

# TexasLiving

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## A point-and-click Texas history trail

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Did you know that Austin was once home to a flourishing red-light district known as Guy Town?

Did you know that Camp Ford, near Tyler, became the largest camp for Union POWs west of the Mississippi?

Did you know about the buffalo "plunge of death" at Bonfire Shelter near the Rio Grande? Or the Gilbert site near Dallas, which provided Parisians a steady supply of slick deerskin through most of the 18th century?

These intriguing moments from Texas history are just a point and a click away on a new website created by the Texas Archeological Research Lab, or TARL. Using archaeology as the means and the Internet as the method, the website — [www.texasbeyondhistory.net](http://www.texasbeyondhistory.net) — offers an

extraordinary window into Texas history and culture.

Enter the site and the first thing you see is a map of Texas, pockmarked by dots, each of which bears a name. By clicking on "map tool," you begin a cyberspace journey through a Texas you may have never known before.

"The question is, why were the French in 1750 interested in northeast Texas?" asks Steve Black, editor of Texas Beyond History and a research associate at TARL, which has its headquarters at the University of Texas at Austin. Dr. Black, 48, has a doctoral degree in anthropology from Harvard University.

So why *were* the French so interested in Texas? The answer, he says, is found within the sprawling content of Texas Beyond History, which, in the future, hopes to sprawl even more. When it launched Oct.

1, the website contained 20 exhibits and more than 1,000 images. But over the next three to five years, its founders hope to expand the site tenfold, shooting for a target of 200 exhibits, 10,000 images. Dr. Black says it took \$50,000 to launch Texas Beyond History, which is financed in part by TARL's "partner," the Texas Archeological Society, and several private foundations. The site also contains pathways for students and teachers, audiences he hopes to lure in greater numbers in the future.

Gilbert is just one example of the website's cybercaves, Dr. Black says. Like every other point-and-click destination, the one on Gilbert, he contends, says as much about Texas history as it does archaeology.

"Parisians liked to wear sleek clothes," he says, "and in the Paris of that era, the

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# Site is for those who dig history

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most popular fashion item was fur made from deerskin. The Gilbert site, which is east of Dallas [in Rains County], was so heavily populated with deer that the French used it extensively in fur trading.

Over the years, archaeologists such as Jay Blaine of Allen have unearthed a slew of objects from the site — guns, swords, knives, kettles, hatchets, and hoes. Mr. Blaine participated in a massive dig at the site in 1962 that produced a plethora of little-known items from the French fur trade, including gun parts, flint tools and hide scrapers, which were used to remove flesh from the hide of the deer.

"We uncovered more than 400 hide scrapers from that site alone," says Mr. Blaine. "We uncovered a lot of deer bones but not the tail bone, which was sold along with the hide. As far as we can tell, most of this went on from 1730 to 1760, but after that, the site was abandoned."

At one spot on Texas Beyond History, the findings become surprisingly risqué. Guy Town was an area in what is now downtown Austin. Notorious as a red-light district, Guy Town blossomed during the last quarter of the 19th century. Those seeking the services of Guy Town prostitutes included city council members, legislators, and businessmen, the website says.

An environmental consulting firm, Hicks & Co., has been conducting archaeological investigations of Guy Town as part of Austin's downtown redevelopment initiative, according to Texas Beyond History. The excavation area



E. Mott Davis

**Bonfire Shelter, west of Del Rio, is a buffalo "jump," where Indians drove herds over the cliff thousands of years ago. The man is unidentified.**

spans four city blocks, including areas targeted for a new city hall.

Some of the objects uncovered include fancy cut-glass goblets; bar tokens; dice; hundreds of empty beer, wine, and whiskey bottles; and even early birth-control devices.

Not far from Tyler, the website directs users to Camp Ford, which offers a rare glimpse at Texas' involvement in the Civil War. Camp Ford was a ramshackle stockade where, near the end of the war, more than 6,000 Union prisoners, Confederate guards, and slaves "lived, worked, and variously made their mark on the history of the area." Archaeologists from Texas A&M are given credit for uncovering the remains of this little-known site.

In Dr. Black's view, one of the website's more intriguing pathways leads to Bonfire Shelter, which made history nearly 12,000 years ago as a jumping-off place — literally — for stampeding herds of bison.

Bonfire Shelter, 70 miles west of Del Rio, is the oldest and southernmost buffalo "jump" in North America. There, "Native Ameri-

cans drove buffalo herds off a steep cliff during Paleoindian times, about 11,000 to 12,000 years ago, and during Late Archaic times, about 2,800 years ago. After both periods of use, the heaps of rotting bones burst into flame from spontaneous combustion, creating true bonfires."

But as the site explains, "What archaeologists and others call a bison 'jump' was, of course, not a jump at all. It was, at least from the buffalo's perspective, a terrifying plunge of death."

From Dr. Black's perspective, one of the best things about Texas Beyond History is its use of the Internet and how pointing and clicking can lead to a world of wonder in such places as Bonfire Shelter, Gilbert, and Guy Town.

"We've never had a way before to reach large numbers of people and do so economically," he says. "But this way, anyone anywhere in the world can find out about the cultural heritage of Texas. And the fact that we're able to do so in this way is just remarkable ... something that couldn't have happened even 10 years ago. And who knows what the future will bring?"