Abstract: This paper was a collaborative effort between Anthropology undergraduate, Crystal Platz and Anthropology post graduate, Lauren Springs, both interns for the Texas Historical Commission (THC) within the Historic Sites Division (HSD). This project reflects an anthropological account throughout the course of the internship, with independent analytical sections.
I. Introduction

History, Background, and Mission

The Texas Historical Commission (THC) is a state agency that seeks historic preservation by aiming “to preserve Texas’ architectural, archaeological and cultural landmarks” (THC website). The agency was first established in 1953, under the name Texas State Historical Survey Committee. Their initial goal was to look across the State of Texas to identify any important historic sites (THC website). In 1973, the state legislature changed the agency’s name to its current moniker, the Texas Historical Commission. At this point in time, it only had two historic sites under its wing; the rest of the known historic sites were under the control of the Texas Parks and Recreation Department. However, during the 80th legislative session, the chairman of the agency asked Texas Parks and Recreation (now known as Texas Parks and Wildlife) to relinquish 18 of their sites to the THC.

The Historic Sites Division of the THC has accordingly taken over and relieved the Texas Parks and Wildlife (TPWD) of those 18 sites, and they are currently continuing the collections processing and maintenance duties that they inherited from TPWD. So far, the THC’s Historic Sites Division has inherited twenty total sites with associated artifacts and is responsible for the preservation and maintenance of these sites. To date, “artifacts remain in hundreds of boxes” (Wilhelm interview), the same way they were recovered years ago post excavation.

In 2008, the Historic Sites Division received a $50,000 grant of contract money from the state to be used to preserve the most significant historic pieces that are relevant to each of the sites. As mandated by the state, projects are based on priority. By contract, any and all significant pieces from the collections go to the Conservation Research Laboratory (CRL) at Texas A&M. Still within budget, approximately 650 artifacts have been sent to date. Treatment materials are petroleum based and prices do fluctuate according to price of gas, so this is important in considering the cost and budget. To put into perspective the cost and budget, with regard to prioritizing artifact conservation, the following example is rendered: the cost of an 1850’s stove sent for restoration to the CRL for cleaning is proportionate to 500 conserved horseshoes. An important note to be aware of is that the conservation process does not seek to remove historic value, but only to stabilize the decomposition process in order to preserve its historic value. Simply put, the conservation process does not try to make artifacts look new, it just seeks to “stop” or prohibit the continuation process of decomposition.

Ultimately, the mission of the THC is to protect and preserve the prehistoric, historic and cultural resources of Texas history for “the enjoyment and economic benefit of present and future generations” (THC website).

Curatorial Standards

The Historic Sites Division (HSD) seeks to catalogue and conserve artifacts excavated from their associated historical sites, according to national museum curatorial practices. The HSD currently uses the Texas A&M Conservation Manual (Nautical Archeology Program) as their curatorial standard. The HSD lab does not conserve artifacts on site. Artifacts needing conservation are sent, as determined by the lab manager in regards to the project, to one of two
designated labs with superior curatorial standards. The first is the previously mentioned Texas A&M Archeology lab, also known as the Conservation Research Lab (CRL). The second is the University of Texas at Austin lab, known as the Texas Archeology Research Laboratory, or TARL. All artifacts from the state collections are individually catalogued at the HSD lab, but not all are sent out to be treated.

Organizational Structure

When the Texas Historical Commission gained control over the twenty historic sites, they reorganized and created eight internal divisions including; Administration, Architecture, Archeology, Community Heritage Development, Historic Sites, History Programs, Marketing and Communications, and Staff Services, as well as other departments including, but not limited to, the THC Library and Friends of the THC. Because of the rather complex hierarchical structure, and for purposes of this paper, the focus will be on the Historic Sites Division and an introduction to the Archeology Division.

To begin with, the Historic Sites Division is comprised of approximately 12 members. The immediate intern supervisor and HSD lab manager is the Archeology Collections Manager/Curator of Archeology for the HSD, Kerri Wilhelm. (Kerri’s former title was ‘Conservator of Archeology materials and associated archives’). Kerri is the primary person of contact for whom the interns have to report to for the entirety of the internship. The Chief Curator of the Historic Sites Division is Laura DeNormandie-Bass, and is Kerri’s direct boss. Laura does not work in the Lab, but from an office within the Historic Sites Division Headquarters in downtown Austin. In the event Kerri is ill or out of the lab, the interns are under the direct supervision of Brad Jones, the Archeology Division lab supervisor. In such instances, Brad reports either to Kerri or Laura with intern updates.

Brad Jones acts as the primary Wheless Lab supervisor and has an additional group of interns who report directly to him. The two division lab supervisors (Kerri and Brad) have unrelated responsibilities, except those to the state of course. The main difference between the two is that Kerri works on a more public-state level, on behalf of the Texas residents and peoples, while Brad deals primarily with independent state land owners and private property.

II. Environment and Communication

Location, Neighborhood, Laboratory

Location. The actual Historic Sites Division Headquarters occupies a quaint two story, historic home located at the intersection of San Antonio Street and 15th Street in downtown Austin. This location contains the offices for each division team leader, such as Kerri’s boss, Laura.

Currently, both the Archeology Division and Historic Sites Division laboratories are housed together at what is officially the Archeology Lab, and is located just off of Wheless Street in Austin, Texas. The lab is commonly referred to as the ‘Wheless Lab’ and it is as this location where the interns perform the majority of their tasks. The Archeology Lab is generously sharing their lab space with the HSD because the construction of a new Historic Sites lab is currently underway at
another location on Tuscany Way Street in Austin, Texas. Completion of a newly designed space for collections storage is also not expected until early next year.

**Neighborhood.** The Wheless Lab is nestled in a growingly gentrified neighborhood of East Austin, with access to I-35 and Highway 183. The building itself is not identifiable to those passing by because there are neither signs nor welcoming entrances, and all the windows are tinted for security. Although the building is situated on a corner lot, it is set back from the street and is not immediately visible.

The parking lot is positioned in front of the entrance from the Manor Street view. The first couple of visits generally resulted in the interns completely bypassing the building and parking lot because it blends in so well with its surroundings. The basic scene encompasses a building of natural color, with a basic 1970’s – 1980’s prairie home architectural style, with various decorative trees surrounding it, and a lack of any distinguishing characteristics that would mark it as significant. The only eye catching feature is a large, bright blue dumpster positioned in the parking lot, just to the left of the lab entryway. From the view of the parking lot, there are many windows, and all of them are tinted from the outside to prohibit outside viewing of the lab. Only when walking up to the building from the parking lot does it become apparent from the numbered address above the door that you have arrived at the main door for Wheless Lab.

**Laboratory.** To gain entry into the building, one must ring the outside door bell located to the left of the door on the metal frame. Usually one of two gentlemen from the Archaeology Division, Jeff or Steve (Brad’s bosses), will answer the door. The foyer is bare with only a table and a large poster of the La Salle shipwreck conservation project located between the two gentlemen’s offices on the right. The interior of the lab itself is windowless and resembles any other general chemistry or biology lab one may walk into. The basic layout of the lab follows an ‘L’ shape pattern, with the main door at the ‘foot’ of the L. In the center of the lab lies a long row of tables that ends when the room angles 90 degrees to the right. Instead of tables down this section of the L, there is a long narrow workstation with cabinets and stacked boxes of artifacts going from the counter to ceiling. It is this section of the lab that has been reserved for the Historic Sites Manager and her team of interns. The atmosphere is kept at an average chilling temperature of 65 degrees for maximum artifact preservation. As a result, the air conditioning unit is always running. The lab is generally quiet, (with the exception of the humming AC unit), and everyone within it is calmly, but busily working. There are also little ‘room lets’ within the lab, including a mini library and an archway that makes up the break and supplies room, and leads to the photography room with an additional door to exit the lab.

**Work Environment**

The working conditions always vary. The historic sites intern will be involved with a variety of projects including, but not limited to the following: Numbering and inventorying artifacts; relocating and re-housing artifacts from storage space or sites; photographing and cataloging artifacts onto the collections manager’s desktops; identifying and researching artifacts; and observing/assisting with temporary exhibition installation. Sometimes one will perform research
or process records, which reduces the opportunity to work with others (i.e. excel spreadsheets, artifact analysis, and/or Adobe photo-shop). Some days the work will be on artifacts that are bulky, and/or are contained in heavy record containers that require heavy lifting of objects, climbing, or stretching, usually experienced through transportation of artifacts, or during photography. Work in this laboratory setting is limited to the size of the objects in the collection they are working with, which determines the amount of effort involved in the lifting, reaching, and moving of objects. If anyone needs assistance, there is always another person present to assist with the moving and heavy lifting, ensuring the safety of the workers.

Despite the busy workloads of everyone involved in research at Wheless Lab, the close proximity to each other’s workspaces encourages occasional casual chatting, mostly about the artifacts or sites currently under review and the progress of the new HSD building site. These several minute long chats scattered throughout the work day function as a mini-break that can clear your head and help you refocus on your work. The friendly atmosphere enjoyed among everyone at the lab encourages quick familiarity and comfort of use, which is a basic necessity of a successful workplace.

To sum up the Wheless experience, it is important to understand that while the exterior lab itself seems to be restricted, uninviting, and confined, it is comforting to know that the interior is largely fluid and open. The interior lab consciousness stems from the morale and overall ‘feel’ of the lab. This can be largely attributed to the people who inhabit the office building and their interpersonal communications styles which make for a fluid and open environment. The large common lab area and mutual respect among peers and for their work is integral to the formation of the welcoming lab environment we each came to enjoy.

III. Intern Duties and Responsibilities

The first collection the Historic Sites Division began working on was for the Fort Griffin Historic Site located in Albany, Texas. This is one of only three total historic fort sites of the twenty general sites (list of all 20 sites is located on last page) needing conservation. The remaining 17 sites are archeology or historic house collections. For the duration of our internship and under the direction of Kerri, we were primarily involved with the other two fort sites: Fort McKavett and Fort Lancaster.

As interns, it is our job to duly assist the Curator of Archeological Collections Manager with the collections processing, cataloguing, preservation, curation, photography, archives, and data management of all artifacts, as instructed, related to their corresponding historic sites. Throughout the course of this internship, we have been involved in assisting Kerri with a variety of duties including but not limited to: artifact condition reports, photography, handling, cataloguing and data management, packaging for transport, and retrieval of various artifacts to be conserved from other sites.

Maintaining curatorial and lab protocol, certain standards were employed when handling the artifacts to insure their continued structural integrity. For example, anyone handling artifacts
in the lab are required to wear either plastic latex or white cotton gloves, depending on the materials of the artifact, at all times – no exceptions. Not wearing gloves while handling artifacts is not acceptable to any curatorial environment, and thus wearing gloves while touching the artifacts is Kerri’s number one lab rule. Additionally, when moving large quantities of artifacts within the lab, the curatorial box housing the object(s) must be placed on a cart which is then rolled to a new destination for further processing or storage. This greatly reduces the chances of dropping or spilling artifacts outside of their box. Artifacts are not to be handled excessively and should be stored appropriately according to their specific makes, then by site, per box.

Working with prehistoric and historic collections that are fragile require precautionary actions as mentioned above, and thus requires each individual to be mature, organized and responsible. It is imperative that one always be mindful and respectful to the age and value of the artifacts when handling, processing, and transporting. To put into perspective the relative significance of any one of the several artifacts one may handle, all of the following are possible outcomes with regard to each and every object: can be placed on exhibit in a museum or historic house collection; may need to be used to compare and/or contrast to other collections; artifact is on loan from another institution or individual; and/or will be used for future interpretation. Most importantly, each artifact holds significant value to its site, whether proveniened or not, essentially, what research and analysis does not tell us today could be revealed tomorrow.

IV. Collections Management

When we first started the internship in late January, Kerri was in the midst of beginning a bottle conservation project from the Fort McKavett State Historic Site in Menard County, and this is where our first project began.

Fort McKavett State Historic Site

Figure 1 – A map of the area surrounding Fort McKavett. Fort McKavett is illustrated with a red star.

(Photo from THC website)
History of the Bottle Collection

The modern historical origin of the bottle collection began in a dumpster. Its discovery was the result of an antique shop patron who happened to be walking by the store’s dumpster, and noticed these abandoned bottles, and rescued these historical artifacts. Although they were never provenienced in situ from the exact spot of excavation, they were able to site provenience them to Fort McKavett based on oral statements. These bottles were excavated by looters from the McKavett site, which eventually ended up in an antique store near the site. Upon bottle rescue, the patron then donated to the state of Texas. Once the bottles were retrieved, Kerri went through each of the boxes to determine which ones were of most historical uniqueness, based on a variety of factors such as current state of decomposition; overall condition, age, and rarity in determining which ones were of most significance to the site, for conservation.

Pictured below are five of hundreds of bottles from the Fort McKavett bottle collection, unconserved.

Fort McKavett Bottle Collection

Collections Processing

To assist her with this project, we began to fill out artifact condition reports by measuring, weighing, providing descriptive details as to the decomposition process, color, glass type, as well as identifying fragments, cracks, missing parts of the bottle(s), photographing, and grouping the bottles into categories: conserved and unconserved. After data collection and analysis, we then added the specifics of each bottle to various working spreadsheets for archiving and collection records. Once Kerri chose the bottles for conservation, we created a separate inventory worksheet and recorded those selected for conservation that would become a checklist for CRL researchers and our internal records. To prepare a bottle for transport, we made sure they were carefully...
wrapped in bubble wrap, encased in foam, and corresponding THC number, and then bound with plastic string twine. Once that was complete, they were inventoried once more, and finally packaged for transit for treatment at Texas A&M’s Conservation Research Laboratory (CRL).

CRL Trip Narrative and Fieldnotes

On February 22, 2010, we took a trip with Kerri to the CRL in College Station. CRL stands for the Conservation Research Laboratory of Marine Archeology, which is part of the Anthropology Department at Texas A&M University in College Station, Texas, and is located on Riverside campus. The purpose of the trip was to drop off a total of 59 artifacts, including a sample of 40 bottles from the Fort McKavett bottle collection. Additionally, we were to pick up the first batch of 5 bottles from the McKavett collection, two rifles, two swords, and a number of other artifacts that they had completed conservation. (All of the artifacts that were picked up during this trip had been previously dropped off by Kerri prior to our internship.)

Fort McKavett Bottle Collection (Conserved)
Below reflects two sides of 1 of the conserved bottles from the Bottle Collection depicted an earlier photo.

We arrived at CRL at 11:45am. Once there, we met with Dr. Helen Dewolf (the Assistant Research Specialist for the CRL), Catherine (Helen’s Assistant), and an Archeology graduate student named Heather. Dr. Dewolf informed us Heather’s primary concentration in her graduate research
was specializing in historic glass and preservation, thus she would be responsible for taking care of the bottles we were leaving for conservation.

Before accepting any artifacts for conservation, both parties are required to take an inventory of items dropped off and sign off on the exchange. Throughout the inventory, we remained engaged in dialogue with the three women, but predominantly focused on interviewing Helen Dewolf. She was very passionate about her work and particularly entertaining. (Crystal felt as though she knew she had seen her before but could not quite put her finger on how... she decided it was most likely from archaeology related documentaries...). Helen and her team of students clearly get along well with one another, and all seemed very relaxed in the workplace.

The building itself was cluttered with projects, heavily decorated with industrial materials, and slightly overwhelming at first; but our initial apprehension was eased when we heard one of Beethoven’s symphonies welcoming us from a stereo in the center of this huge industrial warehouse structure. Even though the lab is all about business and academics, it felt welcoming and almost relaxing in its jumbled and eclectic environment. The whole space was an engaging, chaotic mess of chemical reactions, odd smells, and things we could actually touch!

As soon as the introductions and initial inventory were complete, we all sat down to chat about the bottle collection drop off and other artifacts Kerri came to pick up. Helen informed us that the bottles would need to undergo “Silicone Oil” treatment after checking the chloride levels on some of the bottles. She explained that artifact conservation and preservation is “not absolute and not guaranteed”, relating to us that there no assurances that certain artifacts will survive the conservation process. Bottles, for example, can start with a chloride saturation of 120-150ppm. Most of the Ft. McKavett artifacts, such as sheet brass and iron, have been saturated at 110ppm. Helen and Kerri acknowledged that Texas was once under a salt sea millions of years ago (The Tethys Sea), so all of those chlorides are still in the soil and transfer to all buried materials.

These salinity levels exist in addition to those naturally occurring in the artifacts themselves. The chlorides then migrate with changing pH and usually transfer to the object / artifact surface, accounting for the “cloudiness” of glass in particular. After checking the chlorides, her team will clean and then treat the bottles with the silicone oil. With the Silicone Oil Treatment, the artifacts will have a sustained half life of 250 years (this actually goes for all material classes, not just glass). She informed us that in the end, the chloride levels should be 10ppm (parts per million) or less. After conservation, the team will take the ‘up close’ and detailed photos of the bottles, catching details such as maker’s marks, seams, other embossing or inscriptions not seen pre-conservation. They will additionally “notate and record all diagnostic information that can’t be seen by the naked eye (i.e., x-ray)” or, if necessary, take the objects apart to get to said information.

It was about this time during our discussion that Dr. Dewolf’s partner, Mr. Jim Jobling, arrived. Jobling is actually a marine archeologist and dive safety officer for the renowned Institute for Marine Archeology at A&M, and manages the CRL lab, however is not a professor at Texas A&M University. Mr. Jobling was active and energetic when he arrived with his best friend, a huge, beautiful Golden Retriever. Spirits were high and added to the informal nature of the overall environment when this huge creature entered the room! As Jobling began to speak, we noticed a
distinct English accent, as we would come to find out he is from South Africa. Once settled, Kerri inquired as to the approximate time frame and cost estimate, which are determined by Jobling, so she can report them back to Laura at the THC. Upon introduction to him, we learned that these estimates are dependent on the following information:

1 - Is it a composite object? And, if so,
2 – Does it have to be disassembled?

If it is a composite, then they will first have to stabilize the organic component, and later stabilize the metal component. Ideal circumstances yield a curation period of 6 months to 1 year, or according to Helen, “72 weeks”. If the artifacts are extremely fragile, then a period of 18 months may need to be observed. In short, “the artifact determines the length of time” needed and this is the principle the CRL standards have incorporated into the THC’s time frame and budget considerations. Getting to know the process showed us that “conservation is not a science, but an art” (Dewolf interview); and, sometimes, all it takes is a little “fairy dust”...

In addition to conserving artifacts, Helen and her team also create replicas that can be handled and displayed when the original artifacts are too fragile. The replicas are extraordinarily authentic in appearance, but easy to distinguish from the originals because of their markedly light weight. The team makes the reproductions by taking molds of the artifacts and pouring in an epoxy resin to create the cast. Once set, the casts are then colored using what Dewolf and her team dubs ‘fairy dust’. The ‘fairy dust’ is actually the dust that collects on the lab floor as a result of the artifact’s cleaning and conservation process and gives its color and texture.

Figure 3: Represents a conserved key (left) and an epoxy resin of the original key (right) shown to scale. Accession numbers have been blacked out per THC request. (Photo by L.Springs)

The photo above depicts a side by side comparison of a conserved key (left) and the epoxy resin cast (right) of the original key. This resin was made due to the possibility the original artifact would not survive conservation.
Upon returning the conserved bottles, epoxy casts (with or without accompanying original) and various other artifacts from conservation at CRL, we completed filling in the gaps with additional Fort McKavett data, as well as archiving the other site artifacts, and prepared ourselves for our main project, Fort Lancaster.

Fort Lancaster State Historic Site

This photo represents a zoomed in map of the area where Fort Lancaster is located as illustrated by the red star.

Collections Processing

For this site, we were responsible for assigning a numbering system to the artifacts, bagging and tagging them, reporting on their general condition and characteristics, photographing them, repacking them into a storage container, and cataloguing all of this information into a spreadsheet to present to Kerri, Laura, and the rest of the Division. This project made up the bulk of our internship work and, at present, we are still in the process of editing and adding information to the spreadsheet.

The Fort Lancaster Collection came to us in boxes from the TPWD. As per TPWD standards, the artifacts were collected into cardboard boxes and turned over to us with an inventory list stating what each artifact was and its identifying characteristics. Some of the objects were marked with accession numbers assigned by the TPWD, which made their identification much easier, and still some had no record of existence in the inventory report we received. For each artifact, we had to assign an official THC records number for easy reference and retrieval. Each number was printed out on an individual tag, inserted into a small, clear, plastic baggie, and then placed in another bag with the artifact itself. This process is known as 'bagging and tagging'.

After we had devised our numbering system, we began to fill out the artifact condition reports for each object. When filling out a condition report, you must note the current date, date the object was received, associated accession and catalogue numbers, site of origin, and examiner of the object. The reports include a scale (from poor to excellent) where the overall condition of the artifact is noted. Below that is space for more specific notes. The object’s description and material
properties must be noted along with any inherent imperfections or acquired damages (cracking, material break-down). The artifact must be measured for height, length, depth, circumference (when applicable), weight, and any other measurements deemed useful by the examiner. Any maker's marks or identifying embossing/wording must be recorded as well. The artifact is then given its conservation assessment, and is bagged and tagged.

When the condition reports had been completed and all artifacts were assigned THC numbers, we began to take them in small groups to our photography room to get the necessary visual documentation. Each provenienced object must be photographed at least once on each side, and any small marking or identification stamps were to be zoomed in on in an additional photo. So for example, each bottle needed at least six photographs, one from each of the four sides, then two more with views from the top and bottom. Each picture needs to include at least one scale for a reference of size and the THC numbering tag in one of the corners. For objects which have been only site provenienced, fewer photos are needed. One photograph that is most representative of the object is all that is required. This photo must also include a THC number and scale.

The photography room is set up with two camera stands and multiple lights, situated over two tables covered either in a red felt background or a white paper backing. For our purposes, the white backing was used most frequently. Because we took photographs from above the artifacts using a camera attached to an arm-stand, a stool or step ladder was necessary to achieve the right height for viewing the photos. The camera had to be evenly situated before each session to ensure the correct angle was being preserved in the photographs, so we had to have a small level on hand at all times. Molding clay and small pieces of white foam were commonly used to still lopsided or round artifacts so the photographs could be taken accurately.

Once each batch of photos was finished we could start the process of editing. We edited the photos in Adobe Photoshop, first by ‘batch processing’ them in a medium jpeg format to automatically correct the lighting levels of the photograph. Afterwards, each photograph was
additionally edited for alignment corrections, sizing, lens imperfections, and further lighting issues. We saved four copies of each photograph. The first was the original photo, the second the batch processed only version, the third was a completely edited but not compressed photo, and the fourth was the finalized and compressed version. These photograph groups were classified as ‘originals’, ‘original edits’, ‘first edits’, and ‘final edits’ respectively.

Throughout the project we were also in charge of re-boxing the artifacts for storage. To accomplish this we constructed plastic pre-made boxes and packed each one with the necessary cushioning materials (usually layering the inside of the box with foam) to safely store each artifact. The more fragile artifacts were additionally wrapped in either bubble wrap or more foam to ensure their safety. Each box was labeled with a number or description and the artifacts were assigned to each box as was seen appropriate. Within each box, we had to place an inventory list explaining which artifacts were housed in that specific box and providing a total count of the objects included inside it.

After the collection of all Fort Lancaster information and documentation was completed, we were assigned with the task of creating a spreadsheet which served to organize the bulk of the information into an easily digested and referenced worksheet. The spreadsheet contains THC and TPWD numbers; very basic artifact descriptions; the presence/absence of condition reports, conservation cards, and accession records; conservation information; photographs; artifact location; and any notes. We also created a laboratory binder with copies of all the hard materials such as accession records, artifact reports, conservation card copies from A&M, and any associated notes or artifact research materials. These binders will then be duplicated and will ultimately serve as references and/or supplements for the onsite curator and registrar.
V. Independent Analysis

While Fort Lancaster was our main project in the internship, we also had the opportunity to travel with Kerri or Laura to visit sites and conduct independent research. The following sections will examine independent projects undertaken by each intern, involving the processes involved in creating museum displays and mounts, and present an archeological debate regarding one other historic site under the THC not previously mentioned.

Museum Display and the Bob Bullock Workshop
By Lauren Springs

Display and Mount Backgrounds

Displays. Museum display cases can be many different things. Some museums will put only one type of artifact in a particular case (e.g. coins or buttons), while others will house a variety of objects (a book, writing utensils, glasses, etc.) and materials. The first display (single-type display) functions to show a variety of the same sort of object, while the second (multi-type display) seeks to provide a context to the items presented, which can contribute to a fuller understanding of the pieces by the viewer.

Single-type displays may seem more boring than their counterparts, but because they are housed with objects made up of the same single material, they are less likely to show signs of rapid decomposition. A display case containing all glass bottles, for example, can be temperature and humidity controlled to the specific chemical properties of the glass, slowing down the chemical breakdown of the object and aiding in its continued preservation.

Conversely, multi-type displays involve a variety of objects of differing materials, either touching one another or in their close proximity. These display cases are often a favorite and draw larger crowds because they have more going on than the single-type displays. However, because the multiple materials involved are not separated from each other in any significant ways, each object can contribute to the quicker decomposition of its neighbors through natural gas or chemical emissions. Additionally, cases have to be environment controlled (if controlled at all) for the entirety of the objects, which means some might be adversely affected while others benefit.

This is a common problem to run into in the exhibition of archaeological or historic finds in museums. For example, during the cataloguing of the fort sites’ artifacts after turnover to the THC, the discovery of a genuine, historic saddle was brought to attention. The site that housed the saddle loves it because it is one of their main attractions and a really impressive artifact. The HSD feels the same way about the artifact and wants to make sure it is properly preserved.

Because of the attention the saddle can (and has) garnered for the site, they intend to re-display the saddle as it would have been used in real life, with a gun propped onto the side of it. With this type of display, there would be metals touching textiles touching organics, and it would
certainly decrease the life-span of the artifact. As a result, the THC is trying to delay the release of the saddle from conservation to the site until they agree to display it in a more conservation-worthy fashion. This would involve the separation of the differing materials into separate cases, in effect losing its context. A fully assembled riding saddle is much more impressive than say a saddle tree, which not everyone can readily identify as significant.

This is just one of the issues that arise when deciding how to most appropriately display historic and archaeological items in a museum. After deciding on the type of display to use, a mount must be created to support the object within the display.

**Mounts.** Mounts fall on the more technical side of museum display presentation. There are basically two different types of mounts used in museums – general and custom-fit. A general mount is tantamount to a shelf; it can house a variety of objects with differing sizes and shapes at once. A custom-fit mount is made specifically for the object which it will display and can become a very time-consuming enterprise.

Mounts should be made of non-reactive, stable materials. If reactive materials must be used, a barrier such as Mylar or polypropylene must be placed between the object and the mount (and even the mount and the base) to prevent volatile component migration. The mounts should be padded and designed so that they provide complete support to the artifacts and distribute stress evenly throughout the object. In displays where you want items to appear “stacked” on one another, mounts should always be present between each object, separating it from its surroundings and providing adequate support. (Exhibiting 2008; Mounts 2008)

**The Bob Bullock Workshop**

On March 24, 2010, Kerri, Laura, John (a THC employee from Fort McKavett), and myself attended a workshop presented by the exhibits staff at the Bob Bullock Texas State History Museum. The workshop, titled “Beyond Wax and Wire” was put on by Toni Beldock (Head of Exhibits), John Peel (Exhibit Production Coordinator), and Mykel Pierson (Exhibit Technician). The purpose of the workshop was to provide us with ideas for effective exhibit displays and a quick how-to for making custom mounts.

The workshop began at about 9:00 in the morning and lasted until 2:30 in the afternoon. The morning hours were devoted to a tour of the facility with descriptions of the different displays and mounts and the afternoon was spent learning how to create our own custom mount.

**Display and Mounting Tips and Ideas**

**Basic Display Tips.** We began by learning some basic tips and notes concerning mounting and displays. Toni and Mr. Peel were particularly helpful describing the different ways to create displays and mounts that don’t take the focus away from the artifact being presented. For example, when trying to display small items, heat shrink tubing can easily secure the object to its mount or base without being seen or creating a dangerous environment. Another useful tip to minimize the appearance of a mount is to paint the tabs that secure the artifact the color of the object. For objects that easily blend into the background of a display, contrasting linen patches can be added
under the artifact to make it stand out, as seen in the following photograph. An added benefit of adding linens (the ultra-suede type in particular) to your display case is that they introduce texture as well as color to presentations, and makes them easier to take in visually.

Figure 7: Display case exhibiting coins and insignia on linen (Photo by John)

Figure 8: Contrast added with addition of a linen patch (Photo by John)

Toni explained to us the importance of properly supporting the artifacts and suggested that fragile or re-constructed artifacts be cradled in their mounts for additional support. In all cases, EVERY aspect of the artifacts must be stabilized before display, and extra care should be taken where artifacts appear to be shaky.

Lastly Mr. Peel talked to us about the time and money involved in making custom mounts. To make a very basic pipe mount for one object, an experienced technician needs at least three continuous hours of work time. These mounts can become costly as they can really only be used once. Similar acrylic mounts can be made at a lesser cost than pipe mounts, but are also a time consuming endeavor. For acrylic and heat-shaped mounts, Mr. Peel recommended using Weld-On, an agent that dissolves solvents and effectively welds mounts without leaving evidence of eye-catching seams.

Display Ideas. After going through some of the basic display and mount information, we catered the workshop to creating displays for artifacts that we commonly encounter in the fort sites. The following includes a list of artifact types and the ideas for display that we decided would be most appropriate given our site context, time, and budget restraints.

Ammunition/Shells/Thimbles – These artifacts can be held in place by small acrylic or wrapped brass posts mounted on a shelf. For a less expensive mount, a foam tip on a post can be substituted.

Blades/Swords – These objects can be mounted on multiple posts of varied heights and secured with tabs. The angel of viewing must be taken into consideration when arranging multiple artifacts near one another.
**Books** – Plex benders and other heat shaping devices can create profile mounts for delicate artifacts such as these to rest on. In this way they can be angled for optimal viewing without creating a stressful environment for the artifact.

**Bottles** – The use of contour gauges for mount molds can create a well fitting mount that secures items prone to movement.

**Buttons/Coins/ Other Small Artifacts** – Small artifacts such as these can be mounted in a variety of easy ways. They can be sewn onto a linen-covered deck (as shown in the previous photograph), secured onto the display base with heat-shrink tubing or wraps, they can be rested in shallow wells on a covered deck, or held up via spider mounts coming from the walls or base of the display. When spider mounts are used, strategically placed mirrors which allow for the viewer to see both sides of the artifact can be especially helpful.

**Documents/Photographs** – These should most often be framed and then can be placed on wall mounts or acrylic ledges.

**Heavy Objects** – For heavier artifacts, it is important to rest the majority of the weight on a sturdy base such as a shelf. Some additional weight can be leaned onto well made mounts for extra support.

**Jars/Pottery** – Jars and pottery can be placed on a display base and secured with tabs surrounding the object base.

**Locks** – Locks look great when mounted on a brass post and secured with tabs and polyethylene padding.

**Rifles/Other Firearms** – Firearms can be held in place with “U” clips on parallel vertical rods. Spider mounts should then be used to attach the rods to the walls.

**Sheet Textiles** – Textiles present well when draped over padded rods that are set in a stand-off cover. In this way, they stick out from the wall behind it and become more visible.

**Clothing** – Linens should be used to make busts or mannequins which can properly display the featured textile.

While this list is in no way exhaustive of the artifacts encountered at the fort sites, it is a highly representative sample of what anyone could expect to encounter in any one of the sites; furthermore, the display ideas discussed above can easily be used for other artifacts with similar characteristics.

**Making a Custom Mount.** After breaking for lunch, Mr. Peel and Toni returned to their usual posts at the museum, and Mykel brought us to the mount making room for a hands-on demonstration. One of the objects that we needed to make a custom mount for was a dragoon saber from Fort McKavett. Mykel volunteered to show us how to make a basic mount and, after a short demo, let John take over to try it out on his own.

The mount would be comprised of multiple posts with securing tabs to lock on the saber. The first step in creating our custom mount involved figuring out where the object needed to be supported from to properly balance and secure it. We decided that it would be best to make two
posts with connected clips that would hold the saber at the base of the handle and the tail end of the blade.

To easily reference the shape of the sword without having to carry it around the mount building shop, Mykel stenciled around the edges of the sword on common computer paper. After completing the outline, Mykel sketched in the clips for reference and a size estimate. A small amount of plexi material was selected to be shaped into the clip. This was cut into the shape of a cross, with thicker arms extending across the width and longer, thinner arms stretching the length of the plexi.

Shortly after, a small hole was drilled through the center of the material so that it could later be fastened to the posts supporting it. Next, Mykel began to warm up the material with a heat gun so that it could be easily worked into a suitable shape for displaying the saber. She bent the mount around a few times after heating it, would let it cool, then would fire it up again to illustrate the memory of the plexi. Even after it has cooled in a new form, it will try to return to its original flat state after being re-fired. Mykel successfully bent the clip to the correct specifications after only a few tries.

Then the torch was passed to John. He breezed through the first few steps involved in making the second clip, but began to have a bit of trouble bending the material. It became quickly apparent that the clips are not as durable as they appear while they are cooling, and too much pressure can easily break them. Because of this, a steady hand is definitely a plus for mount making. John had to start his project over no fewer than three times. He was finally able to create one durable clip that fit the blade as we were wrapping up our session. The following photographs demonstrate the process of creating the mounting clips and were taken by L. Springs.
While John was working on his project, Kerri and I had time to explore the workshop. There were hundreds of custom made pipe mounts covering cabinets, in boxes, and lining the shelves. The storage room had multiple busts and mannequins on reserve and ready for use along with more linen samples for display cases than I would imagine in a fabrics store. From the tour and information provided by the staff at the Bob Bullock it is clear that display and mount making not only involves a considerable amount of funding, but can also be a very time consuming and cumbersome undertaking for the untrained employee.

From the politics involved in what goes in a display case to the practical complications concerning how to make it, designing museum exhibits is far more demanding than grouping together similar items in an enclosed case. It is an art that requires patience, diligence, and a respect for the science of artifact preservation.
Levi Jordan Plantation State Historic Site: 
An Insight to the Politics Behind the “State” of Archeology 
By Crystal Platz

Nestled in the gulf coastal plains of Brazoria County near Galveston and Matagorda Bay, lies a fantastic little, but big, historical site on what is known as the Levi Jordan Plantation. The history and remains that lie within this site are so vast and amazing, yet the realities are unsettling and uncomforting to many who know about it and its mysterious abandonment. Today this state historic site is now in the hands of the Texas Historical Commission (THC) which seeks to preserve state heritage sites from further deterioration, and restore the architectural and historical artifacts recovered. Here, decades of excavation and hard work have amassed to uncover the mysteries left behind. As a result of the many previous excavations, and through its several ownership exchanges, this site has also endured politics related to ownership issues over the artifacts and records, which ultimately impacts the way it will be preserved, and the stories it still has to tell. The following analysis attempts to provide a timeline of events beginning with a brief historical background, twenty years of excavation, leading up to the current controversy revolved around the plantation between the THC state agency, members of the Levi Jordan Plantation Historical Society, and the State of Texas.

History. The Levi Jordan Plantation is located in the gulf coastal plains of Brazoria County near Galveston and Matagorda Bay. The history begins in 1848 when Levi Jordan arrived with 12 slaves from Arkansas to start a plantation. He purchased 2,222 acres of land from Samuel M. Williams, and began to plant his primary cash crops being sugar and cotton (Brown 1994:97). Throughout the post-antebellum period, this community thrived until its mysterious abandonment in 1892. After a series of court cases and appeals, as well as through historical documents and oral histories reveal that this abandonment occurred after Jordan’s four great-grandsons took ownership in 1892, resulting in the eviction of tenant/sharecropper families and thus ending the tenant/sharecropper system on the plantation (Brown 1994:97-99). The tenant/sharecroppers appear to have been “forced out of the old slave quarters, possibly on the grounds that their services were no longer necessary, or because of the testimony given on behalf of the McNeills” (the other family who claimed rights to the property), “or for some other reason” (McDavid website). For instance, Dr. Brown and student D. Cooper, in “The Abandonment Question” article from the Levi Jordan Plantation website, suggest that due to the rampant racism of the south, and they may have been forced from the quarters by white supremacists. This is one of the leading hypothesis’ revolving around the mysterious abandonment of the slave quarters, to help explain why archeologists have found artifacts in the exact context from which they would have been used.

Archaeology. This site has revealed remnants of architectural structures, including several slave cabins, a cemetery, and various artifacts of unknown significance. All archeological artifacts found from the slave cabins excavated show things in the places the exactly the way they were left by the families that once inhabited the land (Brown 1994:98-99). Here, decades of excavation and hard work have amassed to uncover the mysteries of the material culture the tenant/sharecroppers left behind. Some unique artifacts of mystery include; numerous buttons with engraved

Below are pictures of the pentagram engraved shell button, and the slave fly whisk recovered from Levi Jordan. (All pictures are from the Levi Jordan Plantation website, www.webarcheology.com.)

Figure 11: Close up view of an engraved pentagram on a shell button.

Figure 12: Picture reflects a penny beside the button for scale, with a detailed drawing of the pentagram.

Figure 13: Depicts 3 components of the slave fly whisk made of bone and metal.

Figure 14: Upclose view of the metal head/top of the slave fly whisk.
Many artifacts have been recovered and require further investigation and hypothesizing involving the mysteries of occurrence of artifacts recovered from one particular cabin quarter. For example, the interpretation of the “Carver’s Cabin” by student Archeologist Robert Harris suggests that the artifacts found in this cabin, consisting of hand carved wood and bone objects, may have helped “create and maintain the shared identity of the community”. More specifically, the pentagram incised on the button shown above and the fact the crown ‘head’ of the fly whisk with its six points may have been symbolic, with the reoccurrence of the number 6, and a meaning that is only known to them in that community may have been unique to an African tribe during this time (webarchaeology.org).

Since the onset of excavations in 1986, the community and archeologists have endeavored to answer the many questions posed by the archeological evidence recovered from the plantation. Excavations have now been conducted for over twenty years, through various institutions from University of Houston (McDavid), to the Center for Archeological Studies (CAS) up until the mid 2000’s as requested by the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department (Leezer 2006). During the last twenty years, these excavations have amassed an abundance of artifacts and evidence of structural housing to keep generations of students busily trying to interpret the site for decades to come. By not having all the required resources such as these, significant to the site severely restricts any future hypotheses and research studies yet to be conducted.

Late 20th -21st Century. Amid the site’s historical past, it has also seen a whirlwind of recent history through its exchanges of ownership. During the mid 1990’s, the Levi Jordan Plantation Historical Society was created and founded by University of Houston Professor and Archeologist, Dr. Kenneth Brown (principal investigator), University of Houston graduate student, Carol McDavid, and its site descendents. Members include the site descendents, founders, local community members, and students. Prior to 2001, the site was owned by several of its descendents, before the title was eventually transferred to the State of Texas (webarchaeology.com). Upon acquisition by the State, the site was placed under the management of the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department until 2008 when it was then handed over to the Texas Historical Commission. Today, this state historic site is now in the hands of the THC and is managed by the Historic Sites Division. Along the way, various aspects of research since the beginning have either been misplaced, unpublished and/or unreleased from previous institutions. The THC Historic Sites Division’s mission to preserve this site from further deterioration, and restore the architectural and historical artifacts recovered is no different than the goals of its previous title owners, researchers, and management, and her lies the beginning to the controversy behind the archeology of the Levi Jordan Plantation.

The current debate concerning the Levi Jordan plantation site exists between the Levi Jordan Plantation Historical Society, the THC, and the State of Texas. According to Laura DeNormandie Bass, Chief Curator of the THC Historic Sites Division, the controversy involves details regarding the archeological guidelines set by the Texas Archeological Society (TAS) and the State’s curatorial standards and theoretical practices utilized on and off the field. Currently, the State is in the process of updating their curatorial standards to the national museum level, resulting in an elevation of their standards to help preserve the heritages of the people of Texas. Archeologist
Mark Denton, for the THC, wrote the guidelines for all 19th and 20th century excavations in the late 1990’s. Denton’s methods for dealing with Texas archeology involved looking for a sample large enough so that it is not necessary to conserve everything. This would help keep state archeologists from adding more than needed to their already overflowing workload. Ideally, instead of bagging each and every nail and shard they find through excavation, they would only take enough so that post excavation work is not consumed by bagging and tagging every piece of evidence and subjecting them to years of lab work involving re-bagging, accessioning, cataloging, and archiving. Moreover, because the THC is an enforcement agency, it makes preservation history very political (DeNormandie-Bass personal interview: 3-26-2010). In other words, based on an act passed during the 80th legislation H.B. No. 12, authored by Hilderbran, which legally transferred the sites to the THC, basically indicates that any and all related documents, records, and/or artifacts recovered prior to the transfer to the THC, belongs solely to the THC, and must be relinquished by the Texas Parks and Wildlife, under state and federal law. This is because these sites are now funded by state and federal money, thus subject to state and federal laws. Therefore, if necessary, the state may aggressive pursue legal action to recover items considered ‘encumbered’ (see below), requesting proof by law, otherwise face legal action.

Additionally, much of the original documented research based on excavations conducted since 1998 has not been fully completed, published, or encumbered. Also, artifacts that have been on display at the Bob Bullock are difficult to access in order to provide proper conservation because they are encumbered as well. Encumbered artifacts are objects that are privately owned or entrusted to individuals by private owners. After a period of time, encumbered artifacts may be transferred to the site and/or state by will, agreement, and/or individual consent. It is unknown at this time if or any artifacts encumbered have been transferred. Consequently, the reports from these encumbered artifacts remain, to this day, with the principal archeologist, Dr. Kenneth Brown. Consequently, much of what is needed for publication, preservation, and interpretation is unavailable to the THC. To date, the topic has yet to be addressed.

Eventually, the THC would like to address the debate objectively through literature, thoroughly outlining the debate through literature review by compiling an annotated bibliography. Issues regarding encumbered artifacts relevant to state and federal historic sites are not completely uncommon, however they do create unease between the source that encumbers the artifact(s) and the institutions who wish to study them or have been given rights to them as well. Eventually, a more in depth analysis could be sought by looking up articles and tracking down graduate students from previous excavations after these guidelines were instituted. For example, when time and help permits (i.e. future interns) Laura would like to see summary reviews of all articles and responses from TAS and other sources concerning Levi Jordan issues stemming from 1998. As of September 2009, the site remains closed to the public, and much remains to be investigated and interpreted.
Conclusion

Throughout the course of the internship we have met an array of people, from varying backgrounds who have miraculously come together, bringing their education, training, and expertise working towards a common goal – conservation and preservation of the historical past. Whether it is at the state level, academic level, or in the professional workplace, we have seen groups and teams of people from a myriad of backgrounds collaborating on single projects. Additionally, this experience has strengthened our communication skills, technical and computer application skills, provided us with professional lab training, and have introduced us to a wide variety of historical artifacts that not many people get the privilege to touch.

Figure 16: The authors Lauren Springs and Crystal Platz (on the left and middle, respectively), and Internship Supervisor Kerri Wilhelm in the Wheless Lab. (Photo by L. Springs)
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Websites:

THC website: http://www.thc.state.tx.us/

Mount Making:


Levi Jordan:


Supplement:

Alphabetical List the 20 Historic Sites Managed by the THC:

- Acton State Historic Site
- Caddo Mounds State Historic Site
- Casa Navarro State Historic Site
- Confederate Reunion Grounds Historic Site
- Eisenhower Birthplace State Historic Site
- Fannin Battleground State Historic Site
- Fort Griffin State Historic Site
- Fort Lancaster State Historic Site
- Fort McKavett State Historic Site
- Fulton Mansion State Historic Site
- Landmark Inn State Historic Site
- Levi Jordan Plantation State Historic Site
- Maggoffin State Historic Park
- National Museum of the Pacific War
- Sabine Pass Battleground State Historic Site
- Sam Bell Maxey House State Historic Site
- Sam Rayburn House Museum
- San Felipe de Austin State Historic Site
- Starr Family Home State Historic Site
- Varner-Hogg Plantation State Historic Site