



The
Social
Studies

TEXAN

Fall/Winter, 2014 Volume 30 • Number 3

The Official Publication of the Texas Council for the Social Studies



THE MILITARY
in History

RANSOM WILLIAMS

African American Legacy in Texas



Carol Schlenk

In 1871, just six years after the end of slavery in Texas, an African American man named Ransom Williams managed to buy forty acres of land on which he built his own farm and began raising livestock. Unlike other African Americans of his day, he chose not to live in a freedmen's community after the Civil War, but rather in an isolated location surrounded by white neighbors. At that time, only 1.8 percent of African Americans in Texas owned land. While most freedmen worked as employees or sharecroppers for their former owners, Ransom Williams managed to purchase his own property, and in the process elevated himself from owned to owner.

We have no likenesses of Williams, no photos or drawings of him or the woman he married. But thanks to archeologists and historians who researched Ransom Williams and his farmstead site, we are able to understand much about this man, his family, and his times. In 2003, a Texas Department of Transportation consultant was surveying the land intended for the construction of a new highway, Texas 45, near the Travis-Hays County line, when he came across an old collapsed chimney. Little did he know then that the chimney was part of a historically significant farmstead purchased by Ransom Williams in 1871 for \$160 in cash (\$160 would be worth over \$3000 today). As the site was excavated and researched, more and more information about Williams and his family came to light. Archival records, such as land deeds, maps and tax records, helped illuminate the lives of Ransom and his wife, Sarah, while the 23,000 artifacts discovered on the farmstead site helped breathe life into their story.

A new Texas Beyond History online exhibit, *Ransom And Sarah Williams Farmstead* (www.texasbeyondhistory.net/ransom), offers a multi-faceted view of the Williams family and the antebellum, Civil War, and Reconstruction eras in which the family lived and worked. Once released from slavery, African Americans like Ransom Williams were legally able to buy land, marry, and begin making their own life decisions

for the first time. These milestones are reflected in the exhibit's primary source documents, such as 19th century African-American newspapers, voting records, and oral histories. For teachers and students, the Texas Beyond History Kids section offers several colorful interactive sections focused on the Ransom Williams story.

In the activity **Discover a 19th Century Farm**, students can follow Dr. Dirt, the armadillo archeologist, as he explains how archeologists discovered and excavated the Ransom Williams farmstead. Navigating through three exciting scenes of the past, students can explore the farm, meet the family, peek inside the Williams cabin, check out his corral, and visit with him and his family on their porch, all the while unearthing facts about slavery, emancipation, and the challenges that African American Texans faced after the Civil War. Included is a downloadable set of student questions and an answer key for teachers.

Ransom Williams and his family lived during very interesting but difficult times. In the Interactive Timeline, **Who, What, Where, and When?**, students can explore local, state, and national events on an illustrated timeline that covers the tumultuous period between 1850 and 1890 — before, during, and after the Civil War. This activity offers primary source documents and vocabulary definitions for students to discover, as well as a Teachers Guide containing 7th and 8th grade Social Studies TEKS and downloadable student questions.

The interactive **Population Puzzlers Game** illustrates the change in size of different racial groups in Texas and the U.S. from 1850 to 1890 and the data reveals some very interesting facts. Students can play the game to answer some important questions about this data and see their

scores recorded on the page. The game includes downloadable discussion questions as well as 7th and 8th grade Social Studies and Mathematics TEKS.

In the **Teachers** section of the exhibit, four lesson plans offer 4th-11th grade teachers creative ways to teach the Ransom Williams story:

Life in Texas Freedom Colonies (grades 4-8) focuses on the hundreds of self-sufficient African American communities known as Freedom Colonies which



The Ransom and Sarah Williams farmstead, circa 1895, central Texas. This small hardscrabble farm was home to one African American family from 1871 to 1905, during the tumultuous years of Reconstruction and the Jim Crow era. Painting by Frank Weir, based on archeological and historical evidence recovered during the farmstead project.

PHOTO COURTESY OF TEXASBEYONDHISTORY.NET

sprang up after Emancipation. African Americans faced many difficult challenges during this time as the United States struggled to adjust to life after slavery. Using the Internet, students research the Constitutional amendments designed to help the estimated 200,000 freed slaves in Texas, as well as laws and conditions that limited their freedoms.

Exercising the Rights of Citizenship in 19th-Century Texas, (grades 4-8), explains how Ransom Williams, an African American living in post-Civil War Texas, reinvented himself — from being someone else's property to legally owning his own property. Students analyze primary source county government documents that show how Williams made the transition to freedom by

continued on page 56 ►

U.S. Military Intervention in Vietnam

continued from page 55

evidence a point of view on a social studies issue or event.

Materials Needed: PowerPoint lecture, KWL template, textbook, guest speaker, concept map template, word wall, Associated Press photo essay, and Cornell Notes template.

Vocabulary: Cold War, domino theory, democracy, draft, refugee, communism, boat people, assimilation, socialization, Vietcong, Ho Chi Minh Trail, Napalm, Agent Orange, Tet Offensive, escalation of forces, Vietnamization, fall of Saigon, 26th Amendment, role of the media, credibility gap, silent majority, and anti-war movement.

Lesson Sequence

Day 1 Activities

Step 1: Working in pairs, students create a KWL graphic organizer documenting what they know, want to know, and eventually learned about the Vietnam War after the overview lecture on the Vietnam War.

Step 2: Create a Word Wall of content area vocabulary and definitions on the Vietnam War (see vocabulary section).

Step 3: Teacher PowerPoint introductory overview lecture on the Vietnam War

while students take Cornell Notes.

Activities Day 2

Step 1: View documentary on Vietnam War.

Step 2: Create a concept map of the textbook content on Vietnam War (teacher led whole class activity).

Step 3: Review content vocabulary on Word Wall.

Activities Day 3

Step 1: Present slideshow of Vietnam War photographs taken and assembled by the Associated Press (www.apimages.com/Collection/Landing/Vietnam-The-Real-War/d52ea03a0ea2468399f694459d4c0fb7).

Step 2: Class discussion on U.S. responsibility to accept Vietnamese immigrants after the war.

Activities Day 4

Field trip (or virtual field trip) to Houston's Vietnamese neighborhood in the Bellaire area of Houston (grocery store, jewelry store, clothing store, restaurant, café, and Vietnam War Memorial).

Assessment Methods: Appropriate content on KWL chart, Cornell Notes, textbook concept map, and timeline.

Modifications for ELLs: Provide sentence stems for the "learned" section of the KWL chart, highlighted textbook, opportunity to view documentary a

second time, multiple exposures to key vocabulary in oral and written formats, individual copy of Word Wall vocabulary and definitions.

Extension: (A) Examine impact of Vietnamese immigration on Houston's community organizations and local politics (B) Evaluate evidence of growing democracy and internationalization in Vietnam (C) View Vietnam War movies (D) Vietnamese immigrant guest speaker.

REFERENCES

- Freeman, James M. 1995. *Changing identities: Vietnamese Americans 1975-1995*. Boston: Allyn and Bacon.
- Freeman, James M. 1989. *Hearts of sorrow: Vietnamese-American lives*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.
- Kibria, Nazli 1989. *Family tighrope: The changing lives of Vietnamese Americans*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Klineberg, Stephen L. and Wu, Jei. 2013. *Diversity and transformation among Asians in Houston: Findings from the Kinder Institute's Houston area Asian survey*. Houston: Kinder Institute for Urban Research, Rice University.
- Rutledge, Paul J. 1992. *The Vietnamese experience in America*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
- United States Census Bureau. 2011. *The Vietnamese Population in the United States, 2010*. Retrieved from www.bpsos.org/mainsite/images/DelawareValley/community_profile/us.census.2010.the%20vietnamese%20population_july%202.2011.pdf
- Vance, Cyrus 1979. Department of State Bulletin. Retrieved from http://archive.org/stream/departmentofstatd7979unit/departmentofstatd7979unit_djvu.txt
- Vu, Roy 2006. Rising from the Cold War ashes: Constructing a Southern Vietnamese community and identity in Houston 1975-2005. *The Houston Review* 3(1): 26-72.

Mike Segrist teaches Advanced Placement European History and United States History to grades 11 and 12 students at Sam Rayburn High School in the Pasadena Independent School District. He has a BA and a MA in History and is currently pursuing a Master of Teaching degree in Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL) in the Department of Urban Education at the University of Houston-Downtown.

Colin Dalton is an assistant professor of literacy education and Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL) in the Department of Urban Education at the University of Houston-Downtown. His classes prepare pre-service teachers to teach literacy development at the elementary and secondary school levels. His teaching and research interests include literacy development and practice, content area reading, and the development of life-long readers.

Ransom Williams

continued from page 51

registering to vote, paying taxes on his own land, and creating his own livestock brand.

Bottles, Pins, and Horseshoes: Analyzing Artifacts From the Ransom Williams Farmstead Using Bloom's Taxonomy (grades 7-11). In this lesson, students use Bloom's Taxonomy and critical thinking skills to analyze several artifacts from the Ransom Williams farmstead. Items such as a horse brand, a harmonica, floral printed ceramic plates, and decorative buttons and toy guns give students a cultural snapshot of the Williams family's material life between 1874 and 1920. In a larger context, these help document the story of an African American family's transition from slavery to freedom.

Life on an African-American Farmstead (grades 4-8). In this very creative three-part lesson, students interpret a colorful, interactive scene of the Ransom Williams farmstead. Art, script-writing, and journaling

help students bring the scene to life, as do pictures of actual artifacts that help students compare their own lives to those of the 19th-century rural Williams family. Writing imaginary journal entries using the voices of Williams' family members rounds out this scene of 19th century rural life in Texas.

The *Ransom And Sarah Williams Farmstead* website opens for teachers and students a window into a seminal time in Texas history — a critical juncture when African Americans struggled mightily and accomplished much. Please explore its educational resources as you integrate Black History Month into your classroom.

*Carol Schlenk is Education Advisor for the University of Texas Archeological Research Laboratory education website, Texas Beyond History (www.texasbeyondhistory.net). She has been active in TCSS for many years, and serves on both its Publications Committee and the Editorial Board of *The Social Studies Texan*.*