Weeks 1-4, Archeological Investigation Updates
At the intersection of two highways in Denton County is a small Texas town. In the 19th century, Bolivar was a burgeoning frontier town on the edge of the old west. The Texas Department of Transportation (TxDOT) is uncovering artifacts from a transportation project in an area which was once historically part of Bolivar. Stay up to date on project information, excavation updates, and the historic timeline by visting our website.

SARTIN HOTEL SITE
During the first few weeks of investigations, archeologists cleared vegetation from this site, mapped it, and performed remote sensing surveys to detect potentially buried features. These efforts help guide the upcoming excavations. Within the first few days of digging, the team exposed the foundation wall of the hotel and discovered the building’s lightning rod five feet into the ground at the corner of the foundation.

Archeologists found a small ceramic jug labeled “Complements of Curtsinger & Bro/Bolivar, Tex.” Early research indicates the Curtsinger family operated a store in Bolivar since the 1880s, and some family members still reside in the area. Further hand excavations revealed a hand-dug, stone-lined water well on the site. Nearby, archeologists found a metal pulley and wire bucket handle with an attached chain, both likely used to draw water from the well. Other fragments of a cast iron stove were also found within the site. More excavations should help us tell the story of the materials used at the Sartin Hotel during its operation. Learn more about this hotel’s history here.

TOM COOK BLACKSMITH SHOP
After clearing the site, mapping, and performing remote sensing surveys, the archeologists began digging at the site of this former enslaved person’s blacksmith shop. Archeologists used special magnets to detect and quickly identify areas with concentrated hammerscale – small metal pieces that flew off as sparks when Tom Cook hammered hot iron. Using special magnets helped focus the location of initial excavation efforts.

The team discovered the basic “footprint” of the blacksmith shop, which would have been a wooden building. More digging in the coming weeks will hopefully reveal an abundance of artifacts that help us understand Tom Cook’s work and influence in Bolivar. You can read more about his history here.

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Week 5 Updates
TxDOT is partnering with Cox|McLain Environmental Consulting archeologists to uncover history hidden beneath the surface in Bolivar, Texas. Efforts this week are focused on Tom Cook’s Blacksmith Shop and excavations on the Curtsinger Property, in addition to some final investigations at the Sartin Hotel Site. Check out our excavation video here.

SARTIN HOTEL SITE
Archeologists made a final effort to scrape the site with a trackhoe to identify any missed artifacts. During this process, a concrete-encased iron pipe (situated more than 10 feet below the surface) revealed that Feature 5 is indeed an old well. Though the exact age of the well is unclear, archeologists are hopeful that archival records will provide a more accurate date.

TOM COOK BLACKSMITH SHOP
34 square meters of hand excavations have exposed exterior “walls” of a rock structure. Though it is difficult to determine the type of structure without more digging, archeologists believe this may be a collapsed forge box, where Tom Cook would have had his coal fire to heat the iron he was working. Archeologists are finding hammerscale (small pieces of metal that fly off when hot iron is hammered) roughly 4 to 12 feet east of the rock structure. This evidence will hopefully tell us where Tom Cook’s anvil was located.

CURTSINGER PROPERTY
Excavations on this privately-owned property are now underway. A large concentration of artifacts, including horseshoes, bolts, whiteware and more domestic items, have already been found. More hand and trench excavations on this site will focus on areas with “forge clinker” – non-combustible compounds produced by burning coal – that had to be regularly cleaned out of the forge from the blacksmith shop.

Descendant Community Site Visit
On December 5th, Maria Franklin (historical archeologist), Tom Cook family descendants (spanning four generations), and other invited guests joined TxDOT and Cox|McLain staff members to explore the sites with a short presentation from archeologist Anthony DeFreece (University of North Texas student). Attendees expressed interest in learning more about the history of the sites, the artifacts uncovered, and what this effort could mean for African American history in Texas.

Stayed tuned for more updates!
Week 6 Updates
As the TxDOT and Cox|McLain archeology teams dig deeper into the history of Bolivar, Texas, efforts this week focused solely on the Tom Cook Blacksmith Shop. Some exciting discoveries this week have helped us learn more about the tools used in the blacksmith shop.

TOM COOK BLACKSMITH SHOP
Last week the team thought they found a large forge box. After more digging, archeologists believe the rock structure is actually a dugout room that is roughly 8 feet wide and 11 or 12 feet long. This may have been the blacksmith shop itself, or possible living quarters for Tom Cook. Until excavations are expanded, it is difficult to determine the use or size of this room. According to our archeologists’ probing, the bottom of the wall and interior floor is at least another 12 inches deeper, maybe more!

ARTIFACTS UNCOVERED
This week’s work uncovered many artifacts, including some domestic items like a clay marble (Figure 1). Most notably, archeologists found the wedge-end of a classic “blacksmith hammer” (Figure 2) and the working end of a pair of blacksmith “tongs” used to hold hot iron pieces. These are the most important tools for a blacksmith. Tom Cook would have used, made, and broken many of them in his years as a blacksmith in Bolivar. We also found several artifacts that indicate Tom Cook repaired wagon wheels and horse harnesses:

- Horse gear
  - Bridle buckles (Figure 3)
  - Bridle bit
  - Cinch rings
  - Brass rivet with a piece of leather still attached
- Wagon parts
  - Broken wagon box wrench
  - Singletree clips

A Special Thanks
17 members from the North Texas Archeological Society volunteered their time to help us screen and recover artifacts. This is the coldest week our archeologists have had yet, and our staff is thankful for the extra sets of hands. While we are still tallying up the total number of volunteer hours, their help over a span of 15 days has added to our manpower.

To learn more about current and upcoming archeological projects, or to find out how to get involved or partner with TxDOT, subscribe to our webpage at www.txdot.gov, keyword: “Archeology.”
Week 7 Updates
Rain, rain, go away! This week was cut a little short due to thunderstorms. Nevertheless, our team of archeologists continued to examine the Curtsinger property, just south of Tom Cook’s property. Archeologists plan to hold one final 10-day excavation at the Tom Cook Blacksmith Shop – stay tuned for final updates! See more photos from the field here.

CURTSINGER PROPERTY
Further excavations were dug adjacent to a trackhoe trench on the property. As expected, archeologists uncovered a sample of materials that represent a mix of blacksmithing and residential debris. Artifacts include window and container glass, buttons, and other small items that might be found in a dwelling.

In addition, archeologists revisited the “dugout” structure and exposed almost all of the stacked rock edge that forms the south wall. Unfortunately, the team has yet to reach the “floor” of the structure, but more probing shows that investigations are near the bottom of the lowest row of rocks in the south wall.

WHAT’S NEXT?
Moving forward, archeologists will focus their attention on removing the rock structure’s floor zone. The team is still exploring the location of the east wall of this structure. Given the mixed fill inside the structure and undisturbed reddish-brown clay near the east wall, archeologists have three theories about what this may represent:
- The east wall was vertical without stacked rocks to line it; or,
- The rocks may have been removed from the wall after the structure was abandoned; or,
- The east wall may have been constructed of cut lumber.

Aerial view of the south wall of the structure

Notable Findings
Two artifacts found this week have markings that help our archeologists date these findings. One black, two-hole hard rubber button has the mark “N.R. CO/Goodyear’s P=T”. This button was made by the Novelty Rubber Company using Nelson Goodyear’s 1851 patent for hard rubber. These buttons were produced between 1855 and 1886.

The other is a round, brass snap-on cap with a maker’s mark inside a circular frame: “PATENT/[logo]/MOUTH HARMONICA/G. BRUCKBAUER.” This cap likely snapped onto a tube container for a harmonica or harmonica parts. Initial research indicates that Georg Bruckbauer was a harmonica maker in the nineteenth century.
Week 8, 9, and 10 Updates
Our final field session for the Bolivar Archeological Project was on February 3rd. Work at the Sartin Hotel included screening several of the machine-excavated fill from areas north and east of the hotel foundation. An extra special thanks to the members of the North Texas Archeological Society that have helped recover unusual and diagnostic artifacts.

TOM COOK BLACKSMITH SHOP
Our final efforts have focused on the historic dugout structure. Here are some facts we know about this site:

- The upper fill contained many iron artifacts related to blacksmithing, along with residential artifacts.
- Below the rock rubble layer are two layers of “Floor Zone.” These areas contained mostly late-nineteenth century artifacts. Some represent actual occupation activities and disposal of debris onto the dirt floor of the structure.
- We have not yet completed much of the historic archival research for this property, so we do not know who built the dugout structure, or who may have used/occupied it. A deed record from 1882 indicates that a “storehouse” was on the property when Tom Cook bought the lot, and this is most likely that structure.
- We have not found the north wall of the structure, but we have a good idea of where it is (or was). It may have been completely destroyed by road-related construction activities.

Sherds of banded annular ware from a pitcher - common in the Civil War era

“Hand Clinching Tool” used by farriers when shoeing horses

Excavation of the dugout structure

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