



# *Concho Valley Archeological Society Newsletter*

*June 2010*

## **June Meeting Presentation—24 June, 7 p.m.**

One of our own, Brownie Roberts, will be sharing her recent trip to Egypt in pictures and stories. She will be showing us the temples of the ancients in Egypt, comparing the art and glyphs to those of Native Americans, and giving us insight into modern life in Egyptian. We will also view scenes of life along the Nile from a felucca, a motorized scow and a cruise ship, the bazaar, a craft workshop, and a school. Sharing these photos and experiences may increase knowledge and understanding of an African nation that has contributed much to our knowledge and understanding of life, civilization, and government.

## **Tower Hill's Mysterious Past**

By Tom Ashmore

If you go to Sterling City and head south on Highway 163 about five miles you will see a prominent hill off to the left named Tower Hill. It was named long before the town's ancestors settled the area. The hill's name was found on land surveys going back as far as 1858. All sides of the hill except the west are very steep, making it a natural defensible location if needed and apparently at one time in the distant past it was needed.

In the early 1920s two Sterling City residents exploring the area found the top of Tower Hill to be set up with a hasty defense of stacked rocks with loopholes to fire from and several barrels of old musket rifles lying in the area. According to an account in the 1924 issue of Frontier Times Magazine, a total of seven Indian graves were found on top of the hill. On the western slope they found evidence of bullets that had struck rocks and trees being fired from the fortification. Near the fortification they found a rock with an arrow carved into it. Following the direction of the arrow they found a small cave with a skeleton of an Indian in full dress of a chief. His head was encased with a mantle of beads, opals, sapphires and gold. The skull had a bullet hole in it with a musket ball from an early Navy Six Colt still embedded. [the first Patterson Colts were first issued to the Texas Rangers in 1846 and the Navy Colt Six came along in 1851.

**(continued on page four)**

## **Tom Ashmore to give presentation for Tom Green County Historical Society**

Barbara Barton recently asked Tom Ashmore to speak at the Tom Green County Historical Society meeting. He will speak at the June 21st meeting at Fort Concho Officers Quarters #8 at 7 p.m.. He will be giving a presentation on the recent work at the Butterfield Johnsons Station.

# Texas Historic Commission believes it may have found grave of mysterious James Coryell

By Wendy Gragg Tribune-Herald staff writer, wacotrib.com  
Sunday June 6, 2010

Famous Texas Ranger James Coryell is a man of mystery. What he looked like, how he died and where he was buried top the list of questions.

Some answers may lie under layers of Falls County soil, not far from the Brazos River and the area he once called home.

The Texas Historic Commission is investigating a gravesite that may belong to Coryell, born in Ohio in 1796 or 1803 (depending on accounts) and killed in an Indian attack in 1837. Coryell County is named after him. These stones may mark the final resting place of Texas Ranger James Coryell, a spot which has long been a mystery. These stones may mark the final resting place of Texas Ranger James Coryell, a spot which has long been a mystery.

Most of Coryell's story is a Texas history classic. It's about a frontiersman, bent on riches and adventure, who made a name for himself protecting settlers and fighting Mexicans and Indians in the land he lived to see declared the state of Texas.

This possible new chapter in the Ranger's story is pure 21st century, complete with computer searches, DNA analysis and even the help of the Smithsonian.

Bringing in the Smithsonian on the investigation underscores how significant this find would be to Texas history, said Jim Bruseth, director of the Texas Historic Commission's Archeology Division.

"We're embarking on a journey," Bruseth said. "We're not sure when we'll get there or what we'll end up with."

The journey began when workers came across large stones while clearing the perimeter of a slave cemetery on private property southwest of Marlin in Falls County.

"They were exactly where you would expect them to be," Bruseth said about the stones.

He came across a slave's account of James Coryell's grave a few years ago, while researching Bull Hill Cemetery, which is being prepared for the unveiling and dedication of a historical marker July 10.

According to Frank E. Simmons, author of "History of Coryell County," former slave Tom Broadus told of a gravesite near the slave cemetery that he was told belonged to "Mr. Jim Coryell."

After several years, the grave caved in, and some of the slaves fetched rocks from nearby Jones Spring to place on the grave and keep the person's spirit at rest, Simmons wrote.

Bruseth said they dug a trench where the rocks were, to determine if there was a grave shaft. Sure enough, there was — 8 1/2-by-3 feet and oriented east to west.

Permission to excavate the remains has to come from a Coryell descendant.

Coryell had no children, but Bruseth said he hopes to find a female descendant of Coryell's sisters, someone who may not even know she is a Coryell, so scientists can test the mitochondrial DNA.



Photo courtesy of Texas Historic Commission

"(The DNA is) passed on almost unchanged from generation to generation through the female line," Bruseth said. He also said if the remains aren't well-preserved, there's a better chance of finding mitochondrial DNA than anything else. **[continued on page 5]**

## Santa Rosa Springs Field Trip

C.A. Maedgen

On May 8<sup>th</sup> five CVAS members, in conjunction with Iraan Archaeology Society members, traveled to Santa Rosa Spring. The site is west of the Pecos and has been a major watering hole since the water started to flow from the rock formation. Ancient nomadic Indians certainly used this site because they left evidence of their presence in burnt rock middens, mortar holes, and flint tools. In 1879 the site was used extensively by the 10<sup>th</sup> cavalry Co. B and Co. C of the 25<sup>th</sup> Infantry out of Fort Stockton as a base camp from which they patrolled. CVAS members deposited all artifacts found that day with the ranch owner and his family who graciously provided lunch for all attending. During lunch the rancher gave a brief talk giving the history of the spring. After the field trip to the spring CVAS members returned to San Angelo by way of Horse Head Crossing on the Pecos. We walked and examined the immediate area near the historic marker erected by the State of Texas in 1936. The Pecos was flowing with a strong current and was beautiful with a blanket of wild flowers. In the distance we could hear the faint echo of a long past trail herd thundering out of Castle Gap desperate for water.



**Paint Rock Report:** Fred Campbell reports that Dr. Bruce Dickson, of Texas A&M, did receive the grant needed to continue with an archeological project at Paint Rock (refer to the April 2010 newsletter available on [cvassanangelo.org](http://cvassanangelo.org) for details). Dr. Dickson will be at Paint Rock Tuesday and Wednesday, 22/23 June, to conduct more preliminary preparations for the project. His previous tentative schedule was to begin in August. The CVAS report on 1800 camping areas at Paint Rock helped Dr. Dickson decide to request the grant and CVAS is invited to participate in the project when it gets underway.

# Tower Hill's Mysterious Past

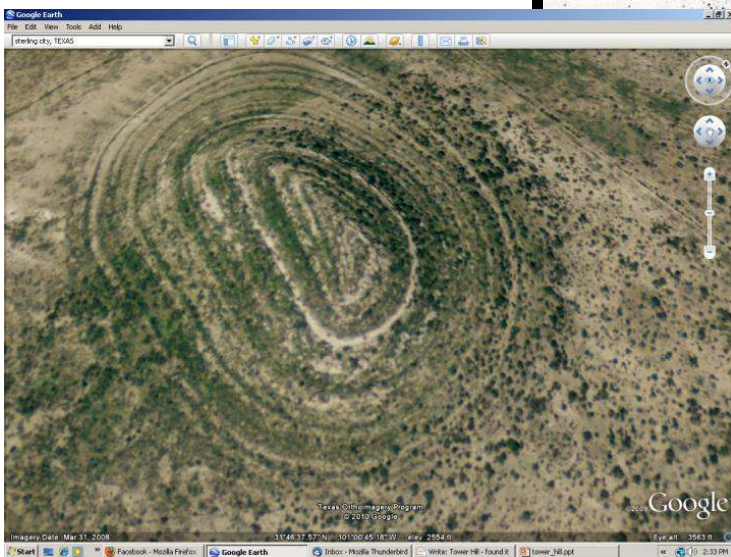
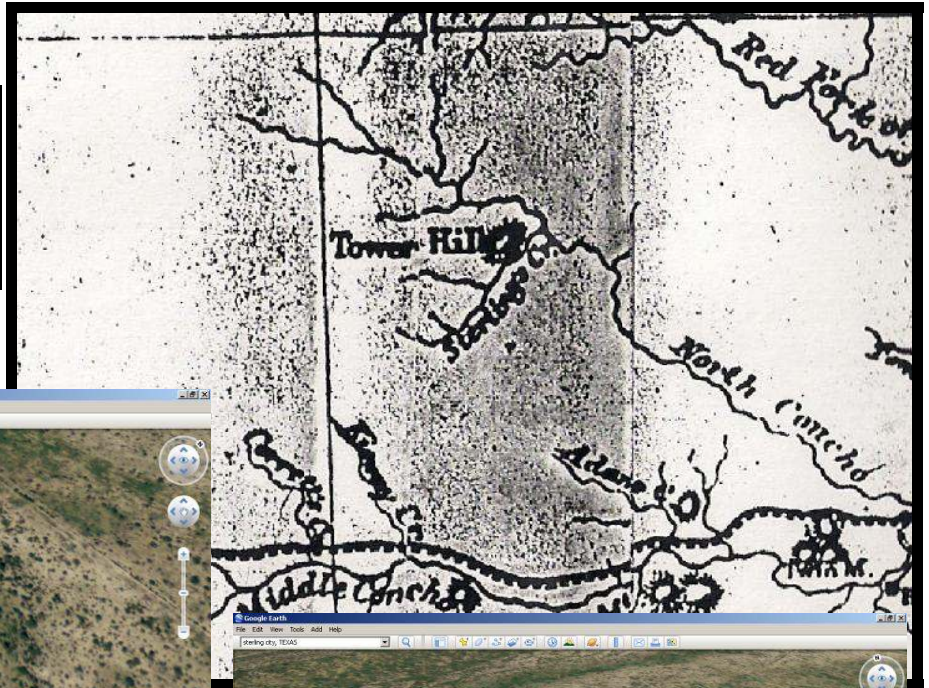
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Interestingly, a known location of Texas Rangers in this area that would fit with the probable timeframe was Camp Elizabeth. This camp was established in 1853, nine miles north of current Sterling City.] With the skeleton there were four brass finger and four ankle rings, a gold nose ring and an ornament made from a Spanish dollar. Additionally, they found a figure a crouching bear made of red pipestone with expert skill - a probable spiritual token of a Comanche chief. On his head was a silver cup with the engraving, 'T. Warner' on one side and 'For The Best Carlisle Colt, 1830' on the other side. [This was probably prized plunder. A good speculation is that this was a prize cup won for horse breeding. The cup was made in England. Carlisle was a famous center for horse breeding in England going all the way back to the 17<sup>th</sup> Century and continuing to this day.]

Through our view of the hill via Google Earth it appears the top of the hill is only about 60 X 20 feet of flat ground. It is a cliff steep on the eastern end and a difficult climb on the western end.

Our new CVAS member, Ray Theiss, brought this story to my attention. Ray and I have been working together on the research. We have contacted the landowner of the Tower Hill property and are working out arrangements for a visit to this mysterious hill lost to history.

U.S. Army Trail map drawn up in 1867 found in West Texas Collections by CVAS member Ray Theiss



## **Texas Historic Commission believes it may have found grave of mysterious James Coryell** **(continued from page 2)**

Based on Bruseth's experience with remains and the specific soil conditions of the Falls County area, he said he's expecting the remains to be fairly well-preserved.

The commission is in the process of contracting with someone to take on the search for descendants. Bruseth said he hopes to be able to excavate by January.

"That'll be the clincher that we have, in fact, found the long-lost grave of James Coryell," Bruseth said.

The commission plans to send the remains to Doug Owsley at the Smithsonian Institution for DNA analysis, as well as a skeletal analysis.

Owsley will look for cut marks on the cranium, which could indicate whether the person had been scalped, as Coryell is rumored to have been. The remains also will be examined for any marks suggesting the person was shot with a musket or an arrow. Bruseth said Owsley should also be able to tell what kind of diet the person had.

### Travels in Texas

By most accounts, Coryell was on Texas soil, or land that would shortly become Texas, by 1830. Simmons wrote that Coryell took up with James Bowie, went on expeditions and fell into famous skirmishes with Huaco, Tehuacana and Caddo Indians.

In 1835, he headed to the town of Viesca, later known as Fort Milam, in today's Falls County. This was where he operated with his various Ranger companies and lived with his friend, Andrew Cavitt, and Cavitt's family.

In 1836, Coryell helped cover the retreat of colonists as they fled from the Mexican army in what is known as the "Runaway Scrape."

They returned to Central Texas, and by May 1837, Coryell was preparing to go west with his Ranger company and scout for land.

The story goes that one day that May, Coryell and a couple of other Rangers were enjoying the honey from a bee hive about a mile outside the settlement when they were attacked by Indians. His companions got away, but Coryell was wounded and died shortly after. After many years, the location of his gravesite became unknown.

"It's one of those intriguing, historic mysteries," said Byron Johnson, director of Waco's Texas Ranger Hall of Fame and Museum.

You won't find pictures or paintings of Coryell at the museum, and it contains no uniform or standard-issue gun.

"At that time period, Rangers were about the same as Minutemen were in colonial America. They supplied their own clothing, horses," Johnson said.

John Crain, executive director of the Summerlee Foundation, which owns the land where the gravesite is, was at the site when the stones were discovered.

Crain, who also is Texas Historic Commission commissioner, said the finding is a high point for him and a unique opportunity for Summerlee, a nonprofit organization that supports endeavors to protect animals and preserve Texas history.

"It seems like we stumble across a lot of wonderful proposals," Crain said.

But in the case of the Falls County property, the Summerlee Foundation seems to keep stumbling over history itself.

Crain said when the organization purchased the Falls County land, it was as a long-term investment. Finding the slave cemetery, and possibly Coryell's grave, has Summerlee officials rethinking what the land means to them.

"We have no interest in parting with the property at the moment," Crain said.



### Meeting Location

Please remember that our meetings are now in the classroom at the Fort Concho Living History Stables, **236 Henry O. Flipper St.** We enter through the side door.

WE'RE ON THE WEB AT  
CVASSANANGELO.ORG

*CVAS is a non-profit organization whose purpose is to bring together people who have an interest in archeology and whose mission is to protect the historic and pre-historic resources of the region.*

*Meetings are held on the fourth Thursday of every month except July, November and December.*

### 2010 CVAS Membership Application

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

City \_\_\_\_\_

Zip \_\_\_\_\_ Phone \_\_\_\_\_

Cell \_\_\_\_\_

Family members \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Email \_\_\_\_\_

I pledge I will not intentionally violate the terms or conditions of any current or future state or local statute concerning cultural resources or engage in the practice of buying or selling artifacts for commercial purposes, or engage in the willful destruction of archeological data, or disregard proper archeological field techniques

Signature \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

<b>Individual</b>	<b>\$15</b>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<b>Family</b>	<b>\$20</b>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<b>Student or military N/C</b>		<input type="checkbox"/>

(active military only)

Mail to: Cynthia Purcell, PO Box 703, San Angelo, TX 76902