Digging Into Coppell's Past

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Could a person discover Coppell history simply by looking down? Yes, and the results can be viewed today in the little museum room at the Ihnfeldt House at Coppell's Heritage Park in Old Town Coppell.

Jan Lorrain is shown at Ihnfeldt House in Heritage Park with displays of archaeological artifacts in the background. She and her husband Paul did archaeological research and led digs around the Coppell area.

Since very few items of memorabilia were available from early Coppell families, the Coppell Historical Society some years ago decided to conduct intensive "archeological digs," hoping to uncover artifacts and to discover significant sites that reflected Coppell's past.

Thus, dozens of searches began over many years, manned by the Historical Society and hundreds of Coppell residents of all ages.

Shown above are a group of CMS West students participating in a dig at Grapevine Springs Park.

One of the first search sites was the grounds of the 1904 Kirkland house in old downtown. As required by law for any digging, the Society always received permission from the landowner. The group searched both before and after the house was moved east from its original location on W. Bethel to nearby Coppell Heritage Park.

A large group of adults and children assembled at the site with metal detectors and shovels. Discovered were old metal toys, lost or left behind by early children, including six miniature metal toy cars, now antiques in various stages of aging.

Shown above are two of the toy cars which were found. One is a square bodied station wagon from the 1960s. The other is a toy concept race car from that same period.

The oldest car was a 1930s Ford that is prominently displayed with the other cars in the Ihnfeldt museum room, items that today's children might enjoy seeing.

Also found were all sizes of square nails, metal objects, old coins, keys, a thimble, a medallion from an early Dallas County Fair, jewelry, and a furniture remnant.

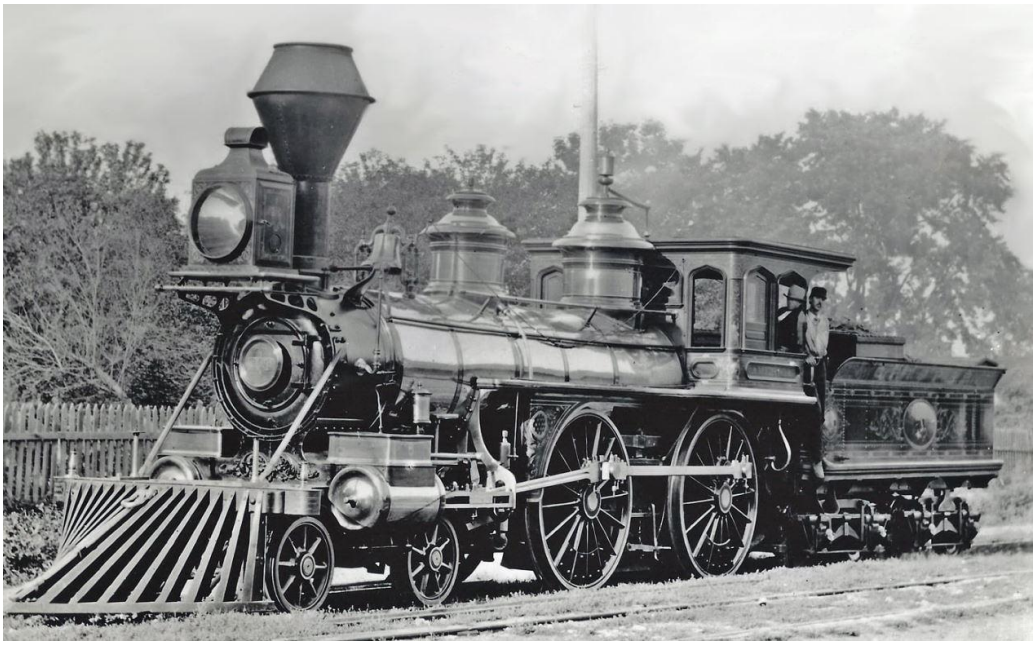
Artifacts uncovered in the searches may be viewed in the Ihnfeldt House Coppell museum room at Heritage Park, 700 S. Coppell Road, open weekdays and Saturday mornings. For tour times, consult the Coppell Historical Museum's website at: coppellhistoricalmuseum.org.

Railroad History Uncovered

Shown above is an enhanced view of the Coppell Depot which was built in 1890.

The site of the old Coppell depot was located on the east side of South Coppell Road, north of the train tracks. The location seemed to be a significant place for another Coppell Historical Society archeological dig. Searches were prominently advertised in the local Citizens' Advocate newspaper, and among workers at the depot site were many young students, encouraged to participate by their history teacher.

Metal detectors were used to flag places to dig. The students suddenly started pulling up railroad spikes, finding over 60 spikes from one location. Items are displayed in the museum room at Heritage Park.



Above is a Grant Locomotive which operated on the St. Louis, Arkansas & Texas Railroad when tracks were completed through our town in 1888.

Draining North Lake Reveals Treasures

One of the most unusual and extensive archeological searches occurred when plans to drain Coppell's North Lake were announced. After receiving permission several weeks ahead from a gate guard at the old Texas Power & Light facility on E. Belt Line Road, the Coppell Historical Society and about 60 searchers gathered and descended on the dry lakebed, finding hundreds of significant items.

Among the many finds were early bullets, a small musket ball, coins, an anchor, an ice age mammal tooth, and ammonite fossils dating back 92-million years, identified by the late renowned archeological steward Jay Blaine. Also found were fishing equipment and sunglasses!

All these items are on display on weekdays and Saturday mornings in the Ihnfeldt museum room at Heritage Park, located at 700 S. Coppell Road.

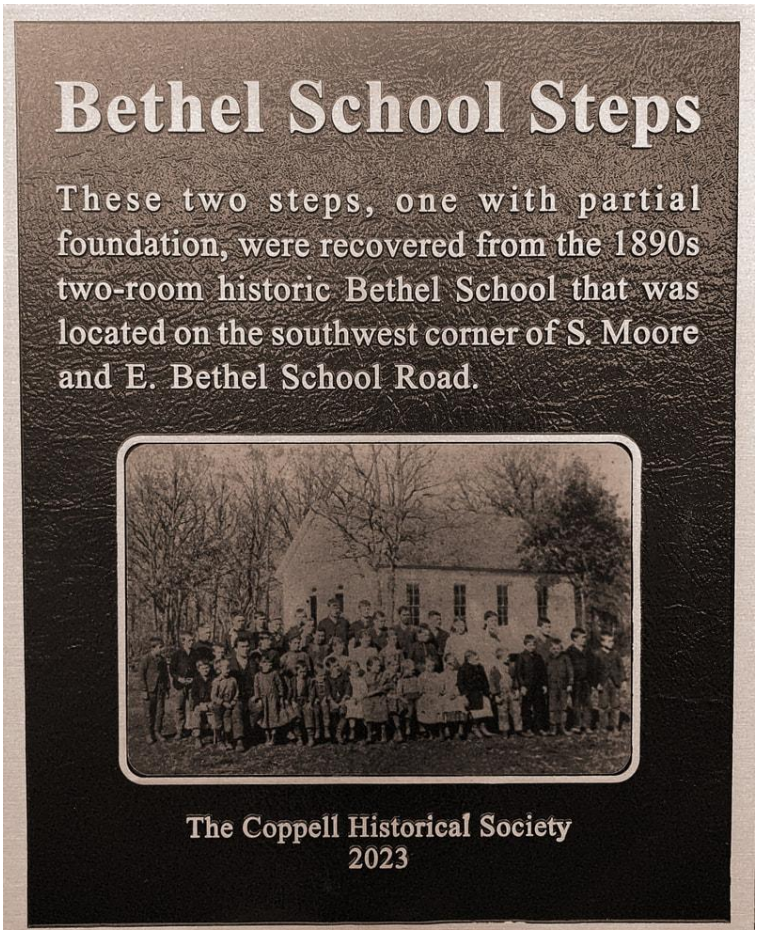
Most Unusual Archeological Search Uncovers Historic School

Old-timers talked about the site of Coppell's 1911 two-story school in old downtown, but no one knew the exact location. Photos of the school and a description given by then-90-year-old Jackie Kirkland, who first attended the school as a five-year-old, were the only evidence.

Coppell School class of 1912 (or possibly 1914)

After receiving permission from the landowner, Coppell Historical Society volunteers set out to explore the suspected area. Within moments, one searcher, former fire chief Richard Lee, noticed an odd, faded pattern in the grass. Using metal rods to poke into the grass pattern, searchers hit a hard layer that formed a huge square, indicating the foundation and four corners of a building. By determining the size of the windows in the old photograph to measure the front expanse of the school, the measurements were found to exactly match the pattern on the ground.

The Coppell Parks Department at the time, under the leadership of arborist John Elias and staff, participated in the retrieval of the foundation blocks and the design of the garden at the Farmers Market. The City of Coppell was supportive of the Historical Society efforts.



A similar find occurred due to the tenacity of Historical Society member Pat Quinlan, who had heard that remains of the old Bethel School existed in a yard on Coppell's east side. After members knocked on doors and much work was done, the steps and part of the foundation of the one-room frame school were found, donated, and moved to Heritage Park, where they are displayed on the grounds.

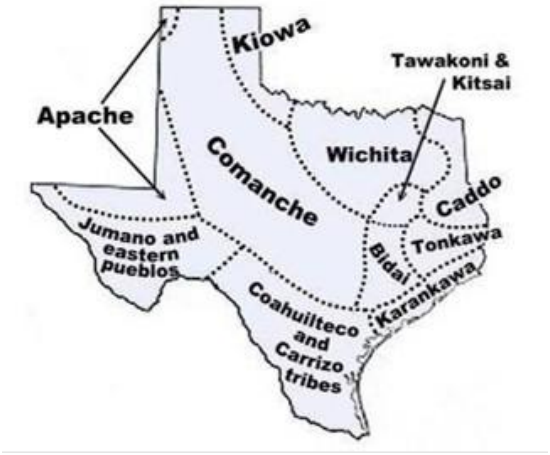
Road Work Turned Up Muleshoes, Bricks from Old Road

As part of City reconstruction of W. Bethel Road in early 2000, road workers during deep excavation began to find numerous old horseshoes, muleshoes and bricks from an earlier brick road.

Each day, more artifacts were brought by road workers to adjacent stores and offices along W. Bethel to add to the historical group's collection, on display in the Ihnfeldt museum room.

Native American Campsites Found

Over many years, archeological stewards and Coppell residents Jan and Paul Lorrain conducted numerous searches of Coppell creeks and woods, finding evidence of the area's earliest temporary inhabitants, Native Americans.

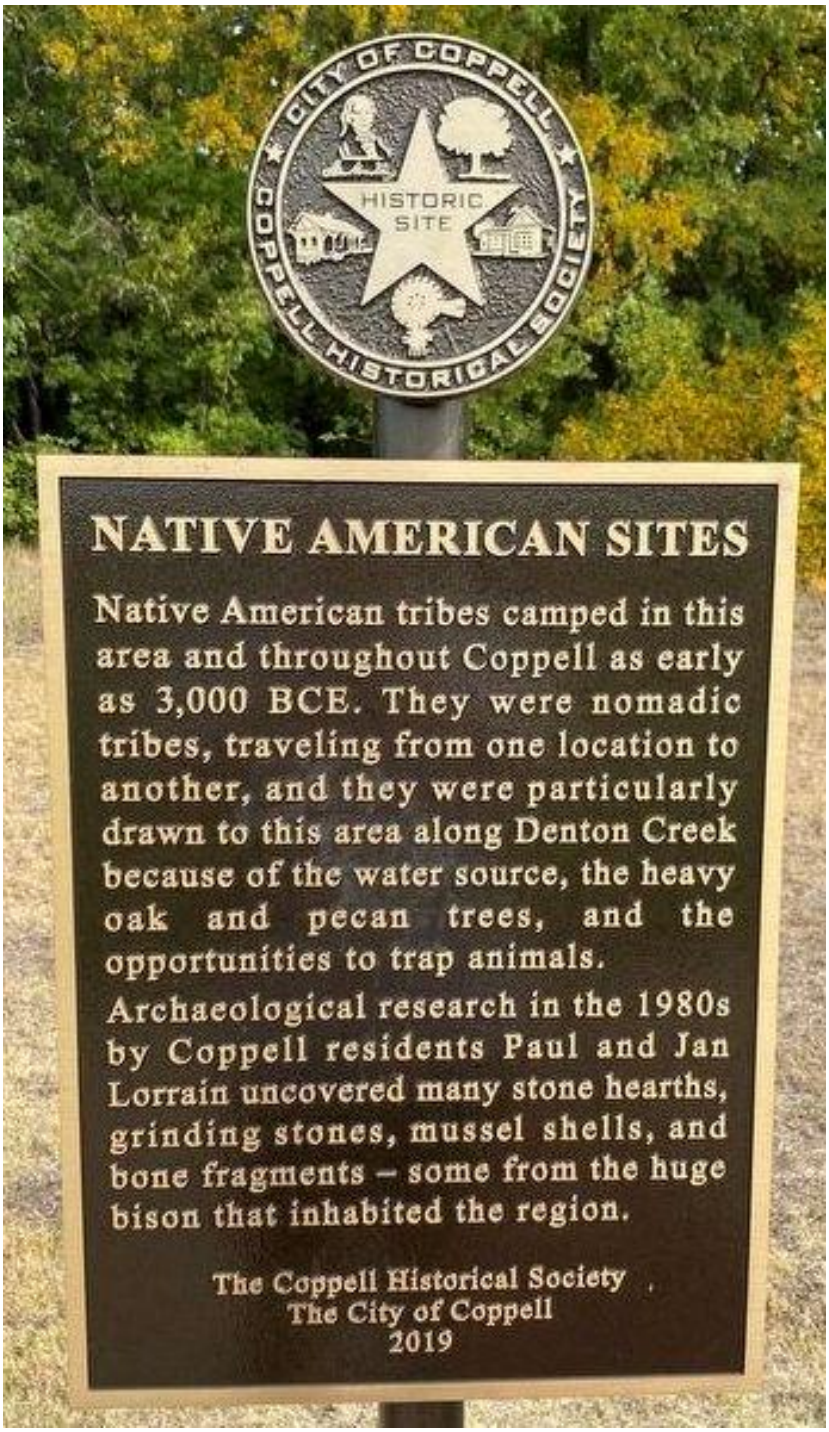


Artifacts from early campsites were donated by the Lorrains and are today on display in the Ihnfeldt House museum room at Heritage Park.

The Lorrains helped the Coppell Historical Society conduct searches at several sites along the Denton Tap Road area. They were also active searchers in all other local digs.

Native American Indian war club stone and the way it would have been used as a war club.

A Coppell historical marker in Andy Brown Park East, near Denton Creek, commemorates the Native American findings of the Lorrains

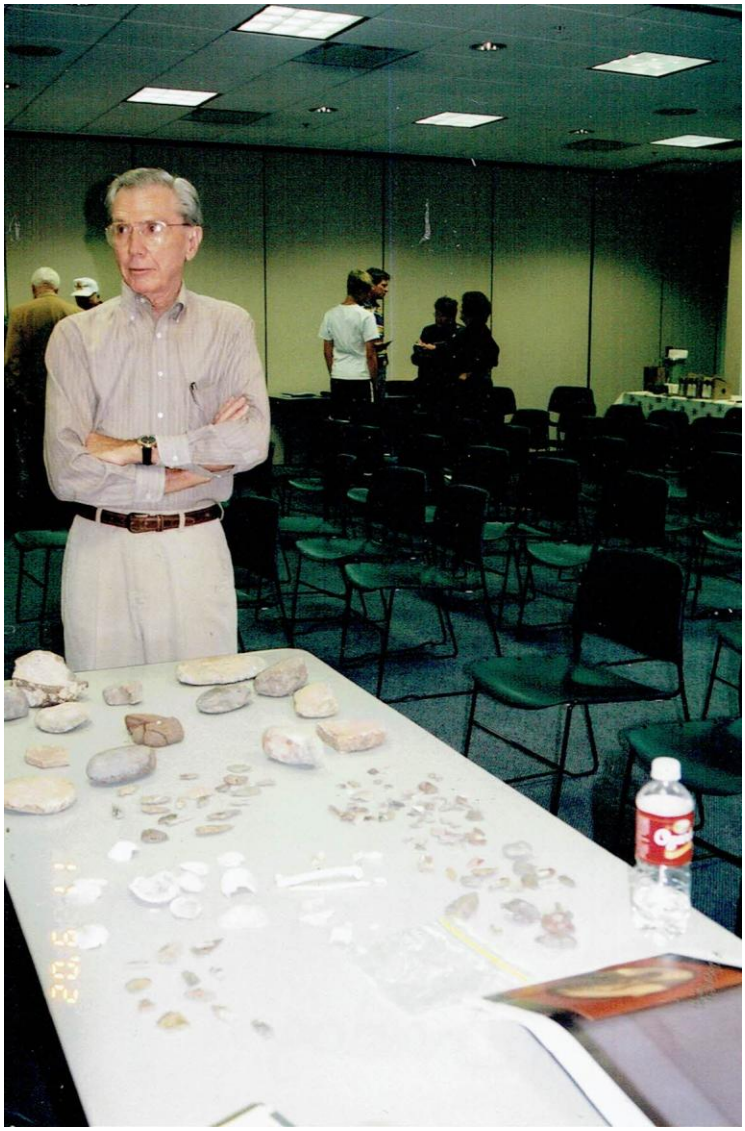


Exploring Grapevine Springs Park

Grapevine Springs Park in today's Coppell, off W. Bethel Road, has been established through extensive research as the 1843 site where Sam Houston camped while waiting to meet with ten Native American tribes to negotiate a peace treaty.

Many professional archeological searches have been conducted at the park, and because it is owned by a governmental entity, Dallas County, the findings of those searches are housed at State archives in Austin. An effort is underway to retrieve these items.

Nevertheless, the Coppell Historical Society met the State's requirement to have licensed archeologists on board and organized one of its first searches at the park. Over 50 volunteers brought metal detectors and shovels and followed maps laying out the entire search area.



Paul Lorrain at an archaeology conference held in Coppell in November 2002.

Among items found were square nails and coins, all of which were taken by the archeologists to Austin for preservation.

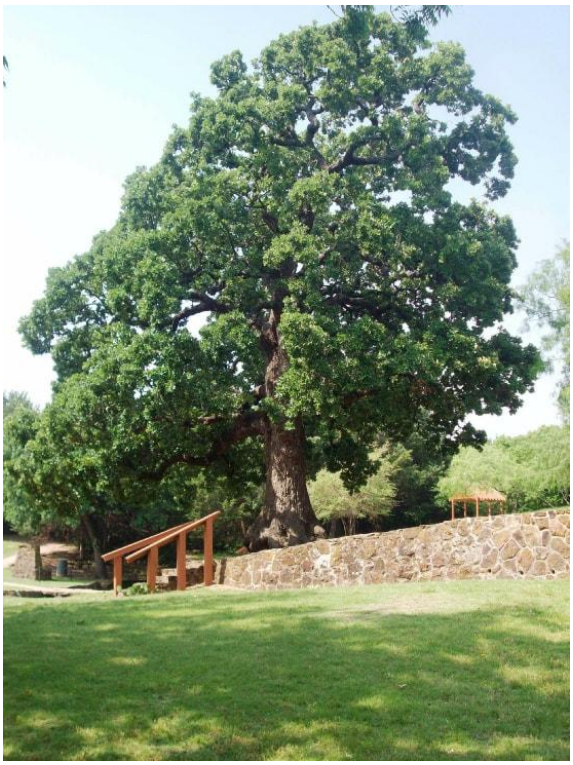
Heritage Park Grounds Reveal Early Home Life

On the grounds of Heritage Park, members of the Historical Society and volunteers have spotted old ceramics identified by spackling patterns. Even today, items appear after rain washes away soil. In the early days, broken pottery was often tossed into the yard, supposedly because it did not burn with the trash.

Prior to construction of new homes in old downtown Coppell, the Historical Society received permission from the City for a search. Found were several unique metal miniature rouge compacts, manufactured in the 1920s and engraved with the name Princess Pat and Armand Cold Cream Rouge.

Above are two rouge containers from the 1920s found in Old Town Coppell, an advertisement for Princess Pat Rouge and an example of an Armand Cold Cream Rouge cannister.

The construction resulted in demolition of numerous old Coppell trees, leading to another preservation effort of the Historical Society-- lobbying the City to preserve its oldest trees.



Houston Campsite oak: Under this tree, Sam Houston, President of the Republic of Texas, camped for almost six weeks in 1843, preparing to sign the first treaty with Native Americans, which would aid local settlement and support Houston's attempts to promote statehood for Texas.

City Develops Preservation Policy

The Coppell Historical Society met with City officials to discuss concern about the Darling Homes development in Old Town Coppell that was changing ground elevation and destroying old and significant trees.

Under the leadership of then-City Manager Clay Phillips, City staff was directed to notify the Coppell Historical Society prior to development that would change the landscape, the elevation of the ground, or demolish old trees and historic structures.

Sec. 12-34-2-12. - Protected tree replacement

Section (A), Item 3

Historic trees must be preserved and cannot be removed unless "hardship" is applied for and approved by the city council.

Local and state archeologists have commented that this directive of the City of Coppell is unique among Texas cities.

Above is shown the Old Town Domino Oak where old timers would sit and play dominos. "The domino table" is one of Coppell's most iconic photos. The back of the photo said, "Clyde Parker, postmaster, C.L. Plumlee, Sr., Floyd Harwell, Grandpa Wood, Abe Miller. These men would almost daily play dominoes in front of the post office, in front of the grocery store next door, or behind the post office under a tree as late as the 1960s. This was on the north side of Bethel Rd.

Later, in 1979, the men played in a little frame building on the south side of W. Bethel Rd., next to the gas station. They had coffee cans beside them that they used as spittoons.

The Historical Society's preservation efforts have greatly benefited from this City policy, according to members, leading to the review and evaluation of many sites, trees, and historic homes before demolition.

Preserving Coppell's Past is our Mission

Mission: is to communicate and preserve the history of the dynamic community of Coppell, Texas which was first settled in 1848.

Town Name: It has been associated with many names - Grapevine Prairie, Bethel, and Gibbs - but it became known as Coppell in 1890, was officially designated as Coppell in 1892, and was incorporated as a city in 1955.

Society: Organized in 1991, growing out of what was initially the Old Town Committee, which next became the Coppell Historical District Committee, both city sponsored committees, and finally it became the independent Coppell Historical Society.

Programs:

- Research papers and videos by members
- Coppell History Talks presentations by noted speakers
- Portal to Coppell History online photo and document archive
- Coppell Historical Society website
- Legendary Locals Portrait Exhibit
- Outreach at City events
- Historical Markers
- Preserving oral histories
- Archaeology digs and preservation
- Presentations to schools and organizations on the history of Coppell

If you would like to become a member and get involved with the Coppell Historical Society, please contact us at: info@coppellhistoricalsociety.org or visit our website at: www.coppellhistoricalsociety.org.