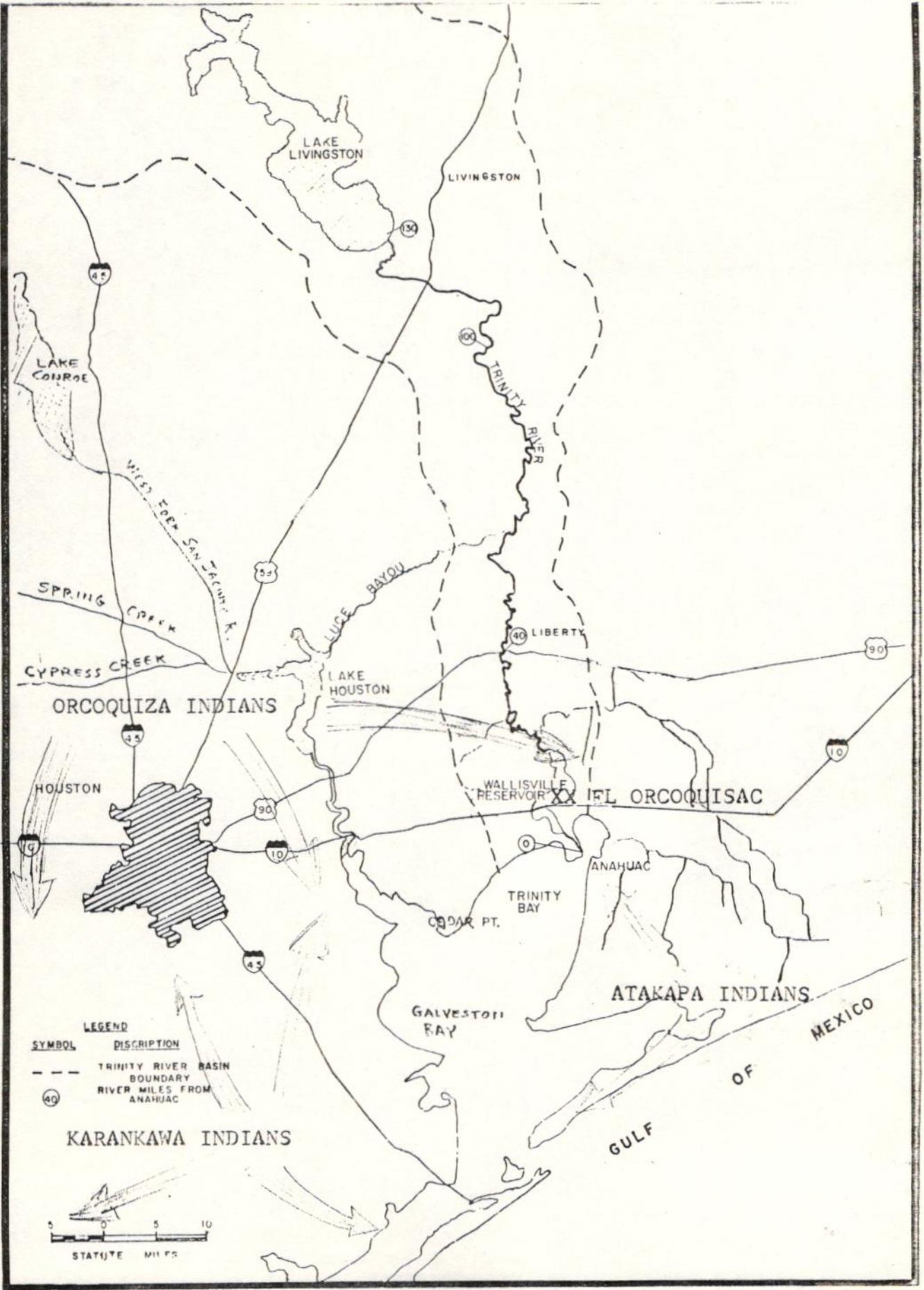
The future of our cultural resources known as El Orcoquisac Archeologic District and the related historic sites yet to be discovered is in the hands of our elected officials, our government agencies, our citizens, as well as our archeological community. We must work together to bring about an efficient use of these archeological resources in the best interest of all concerned. It would seem that a first step would be further discussion between the archeologists, the historians and the planners of the Wallisville Lake Project.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

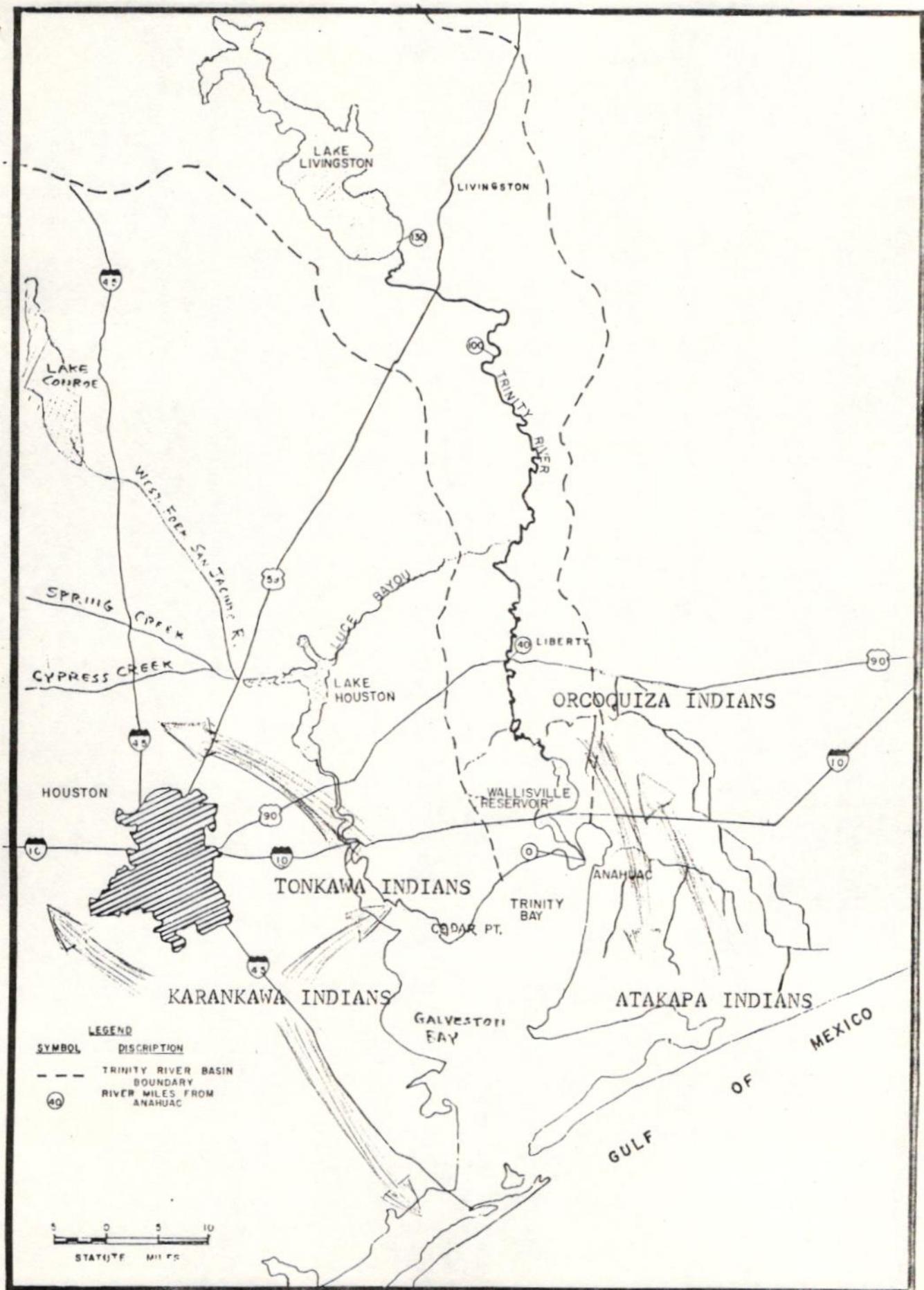
- Ambler, J. Richard Additional Archeological Survey of the Wallisville Reservoir Area, Southeast Texas. Texas Archeological Salvage Project Survey Report No. 6, 1970.
- Bolton, Herbert Eugene Texas in the Middle Eighteenth Century, University of Texas Press, Austin and London, 1970.
- Clay, John V. Spain Mexico The Lower Trinity, Privately published by John V. Clay, copyright 1977.
- De Vaca, Cabeza Adventures in the Unknown Interior of America, translated and edited by Cyclone Covey, Collier Books, New York, 1961.
- Folmer, Henri De Bellisle on the Texas Coast. Southwestern Historical Quarterly, Vol. 44:204-231, 1940.
- Gilmore, Kathleen Cultural Variation on the Texas Coast: Analysis of an Aboriginal Shell Midden, Wallisville Reservoir, Texas, Texas Archeological Survey Report No. 44, 1974.
- Tunnell, Curtis D. and J. Richard Ambler Archeological Investigations at Presidio San Agustin De Ahumada, State Building Commission Archeological Program Report No. 6, 1967.



16th Century Indians of Galveston Bay



18th Century Indians of Galveston Bay



19th Century Indians of Galveston Bay

