

HISTORY AND ARCHEOLOGY UNITE AT THE SAM HOUSTON MUSEUM

by Sandra Rogers, Registrar

When you hear the word “Museum,” what comes to mind? Boring buildings (sometimes located next to duck ponds) often filled with dusty cases containing artifacts that are rarely changed and tell the same old story. Not all museums fit into that dusty, static category. For over a decade, the Sam Houston Memorial Museum has made a significant effort to inform the public of new ideas by offering conferences and fresh, exciting exhibits of art and history.

Not all history is carved in stone. Historical events are constantly being reevaluated and thanks to recent archeological surveys and excavations, our views of historic characters and places are changing. Archeology helps us sort through the historical record for “the real story”. Since October of 2000, as part of the Texas Historical Commission’s “Texas Archeology Month,” the Sam Houston Memorial Museum has hosted expert speakers on numerous Texas topics in an attempt to update Huntsville citizens and SHSU students about the latest historical discoveries. Past speakers have included

*Our first guest speaker in 2000, was Jim Bruseth, Archeology Director of the Texas Historical Commission. He described the search for and discovery of French explorer Robert LaSalle’s ship, *LaBelle*. The *LaBelle* which sunk in Matagorda Bay in 1685 proved to be the most exciting archeological excavation of the decade.

*Texas historian Dr. Gregg Dimmick shared his fascinating search for the retreating Mexican army across Texas in 1836. His journey through the “sea of mud” highlighted the importance of archeological evidence in the historical record.

*Archeologist Marianne Marek spoke about the first archeology to be conducted at the site of San Felipe de Austin, Stephen F. Austin’s colonial capital.

*Jeff Durst, THC state archeologist, provided a fascinating overview of the two years he spent as field director of excavations at Fort St. Louis, the French colony near Victoria. The fort eventually became a Spanish presidio and was lost to history until the mid 20th century.

* Barto Arnold of the Institute of Nautical Archaeology, Texas A & M, recounted the difficulties of underwater archeological recovery in his presentation about the

Denbigh, the only Civil War blockade runner to be excavated in the Gulf of Mexico.

*The Museum hosted archeologist and artist Carolyn Boyd, an expert on the 4,000 year old rock art of the Lower Pecos River Canyon. This art is recognized by European rock art specialists as equal to in importance and older than some well known European rock art. Her newly developed theories of Texas rock art will aid historians by adding to the scant information of early man in Texas.

* San Jacinto Battlefield archeologist, Douglas Mangum, discussed the new archeological finds at that site and provided us with a new perspective of the battle for Texas independence. The battle lasted only 18 minutes, but the many mysteries of that event have lasted to this day. Important battlefield discoveries, such as canister bases from the Twin Sisters offer historians a chance to finally determine the size of the famous cannons and also the artillery strategy used by the Texan and Mexican armies.

Because the Sam Houston Museum is accredited by the Texas Historical Commission as a curatorial repository, the museum staff is able to display the newly excavated San Jacinto battle artifacts in Huntsville. “The Road to San Jacinto” exhibit is unique. Nowhere else will you see displayed such meaningful artifacts from 1836. As part of the museum’s San Jacinto exhibit, a medical model of a skull obtained from the battlefield by John James Audubon was facially recreated at the Museum by forensic artist Amanda Danning.

Each of these expert presenters offered new and exciting evidence for evaluation by historical researchers. Each provided a clearer and broader picture of events in Texas history. This October, clues from a new mystery will be shared with the citizens of Huntsville.

Amanda Danning returns to the Museum with a presentation entitled “Face to Face with the Son of America”, also known as “SAM”. Discovered buried in a cave near the Brazos River in Bosque County, “SAM” is estimated to be over 10,000 years old and is not related to Native Americans of today. Ms. Danning will describe her forensic sculpting technique, recount the story of how SAM was discovered, and explain the significance of the trove of artifacts that were found

buried with him. Join us on Wednesday, October 12, 7 p.m. at the Katy & E. Don Walker Education Center, 1402 19th Street. No admission charge.

History is very much alive on the grounds of the Sam Houston Memorial Museum.

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