

A Summary and Discussion of Additional Findings at the Gilbert Site, an Eighteenth-Century Norteño Occupation in Rains County, Texas

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ABSTRACT

The Gilbert site, characterized in the 1967 *Bulletin of the Texas Archeological Society* as an eighteenth century component of the Norteño focus, was thought to be a village of the Tawakoni, Kichai, or Yscani Indians. A large sample of trade goods at the site was thought to be French, and its analysis constituted a major contribution to knowledge of those artifacts. Subsequent investigations offer alternatives to some conclusions and add new dimensions to the site's interpretation.

INTRODUCTION

A formal investigation of the Gilbert site (41RA13) was initiated in the summer of 1962 by the Texas Archeological Society (TAS). The first group dig organized by the TAS, this project was the immediate predecessor of what has become the annual TAS Field School. The published results of this work comprise Volume 37 of the *Bulletin of the Texas Archeological Society* (Jelks 1967), and readers of this article are urged to familiarize themselves with that important study.

Preliminary testing had yielded metal artifacts, possibly dating to the eighteenth or early nineteenth centuries, which were associated with native-made pottery and lithics. Once the probable extent of the nonnative artifact recovery was realized, one primary goal was to identify the time period involved. Other early goals were to attempt specific identifications and the most likely sources of these nonnative goods. The earlier testing had revealed some remnants of flintlock firearms that could have been made at any point in a long time span. Examination by specialists of a very similar but limited sample of flintlock firearms and other artifacts presumed to be trade goods from the Pearson site (41RA5) had not clarified the problem of sources or isolated a very useful time span for that site (Duffield and Jelks 1961:77-79). The Pearson site, also in Rains County, was assigned to the Norteño focus.

The Norteño focus was proposed to link several different sites apparently occupied during some part of the eighteenth or early nineteenth centuries by groups of "Southern" Wichita-speaking peoples. The scope of the archeological evidence indicated that the Gilbert site also could be assigned to the Norteño focus.

The shared language, Wichita, is one of the four languages of the Caddoan peoples (the others are Caddo proper, Pawnee, and Arikara); the associated tribes are the Taovaya, the Tawakoni, the Yscani, the Waco, and the Wichita proper. The

Kichai are also included in the Norteño focus although they spoke a separate Caddoan tongue and were less well known (Newcomb 1961:250). The collective term, *Norteños* (Nations or peoples of the North), was a label created by the eighteenth century Spanish authorities mainly for lumping together the contrary Texas Wichita-speaking groups and their affiliates. The label generally included varied tribes who were known to the Spanish in provincial Texas but who lived to the north of San Antonio, beyond effective Spanish control. Story (1985:85–86) has now confined use of the term *Norteño* to a descriptive role for isolating the body of archeological evidence attributed to the southern Wichita peoples themselves.

The Gilbert site, it is now realized, was to offer an unusually rich opportunity for archeological observation of a group of Native Americans during a period when both their own traditional tools and livelihood strategies, and those then available through European contacts, were flourishing. Because the time span appeared to be reasonably well limited and the site was mostly intact, the process of acculturation in particular, surely would be happening here and should be clearly visible. However, it is probable that we failed to realize the full potential of this opportunity. Now, some 29 years later, no comparable Texas contact period site has been studied. In addition, some major questions arising from the study of the site still remain unanswered and require further consideration.

EARLY PROCEDURES AND FINDINGS

The Gilbert site has yielded the premier artifact sample presently known and studied from among the Texas sites assigned to the Norteño focus. However probable it might appear, a Norteño affiliation in the ethnohistorical sense is less secure. Under “Conclusions” in the Gilbert site report, the probable tribal identification of the occupants is identified as Tawakoni, Kichai, or Yscani (Jelks 1967:244); subsequent authors have also suggested either Kichai again (Rohrbaugh 1982:54), or Caddoan (Skiles et al. 1980:9–10).

The Historic occupation of the site was estimated at between about 1730 and 1770, based on analysis of time-sensitive remains of firearms and glass beads. The eventual recovery of a 1749 French coin, drilled for use as a pendant but essentially unworn, helped emphasize the probable mid-eighteenth century context. Proposals that the bountiful European goods found at the Gilbert site were primarily derived from the French trade also were to prove valid.

Although there was to be a five-year delay before the excavation results would be published, TAS members continued work at the site, and the additional artifact sample was incorporated into the final report. In addition, the Harrises and the Blaines used pertinent data gained from investigations at Gilbert to help clarify the analysis of the Historic period artifacts from the Womack site, also assigned to the Norteño focus. (The Womack site would see earlier publication [Harris et al. 1965:287–363]).

With permission from the Gilberts, R. K. Harris and the author continued testing at the Gilbert site on an intermittent basis after 1967. A detailed examination

of 19 more French trade hatchets recovered by Blaine from the site after 1966 has been published (Blaine 1988:111–117), as have more summaries of the findings at the Gilbert site (Richmond et al. 1985:128–129; Fox 1983:42–45).

Feature 8

Feature 8, the most prominently mounded feature on the site (Figure 1) was not tested by the TAS, probably because of three large potholes there. In March 1965, a slumping of one lower face in the most central pothole slightly exposed what proved to be the end of a flintlock gunlock. A 3-foot (0.92 m) test square excavated down to the gunlock exposed two more gunlocks nested atop the first. The uppermost gunlock was at the contact between an overlying red clay deposit, some 26 cm thick at this point, and a dark brown sandy deposit that contained this cache. The red clay zone was capped with a sandy loam layer 5 to 8 cm thick; the maximum thickness of the red clay cap in the test square was 39 cm.

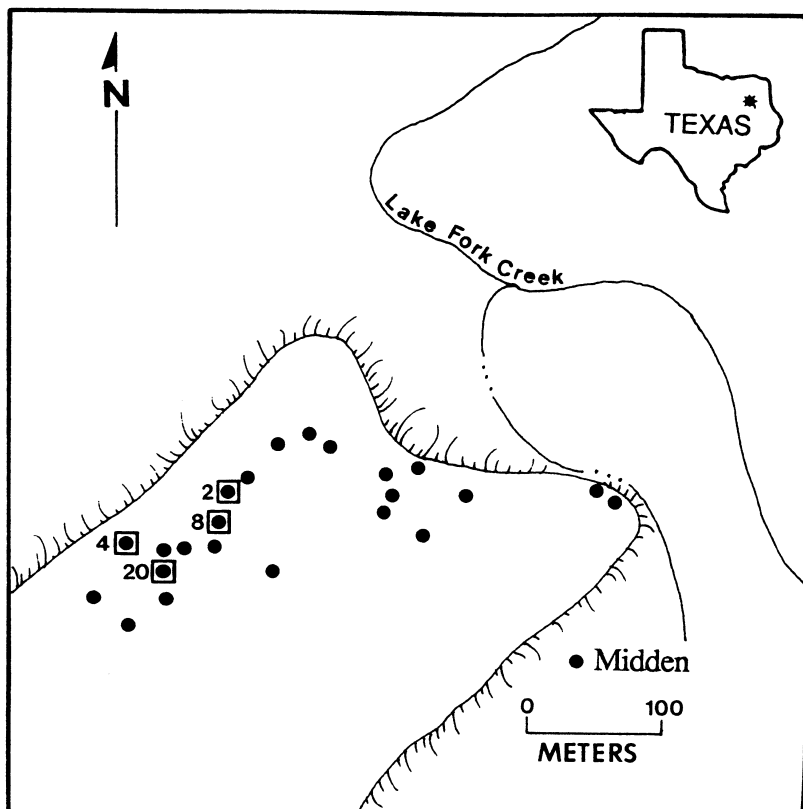


Figure 1. Plan of the Gilbert site, Upper Sabine River drainage, northeastern Texas.

The fill excavated above the gunlocks had very few artifacts, but the dark brown zone contained several broken deer bones, one broken end scraper, and a fragment of smoothed sandstone. Despite the ordinary nature of this part of the feature, the three gunlocks themselves may justify extra consideration for Feature 8 in the future (Blaine and Harris 1967:47–52).

Only the most easily removed parts (the upper cock jaws and their screws) were missing from two of these gunlocks; the jaw screw was missing from the third gunlock, but the upper jaw was present (see flintlock musket diagrams in Jelks 1967:Figures 26 and 27), although it had been moved to the inside of the gunlock and hung loosely over the sear arm. This particular placement indicated that the gunlock had been laid in place with some care and not simply tossed to the ground. This gunlock also has no frizzen. The close association and placement of these three gunlocks also argue against their random disposal onto a trash midden.

These gunlocks were the only relatively complex firearms components in the site that had not been completely disassembled. Several other gunlocks here are traceable only by their often widely separated parts, so this cached group may have special significance in the function of this feature, perhaps reflecting a version of the “killed” offerings that are sometimes associated with burial rituals.

Feature 20

Soon after the Gilbert report was submitted for publication, testing at Feature 20 revealed the only unmistakable storage pit found there. Unlike the two pit features of undetermined function found during the TAS investigations (Jelks 1967:14–15), this was a classic bell-shaped pit (Figure 2). The pit’s bottom was 101 cm below the surface; the lower half had been excavated 52 cm into the basal red clay. Virtually all of the bone found was in the lower 29 cm of pit fill; all were deer bones except for a few pieces of box turtle shell. Although the pit fill had a very high ash content, including some small pieces of charcoal and four fragments of burned bone, there was no evidence of any general burning of either the artifacts in the fill or the pit walls and floor. At the very bottom of the pit was one slightly damaged clay elbow pipe with a slight spur at the heel, typical of those found elsewhere in the site (Jelks 1967:Figure 66).

The lowest 29 cm of pit fill also had such Historic period artifacts as one Cornaline d’Aleppo glass bead in bugle form, a fragment of probable mirror glass, several small fragments of disintegrated iron, and a fragment of a European spall gunflint. This same sample of fill also contained nine pieces of unmodified stone, two stones altered by abrasion or pecking, 67 small chert flakes and chips (four of Florence chert from northern Oklahoma), six small end scrapers, two distal tips of arrowpoints and one reworked Fresno point of Florence chert, three sherds (one probably Womack Engraved), and a few small pieces of bark.

Except perhaps for the bone component, the pit fill seems characteristic of the refuse to be expected from a series of housekeeping efforts in a limited area of the site. Prior testing in Feature 20 itself did not indicate anything suggesting a floor level. From surface to clay, the deep sand matrix had a clean, almost sugary,

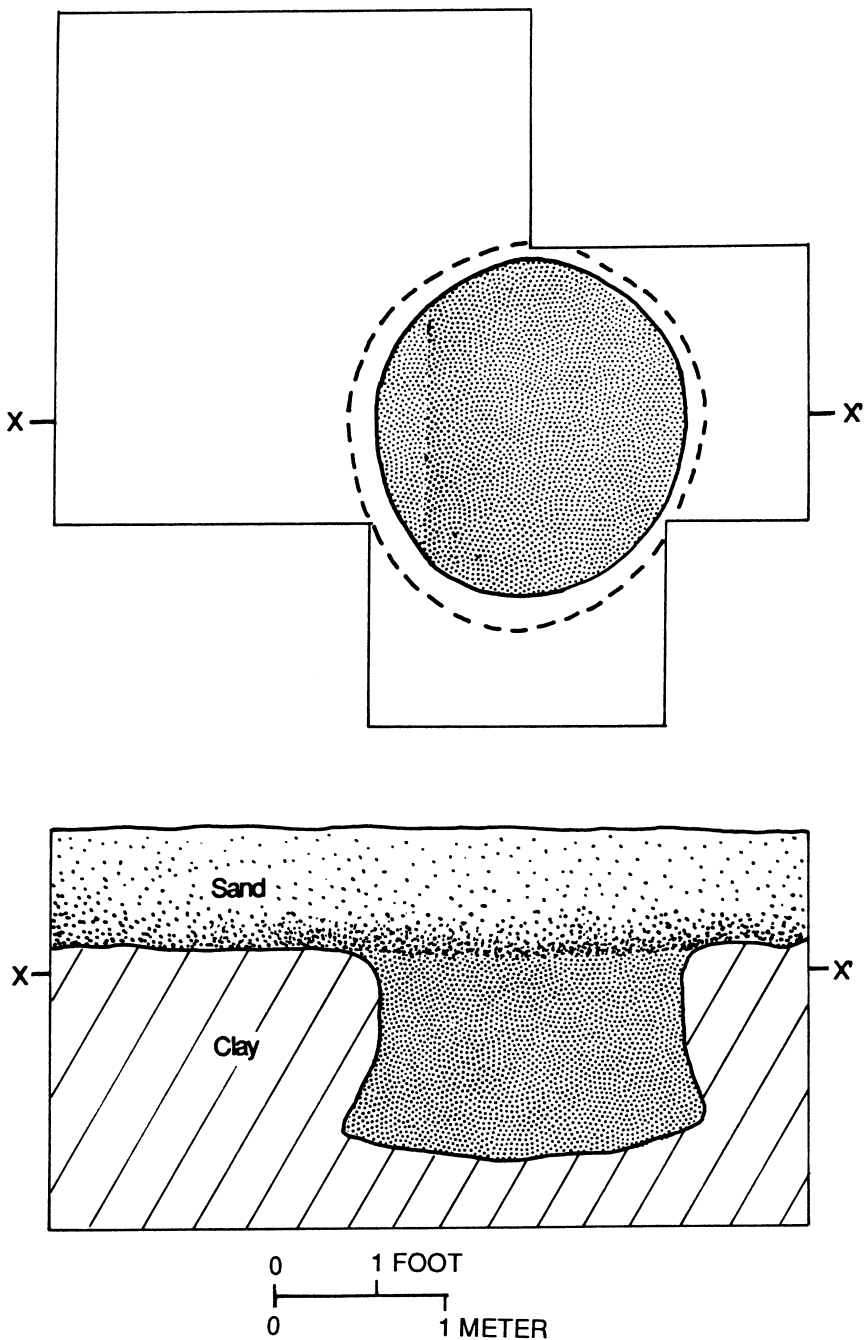


Figure 2. Plan and profile of the bell-shaped pit in Feature 20 at the Gilbert site.

composition without midden staining or apparent lensing. This sand zone averaged 39 cm in depth and, except for one firearm part, the upper 21 cm of sand contained no artifacts. The remaining 18 cm down to the clay contained the balance of the artifacts in these sands. Since as many as three small Gary points were also found, it appears probable that the excavations in the feature area also sampled prehistoric deposits.

LATER PROCEDURES

The Blaines worked at the Gilbert site until the 1980s, when the appearance of survey markers for the Lake Fork Reservoir that was to be constructed by the Sabine River Authority terminated the investigations.

In the earlier post-TAS dig phase, all of the excavations were confined to the areas around the known features. However, several excavation units were still open and soon attracted attention from non-TAS members. The site was especially vulnerable to the public; it had several different owners who had long allowed access to fishermen. On one memorable day, Harris and Blaine underwent hours of very close scrutiny by a series of nonfishermen who approached, one by one, from the river bottoms. These folk, it developed, were lookouts for a very large game of chance that was taking place nearby. We were both pleased to have been judged although obviously eccentric, apparently not a threat.

Early use of a metal detector at the site merely resulted in locating the TAS's kitchen trash pit, according to R. King Harris, and a few years were to pass before increasing signs of such use by others became obvious again. Fortunately, by that time at least most of the more easily detected metal artifacts had been located, mapped, removed, and conserved by Blaine. Two of the later collections made by others who used metal detectors eventually became available for examination and recording. In each of these samples, a fragment was found to cross-fit one collected by Blaine. Regrettably, no specific recording of locations, context, or any other associations had been done by these collectors. The scope of their combined samples, apparently collected over a very limited number of visits, highlights the impact that skilled metal detector operators can have on a Historic period site. This was especially notable in the bias towards the recovery of the copper alloy artifacts in comparison with those in the controlled collection. These nonferrous artifacts are preferred by collectors because they are judged as initially more attractive, can be polished up, and do not soon fall apart in collection displays. The more experienced operators commonly can tell the difference between these brass and iron metals without excavation and usually will ignore the least desired iron objects, passing over iron objects comparable in size to a small nail.

One of these outside collections contained seven pieces of brass round stock in three different diameters; one at 3.7 mm, three at 5.3 mm, and three at 6.3 mm. The longest piece was 50 mm and the shortest 14 mm long. All are, then, characteristic of remnants left over from forming *C* bracelets from stock. A single such bracelet was found in the TAS excavations (Jelks 1967:Figure 46a). Only this outside

collection provided evidence that wire of at least three different diameters was being supplied to the site as stock and that bracelets were made at the site. This emphasizes how scant and vulnerable the evidence of some functions can be in the archeological record. It seems probable that the evidence of this particular workshop was found in one very small area and that the workshop was the product of one individual.

Once it became evident that sporadic disturbance of the site was continuing from year to year, a form of salvage investigations was initiated. This procedure was undertaken with serious misgivings, however, because it had to involve extensive use of the metal detector, and any degree of justification for its use was again based on the need to salvage information from the site before it became totally disturbed.

Since the use of the metal detector is vulnerable to abuses if no proper controls are maintained on the findings, care was taken to maintain satisfactory controls at this level. Up to this time, attempts to maintain the customary controls during the post-TAS excavations themselves were frequently thwarted. In cases where a test pit could not be excavated, recorded, backfilled, *and concealed* in one visit, it became all too common to find that these excavations had been thoroughly shoveled through by others before they were completed. Sometimes there was no evidence of screening; possibly the goal in these instances had been worms for fishing. Here also, as is often the case, weekend excavations were soon trampled by pastured cattle.

A set of improvised controls was created in an attempt to reduce the regrettable impact on the site resulting from the location and removal of metal artifacts through detector use. Once an object was located as precisely as possible, very minimal disturbance of the matrix was done to reach it. In this site the vast majority of such artifacts detected were less than 13 cm deep and were excavated by trowel. Commonly the artifacts were small enough that an area no more than 8 or 10 cm in diameter was disturbed, and the nature of matrix in this area was recorded, as was the position of the artifact if it was not parallel to the general ground surface. The depth below surface was recorded, and any other objects from the area of disturbance were assigned lot designations. All earth excavated from the standard tests was sifted through quarter-inch screen and, at the maximum, in the absence of recognized soil zoning or cultural levels, troweled or shoveled in 6-inch (about 15 cm) levels.

For mapping, each artifact location was plotted by using a prismatic compass and a tape measure, then recorded on a master site map (this map is on file with the author and is available to appropriate persons). The entire historic archeological area of the Gilbert site was remapped for consistency and to include the newer locations. A partly arbitrary diameter of twenty feet (6.1 m) was assigned for each midden excavated by the TAS, and any findings outside these 20-foot circles that were in apparently undisturbed areas were recorded and mapped individually (Figure 1).

After factoring out the metal objects of recent age, about 580 artifacts recovered throughout the site by use of the metal detector were mapped. More than nine percent of the artifacts from the limited area that had been opened for retrieval of

the metal were accompanied by other artifacts, such as animal bones and/or potsherds or lithics. It is certain that there were some other potentially useful associations, but they were not obvious because of the severely restricted size of each retrieval excavation.

However, there were other indications of hidden features. Mapping of the metal signals revealed cluster patterns that indicated specific subareas with possible features. The mapping of metal artifacts also revealed that the eighteenth century area of the Gilbert site is about a third larger than had been previously known (Figure 1); the added territory and the main part of the site appear to be essentially homogenous. There are seven new cases of cross-fitting broken brass firearms parts from separate parts of the site. Features 2 and 4 of the TAS excavations were linked in this way to matching pieces found deep in the extended site area; the pieces of the Feature 2 match were 190 meters apart.

The 580 metal artifacts found in the more recent investigations at the Gilbert site represent a diversity of tools. The full range of the 240 firearms specimens include butt plates, trigger guards, side plates, barrels, gunlocks, rampipes, sears, and screws, and a single escutcheon (see below). Small fragments of kettle brass and iron account for more than 216 more artifacts (including six brass kettle lugs), followed by 48 folding- and case-knife fragments, four of which were complete knives. Iron axes or hatchets are represented by 19 pieces (see Blaine 1988), and there are 16 bridle bit pieces, including rings, mouth and cheek bars, bridges, two "figure 8" links, and one port. There are eight iron hoes in the metal detector sample, seven possible Spanish sword fragments (2 blades, 4 guards, and 1 pommel), and seven iron scrapers manufactured from larger pieces of metal. Rounding out on the metal assemblage are five awls, three pairs of scissors, three iron projectile points (two are arrow sized and the third is a spear), and a single skewer.

The two most outlying metal clusters tested proved to be midden concentrations with no obvious surface indications; the areas involved had never been in cultivation, and neither midden had been capped with clay. These features were designated F-B3 and F-B4, and their contents, although fewer in numbers, generally matched well with those from features excavated by the TAS. Again, however, there was no evidence of postmolds, floor surfaces or suitable depressed sections, fireplaces, or other structural features noted in the excavated areas. A few clay lumps were identified, but not enough to assume the existence of wattle and daub houses; the occasional daub impressions were small, probably from grasses or very slender twigs. The bits of daub found in at least six other features at this site were, as was customary, presumed to be from clay-plastered houses (Davis et al. 1967: 14–15). More recently, however, the assumption that such daub always indicates houses or huts in the Caddoan-speaking area has been seriously questioned (Gilmore 1986: 23–24).

It seems clear now that any future attempts to clarify details of site usage should focus on the intermidden areas rather than on the middens themselves, for larger areas need to be exposed to make it possible to recognize possible postmold alignments and to evaluate activity areas. For example, of the later sample of 19

more French trade hatchets reported at the Gilbert site, only three were closely associated with midden concentrations (Blaine 1988:111–117).

At least two noteworthy categories are now added to the Gilbert site artifact inventory: hoes and swords. Five French trade hoes and parts of at least three sword hilts, all from the same type of sword, have been identified in this later sample. Two of the hoes (Figure 3) were found nested or cached together with a box turtle carapace in Feature F-B3, but neither hoe shows any signs of use or damage, perhaps indicating that this midden may have been among the last to have been used; or the absence of wear might indicate that no tasks required hoes. These hoes are of different types; both are among the eighteenth century forms reported from the Trudeau site in Louisiana, another site strongly oriented to supplies from French sources (Brain 1979:144–148). In the sample from Gilbert, since one of these hoes bears the same stamped *CB* mark that is found on one of the French trade hatchets, we know that both types originated from the same manufacturer. Regrettably, there is nothing else these marks can tell us at this time beyond indicating that the hoes, together with many other items used in the French trade, probably were supplied from production intended for the domestic French market.

The sword remains include parts of three or more individual sword guards and one pommel, as well as two possible blade fragments (Figure 4). These swords were of the regulation Spanish cavalry broadsword type commonly in use by 1750 (Brinckerhoff and Chamberlain 1972:79–80).

The metal artifact sample from the site assemblage is now severely skewed, but real benefits have been gained from the sample. Enough additional firearms remains have been added to the original sample that both personal and French trade types can be isolated at the site, as can those of probable military origin. Among the French trade guns themselves, even the different grades of quality indicated in lists of supplies for French Louisiana can be demonstrated, so the high quality of the fusil hardware at Gilbert, some of which have thoroughly professional hand engraving and design, is very evident (Figure 5). The decorative escutcheon is the only example known from the site, and the sideplate is the only complete version from Gilbert. The formidable depth and validity of the overall French trade gun sample from the Gilbert site has been clearly established.

The count for firearms pieces from recent investigations was 240; in addition, 32 more have been verified in other collections, so the total is now 440 firearms pieces from the Gilbert site. However, this figure is somewhat misleading because the larger parts—the barrels in particular—have invariably been reduced to several pieces. Their thinner-walled sections can be flattened with relative ease and often tend to split into halves that make convenient stock for tools such as projectile points and scrapers.

Taking various combinations into consideration, it can be estimated that at least 20 individual firearms were discarded and reduced to parts and fragments here. Why were they discarded? Springs are elements of these flintlocks that are especially susceptible to breakage, and the mainsprings are the most frequently broken; five of at least nine found so far are broken. That leaves four such



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Figure 3. Photograph illustrating the two different types of trade hoes cached in Feature F-B3 at the Gilbert site.



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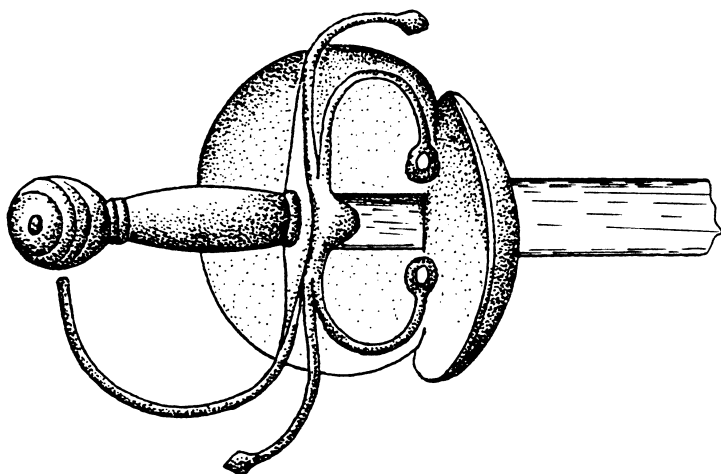


Figure 4. Photograph of parts of a Spanish sword hilt and a drawing incorporating a bilobate shell guard (adapted from Brinckerhoff and Chamberlain 1972:80-82).

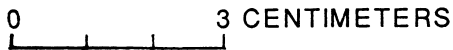
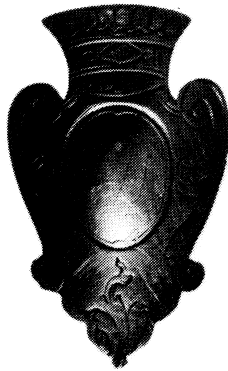


Figure 5. Photographs of an engraved silver(?) escutcheon, above, and a brass sideplate for fusils, below, both from the Gilbert site.

weapons that apparently were discarded for other reasons. There has been only one obvious barrel failure—a ruptured muzzle—typical to this day of the damage resulting from firing similar guns when they are plugged with mud or snow. Too, an eventual wearing of the frizzen face from repeated abrasion by the gunflint can remove the necessary case-hardened surface and result in sparking failure, but this fault probably will not be traceable on archeological specimens. In several cases from other sites, the threaded parts of side screws and cock jaw screws have been moderately flattened; since these threads were almost worn away, the flattening probably was a logical field expedient for tightening the

mechanism in the absence of replacement parts or threading tools. The long service lives of at least some of these shoulder guns from Gilbert are demonstrated by the fact that some of the engraved decorations have almost disappeared from the brass furnishings as a result of polishing alone.

A list of supplies for the Colony of Louisiana in 1733 includes parts for gunlocks for trade guns (Brain 1979:300-301), including cocks, frizzens, and unspecified springs.

The Nature of the Occupation

Considering the size of the Gilbert site and the affluence reflected by the sheer quantity and nature of the European goods found there, it seems almost proven that this was a sedentary village, but a village usually needs to be a year-round occupation site for a substantial part of its population. Villages commonly have structures for shelter, which can be expected to leave construction signs in the ground. The need to shelter and feed most of the population at a given time, especially during long winter months, calls for extensive use of fire hearths and storage pits. The demographics of a village population probably will result in a relatively significant death rate, often manifested by burials and even cemeteries. Identification of pottery-making sites and task-specific work by women are also excellent indicators of permanent villages.

A broad menu of seasonality factors in the archeological record, including construction of substantial shelters, winter-oriented procurement of food, and the presence of agricultural tools, provides markers that indicate a relatively permanent village, as contrasted with the more limited attributes of shorter-term occupations. The data on the Gilbert site, by these criteria and at the present stage of investigation, apparently do not demonstrate an occupation at the village level. Without question, however, there was an occupation at a very intensive level and probably of a special nature.

When definite seasonal preferences can be traced in the occupation of sites, they can be used to help distinguish between the relatively permanent villages and significantly shorter-term usage of sites. Lorrain (1967:234), studying the estimates of age at death for 11 of the white-tailed deer at the Gilbert site, and assuming that the fawns were born in May or June (Lorrain 1967:231), concluded that they were taken throughout the year. However, Gregory (1973:245) points out that these data are based on Florida deer and that they may not apply to northeastern Texas where the climate and vegetation environments are different. In support, Gregory (1973) offers examples of fawn births in seasons other than May or June for Louisiana.

More recent data using deer teeth for this purpose support an estimate of a late winter or early spring kill season for the remains of three out of four white-tailed deer from one trash pit at the mid-eighteenth century Trudeau site in the Lower Mississippi Valley. Here a different seasonal estimation technique was used, which depended on the local ecology and, most especially, on the average dates of the first and last killing frosts (Spiess 1988:418-419). In both examples, only a very limited selection of the deer teeth was suitable for these estimates; therefore, for these and

the above reasons, a larger data base with emphasis upon more environmental factors seems warranted.

R. K. Harris reported finding plum pits in at least one midden at the Gilbert site (Gregory 1973:246). The Blaines also found plum pits in two more features. Gregory (1973) notes that this fruit ripens only in late summer in Texas.

The Blaines found pieces of box turtle shell in the Feature 20 pit and many pieces in F-B3 and F-B4; at least eight of the other features contained similar remains. These terrestrial turtles are not active and available except in late spring, summer, and early fall, as are their kin on the site to this day.

Although limited, these floral and faunal data also lend stronger support for a general spring-to-fall season of occupation than for an occupation that continued through the winter months. In Gregory's (1973:240-245) discussion of his original model for an eighteenth century Caddoan hunting camp, this summer period meshes quite well with the two stages of a seasonal round lived in encampments that were located away from the major village base and its agricultural resources and demands. Still, there is no reason to deny the possibility that some episodes of occupation could have taken place in winter months, especially in view of the bell-shaped pit in Feature 20, and that some deer could have been taken then as needed.

Gregory (1973:238-240), after examining the Gilbert site report, proposed that its interpretation as a village site did not fully utilize other important data. For Gregory, the findings suggested not a permanent village, but rather some type of hunting camp with emphasis on gathering deer hides, and with one or two seasonality phases that centered on the summertime.

In the analysis of animal remains, Lorrain (1967:225-229) counted the remains of at least 127 white-tailed deer from only four of the middens. Half or more of these deer carcasses were complete when they were brought into the site, but the general absence of caudal vertebrae indicated that most hides were removed from the site, and it was suggested that these were traded for European goods. Gregory (1973:239) states that the proposed occupation period for the site (about 1730 to 1770) coincides well with the time of the maximum Louisiana trade for deer hides by the French. It is worth noting here that the sheer size (418) of the original sample of end scrapers also lends extra support to a fully implemented deer hide operation on a commercial scale.

Gregory's proposed Caddoan hunting camp model for the mid-eighteenth century provides a valuable outline for comparing the attributes found at Gilbert with those characteristic of a relatively permanent village occupation. However, some details of a basic hunting camp model probably are too limited to accommodate the needs and composition of a workforce engaged in commercial hide procurement as seems to be the case at Gilbert. For example, it appears probable that a higher degree of task sharing might be called for under these special circumstances, and so there could be more female (or family?) participation there than would be expected in the customarily male-dominated activity levels suggested by Gregory (1973).

If future investigations fail to find house patterns at Gilbert, it should not be assumed that there was no effective form of shelter there. Gregory (1973:239–240), lacking adequate documentation on this aspect of seasonal Caddoan hunting practices, used pertinent shelter data from the Pawnee—their kinsmen to the north. For shelter in the summer encampments of their seasonal rounds, the Pawnee used generally oval frameworks of small saplings covered with skins. A description of the use of small field tents of deer skins by a Petit Caddo chief is quoted by Gregory (1973:248), and elsewhere, the Caddo have been known to use temporary shelters when hunting; their use of skin tents near Natchitoches, Louisiana, is also suggested in French archival records (Kniffen et al. 1987:115).

The direct archeological evidence for such shelters under most conditions, would be easily missed. With this forewarning, however, and with some emphasis now on the areas between middens, more very careful work at Gilbert could still provide answers needed for the fullest understanding of the types of activities that took place there.

Evidence of agriculture that would be expected at a village, such as milling stones or metates, manos, mortars for plant processing, and tools for cultivation such as hoes, has not materialized so far at the Gilbert site. One bison scapula hoe and one mano comprise the total of native tools that could have direct agricultural applications. Even so, this mano, or muller, could be prehistoric, since it was found in the same square and level in Feature 20 as a Gary projectile point. That leaves only the five complete iron trade hoes, four of which show no evidence of use on their sharp working edges; the fifth apparently was broken up for its metal. These tools probably were brought directly to the site by a trader with a somewhat generalized inventory. Another possibility is the diversion by theft—not uncommon in those times—of a load of goods intended and more suitable for trade elsewhere. In any case, the abandonment of apparently unused tools in the site remains puzzling.

There is no obvious sign of any loss of knapping skills among the makers of the lithic artifacts found at the site; the Fresno arrowpoints and native-made gunflints, for example, are finely crafted. The metal points also appear to be native-made, but they are comparatively few in number. Some kinds of cherts are still being imported from distant sources, and lithic scrapers far outnumber iron scrapers.

Despite the remarkable concentration and array of European goods at the Gilbert site, the material evidence of other cultural adaptations has not been easy to understand. Perhaps the best clues to these adaptations can be found in the alteration of metal artifacts. Blaine (1988:116), in examining the trade hatchets from Gilbert, noted from their condition that they were used primarily used for working metal rather than wood. At Gilbert, there is a very strong pattern of experimentation with metals; virtually everything of metal that could be cut and/or broken into smaller pieces has been reduced, but as yet there is no readily discernible pattern of selective removal from the site or of on-site use of many of the metal artifacts that may have been produced.

The two trigger guards of brass from Feature F-B4 (Figure 6) seem to illustrate this treatment of metal; these guards have been broken into smaller parts, and,

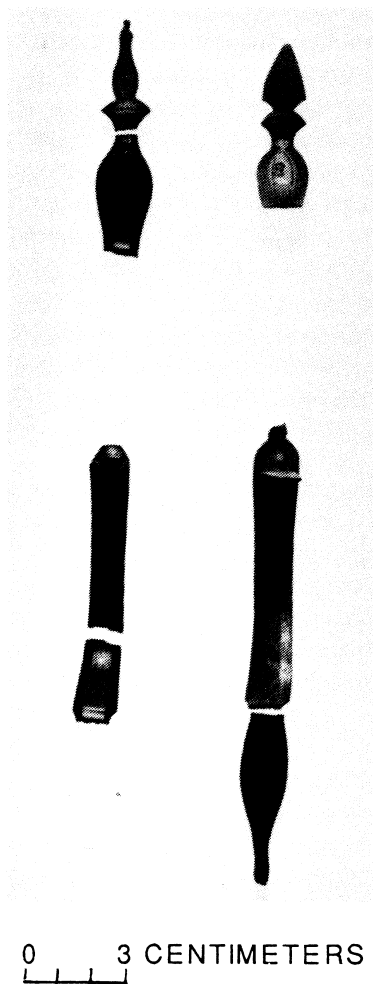


Figure 6. Photographs of two broken, but almost complete, brass fusil trigger guards from Feature F-B4, Gilbert site.

except for one rear finial, the only missing parts are the guard bows. Many virtually identical segments of bows and finials broken from the same kinds of brass trigger guards were scattered around the site, but they have not been modified further. This situation may be analogous to cracking open a cobble of unfamiliar stone to see if something of use is revealed by or because of the reduction process. In the absence of a proper metal-working tool kit, the experimental hacking and breaking of large units of metal into more useful smaller ones may simply be an application of an old

technology to a new medium, but the thoroughness and repetition of this particular activity seems to reflect behavior more than simple curiosity.

Story's team examined the pottery from Gilbert and drew several very important inferences (Story et al. 1967:186–187). Among these are the suggestions that “a single integrated socio-cultural group” accounted for the historic Native American ceramics. Most of the decorated pottery was Caddoan in tradition, and some types can be identified with the Historic Caddoan peoples in Texas. However, the great diversity of the ceramics precludes a strictly local origin for the pottery assemblage, and the fact that many vessels had been repaired or otherwise modified, suggests that local pottery making, if any, was rather limited, and that acculturation was possibly causing their replacement with European vessels.

Story and her colleagues (Story et al. 1967:187) also believe that the Gilbert sample of plain pottery with bone and shell tempering was not typical of Late Caddoan or Historic Caddoan ceramics. However, data now available indicate a probable flux in Caddoan ceramic traditions at this particular period.

Gregory (1973) compared the native Caddoan pottery from Los Adaes with pottery from other sites in northwestern Louisiana that were at least in part contemporary with Gilbert. He found bone to be the major tempering agent, with shell combinations following in frequency. In addition, Gregory found that the major use of bone tempering was most evident after about 1740. Since he also found that bone tempering was less common in the contemporary Caddo sites to the east, he proposed that this trait originated among the more westward Caddoan groups; this proposal is supported by more recent data from East Texas (H. F. Gregory, personal communication, 1991).

All European containers found at Gilbert, except for a few bottle fragments, were kettles (cooking vessels) of copper alloy. Examination of the reported sample of bail ears from these thin metal vessels indicates that there were at least five kettles, and at least four more can be isolated from the newer sample. All nine or more of these containers are broken, and a few of the pieces were used as raw material for ornaments, chiefly tinkler cones. From the evidences of wear, including some repairs of the bail holes, it is obvious that these kettles saw much service before they failed.

Oddly, it seems that there is no evidence of cast iron kettles at Gilbert, although they were available through trade by this time. Judging from both the repaired native-made pottery and the copper alloy metal kettles, some factors (including mobility?) were causing considerable attrition among both of these classes of containers. The sturdier iron kettles appear to have been especially desirable because of their durability, but did their increased weight make them liabilities in extended special-purpose encampments, so were the sturdy iron vessels left behind in the more permanent village?

When the Gilbert site was occupied, that part of Texas had been well within Spanish borders for many decades, but this was a mere technicality and did not involve any real Spanish presence or influence. The amount of physical evidence from Gilbert that can be identified as probably of Spanish origin is virtually

submerged in a sea of French trade material. With the exception of the horse gear, only one firearms part, five parts of sword hilts (Figure 4), pieces of handle plate from a belt knife or short sword, and four case-knife blades with spike tangs are the sum of Spanish evidence at Gilbert. The latter two types of artifacts were linked to Spanish origins since publication of the Gilbert site report in 1967 (e.g., Blaine 1982:123–125). The blades from the swords that are represented only by their hilts probably underwent the conversion into metal spears and lance blades that has been commonly documented as a practice of Native Americans in the Historic period.

Each of two brass parts of firearms pictured in the 1967 report was stamped with a slightly different *Crown R* mark (Blaine and Harris 1967:Figure 37), and two more pieces with *Crown R* marks, also brass gun furniture, have been excavated from Feature F-B4. In this case, the two marks are apparently identical; all four parts are broken but still do not appear to be stout enough to have come from military firearms. Where enough of the shape has survived, the parts are consistent with French civilian or trade shoulder gun styles. Although there apparently is no logical connection or proof of any direct linkage, it must be noted that a *Crown R* mark was required on military swords and guns produced for the Spanish crown by Royal Ordinance beginning in 1728 (Brinckerhoff and Chamberlain 1972:30).

During the occupation of the Gilbert site by Native Americans, the policy of the Spanish government still prohibited the supplying of firearms to the Indians of this province (Bolton 1914, Vol. I:40). Just how efficiently the French traders circumvented this policy is dramatically underscored by the firearms sample from Gilbert. Among the large array of French fusils tracked so far, there is only one example each of English and Spanish firearms. The latter is represented by a single part—a miquelet frizzen. One such frizzen, apparently modified into a scraper, has come from the Spanish Fort locale in Montague County, Texas, and it is possible that the Gilbert frizzen arrived on the site as a single part that was intended for similar modification.

The seemingly casual discarding of so many useful metal objects, including several undamaged knives at Gilbert, implies a remarkable degree of affluence, and this generous example of waste is repeated in other categories of artifacts. The indicated lack of interest in husbanding some of these resources suggests that the possibility of shortages in supplies was not being seriously considered; this in turn could imply that suppliers of such goods were actually on the site. The traders may have been there for the sole purpose of bartering for hides, and perhaps even to participate directly in the hunting and processing of the hides. However, the descriptions of the living habits of French traders and/or *woods runners* of this period lend no support to the possibility that their presence can be recognized solely through archeology.

CONCLUSIONS

Although we have gained extra insight into their behavior and activities, the tribal identity of the Native Americans who left all these clues at Gilbert remains

uncertain. The data now best support two most promising lines of inquiry; one leads through the southern Wichita to the Tawakoni, Kichai, or Yscani, as originally suggested by Jelks (1967), and is supported by the general Norteño character of the archeological evidence. The other line of inquiry leads through the Caddoan groups. The nature and frequency of the affiliations with Caddoan pottery traditions seem especially telling at Gilbert, and even in quantity alone, the difference between the amount of pottery used at Gilbert and in the more westerly, roughly contemporaneous (about 1750) and plains-oriented Norteño sites at the Spanish Fort locale is startling. Although native ceramic pipes are well represented in both places, evidence for pottery among the Norteños to the west is quite scarce in comparison with the sample from the Gilbert site. Mobility alone should not have been a significant factor, since both groups had horses and/or mules.

It is possible that what now appear to be definite Caddoan influences at Gilbert may yet reflect the participation of an ethnological Norteño sponsor; this would be the Kichai, who are normally associated with the southern Wichita under the same Norteño umbrella, but are the least well known with that designation.

Rohrbaugh (1982:51–61) examined the possible origin of the Kichai with emphasis on the native ceramics in the Arkansas River basin and hypothesized that both the Gilbert and Womack sites might be identified with the Kichai. He quotes Swanton (1942:54), who observed that the Kichai as a group habitually attached themselves to the Wichita or their affiliates, or to the Caddo. Apparently the language differences were not a real barrier, and these peoples apparently were unusually mobile and adaptable. If this is a true characterization of the Kichai, it follows that Kichai material culture might, at any given time, strongly reflect influences from either or both southern Wichita or Caddo sources. At Gilbert, then, it is also possible that we are seeing the results of one of these Caddo-Kichai collaborations.

At present, one approach seems most likely to help clarify problems like the one at Gilbert. Such an approach would require a timely effort to further seek out, identify, and analyze Caddoan habitation sites of the eighteenth century; any additional emphasis should focus on the sites closer to the western fringes of the Caddoan heartland. These habitation sites are unusually vulnerable to destruction because of their high metal content and the uncontrolled use of metal detectors by pothunters.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I express special gratitude to the John C. Gilbert and Lennon Gilbert families for permitting continuing investigation of this site over a period of several years. Hiram F. Gregory very generously allowed me to excerpt information freely from his unpublished dissertation, which was especially relevant to this study. I also express appreciation for the influence of the late R. King Harris, who urged my full participation at Gilbert and encouraged this neophyte in many other ways. And fundamental, as always, has remained the contribution of my wife, Jerrylee M.

Blaine. Although not always as eager about archeology as some of us, Jerrylee has always worked generously, intelligently, and effectively to give direct support to those of us who are more eager.

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