FEATURES

Uncovering History

Dr. George Avery, SFA staff archeologist and cultural heritage coordinator, along with volunteer archeological stewards from the Texas Historical Commission, began to unearth the history of an often-neglected gem in Nacogdoches County – the Sand Hill community.

Tucked between Melrose and Chireno along Highway 21 sits Sand Hill, a community established as a freedom colony — those in which African Americans settled after they were freed. To date, there are about 500 freedom colonies recorded in Texas.

According to Avery, researchers of that era often neglected or overlooked freedom colonies, leading to a lack of historical resources cataloging their rich cultures.

"The project is meant to introduce the Sand Hill community to the idea of learning about their past by using archeology," Avery said. "There are not many historical documents about them, so what we're doing here is providing information for the documents."

As part of a grant, Avery, along with stewards and volunteers Lori Horne, Keith Stephens, John Jefferson and Archie Rison Jr., began the dig on June 27 at a location in the community that was believed to have been a Rosenwald School – a school built through support by the Rosenwald Fund, which was established to construct schools for African Americans between 1920 and 1932.

The group began the project by canvasing the area with a metal detector and marking areas where they hit a target. After that, they used ground-penetrating radar to look for areas of disturbed earth across the site.

It didn't take long to find the first artifacts.

About an inch into the sand-filled, weed-ridden earth of their first test hole, the group found broken glass believed to have been from a school window, nails, and a lid from what could have been a paint or tar can.

"We are finding a surprising number of artifacts here," Avery said.

Rison, a 1971 SFA graduate with a Bachelor of Arts in sociology, recalled fond memories of the short travel from his hometown Nacogdoches to Sand Hill to visit family on his mother's side, as well as participating in the area's ample hunting scene.

As what he considered a "kid from the big city of Nacogdoches" compared to the "country" of Sand Hill, Rison remembered it as a place that wasn't rich financially but was rich in spirit.

> *"Were they rich? No, but they were rich in culture, heritage and togetherness."*
> *—Archie Rison Jr.*

"This was a thriving Black community at one time. It was really thriving. Were they rich? No, but they were rich in culture, heritage and togetherness. If a hog was killed, they didn't mind sharing it."

According to Avery, the first couple of days were an introduction, and the bulk of the work will commence when the heat begins to subside.

Avery hopes to present the stories of and artifacts found at Sand Hill in May 2023 during the Aya Symposium, a vehicle for the multidisciplinary exploration of Texas Freedom Colonies held in conjunction with the Texas Purple Hull Pea Festival.

"You learn what people did and what they used back in the day. It's a learning process of human behavior," Rison said, referencing the significance of the project.

Since the artifacts are from private property, they belong to the property owners. However, Avery has asked the owners to let SFA hold the artifacts until they are washed, photographed and analyzed. They will then be offered back to the property owners.

Anyone who thinks they may have familial ties to a Texas freedom colony and is interested in an archeological project in the community can contact Avery at averyg@sfasu.edu.

(Above) Volunteer archeological steward Keith Stephens uses tools to inspect the initial dig, or test unit, at Sand Hill Freedom Colony. (Left) The first test unit dug during the Sand Hill community archeological project uncovered broken glass pieces believed to have been from a school window, nails, and a lid from what could have been a paint or tar can.

Photos courtesy of University Marketing Communications

Professor's work chosen by museum

By Sandra Carranza
Managing Editor

Adjunct art professor Arely Morales' artwork was acquired by the Dallas Museum of Art earlier this year The work, titled "María," is Morales' first museum acquisition.

According to Morales, the 65.5-inch-by-60-inch oil on canvas painting comments on struggles immigrant farm laborers face, specifically women, through the depiction of a female farm worker picking apples under the bright sun of the day.

"It's a painting where I'm trying to talk about issues that go into being a farm laborer, being an immigrant and being very vulnerable," Morales said. "At this point in time when I'm doing all this research, I was very interested in [learning about] women working out in the fields and how vulnerable they are, often being victims of sexual harassment."

Morales said her painting "Maria" has many layers: the female farm laborer is fully clothed not only to protect her from the sunlight but also to avoid being seen; the subject is covering their face with a bandanna, which represents the subject not being able to use their voice; and the laborer's hand is injured, which calls attention to how immigrant workers don't often have access to health insurance.

> *"I want to ... show our strength and hopefully uplift my community when they see themselves represented and appreciated in a space like a museum"*
> *—Arely Morales*

Morales has been researching immigrant minorities in the U.S. for years, and she said most of her work tackles that subject.

"I do tackle the same issue from different angles, so it changes [based on] what I'm being exposed to, what I'm experiencing at the time or what I'm moved by," Morales said. "I would say that everything kind of has that commonality of immigration issues."

Photo by Marcus Jackson / The Pine Log

Adjunct art professor Arely Morales' artwork recently was acquired by the Dallas Museum of Art. The painting, called "Maria," is Morales' first museum acquisition.

Morales said she feels the most significant part of this acquisition is knowing her community will be portrayed in a space for many generations.

"Through my paintings, I want to elevate and dignify our presence, show our strength and hopefully uplift my community when they see themselves represented and appreciated in a space like a museum," Morales said.

Shaun Roberts, assistant art professor and Morales' husband, said she inspires him to work harder in his own studio practice.

"[Morales'] paintings and research explore terrain that can be uncomfortable for some but desperately needs addressing," Roberts said. "[She] is doing very exciting things, and I look forward to seeing her continued success."

Morales has been teaching at SFA for the past 5 years. She received her Bachelor of Arts degree in Painting and Photography from SFA in 2015 and went on to The University of Washington where she received her Master of Arts degree in Painting and Drawing. "Maria" was the last painting Morales completed as part of her graduate work.

Christopher Talbot, SFA School of Art's director, said Morales is talented as both an artist and educator.

"She is an example to her students of what can be accomplished with hard work and dedication," Talbot said. "Our students definitely see what they might achieve through her success."

Morales said being an artist is not an easy career but hopes her student's gain hope through her story and what she has achieved thus far.

"You always hear the phrase 'starving artist,'" she said. "It's a really competitive field. I think it can boost their hope to see someone that is not that different from them be able to achieve something like [this]."

Campus cat steals hearts

By Nathan Thompson
News Editor

SFA's campus cat, often referred to as Twiggy, Leafy or Honey, resides outside of Hall 16 facing the East College Dining Hall and Steen Hall. She is a grey and white tabby with a green right eye and a blue left eye. Throughout the day, she watches students walk to class while resting in her alcove, walks around the perimeter of Hall 16, stretches out in the sun and eats treats left for her by her favorite students.

"I love the cat!" Hannah Bloxom, a junior communication sciences and disorders major from Katy, said. "I fed it a lot last semester and would go see it every time I went home from class. It was always very nice and let me pet it."

For Lynn Vega, senior animal science major from Dallas, the campus cat became her pet away from home.

"It was really in the spring of '21 that I started interacting with her," Vega said. "She had two different colored eyes like me, which is kind of rare in a stray cat, so I started taking a liking to her. I would feed her, and try to make an effort to go out there every day and interact with her… It got to the point where she'd see me and would start meowing."

"For a while, the plan was to try and adopt her and take her off the streets," Vega said. After doing research with Nacogdoches Animal Shelter, she said she was determined not to.

"She wouldn't be able to survive as an indoor cat because she is too acclimated to living on the streets," Vega said. "And I don't think that would be right or humane to take her out of what she knows."

To help our furry friend, Vega settled on building the campus cat a house, so she could keep warm during the icy winter of 2021.

"I went to the dollar store, got a tub, a couple blankets, then cut a hole in the side and stuck it in there," Vega said. "I'm not sure how often she uses it. As far as I know, there's a little crawl space underneath the entire building of Hall 16 at the back where she and her friends go under."

Twiggy / Leafy / Honey
Campus Cat

While Twiggy, Leafy or Honey has caught the spotlight due to her unique appearance, campus is home to a community of stray cats. Most students are happy to leave food and water for these cats, however there is one more thing students can do to help this community.

According to The Humane Society of the United Sates, "Food and water are important parts of caring for community cats. But some people who are new to looking after these cats often don't realize that if they don't find a way to have the cats spayed or neutered, the number of hungry cats may soon become unmanageable as more and more kittens are born. Doing Trap-Neuter-Return (TNR) will keep this from happening to you and the cats. One sign that a cat is a spayed or neutered feral is a tipped or notched ear (if the tip or section of an ear has been surgically removed)."

The Humane Society of Nacogdoches County assists with TNR for feral cats as well as vaccinating them against rabies to help them live their natural lives comfortably. However, their services are useless without help from our campus community.

"The cats are just trying to survive," Vega said. "Like everybody else, they made their home on campus."

Downtown Art

With stoic expressions on their faces, portraits of Nacogdoches historic figures line the side of a building on the square in downtown. The portraits, painted by local artist and Nacogdoches native Dixie Rose Daniels, are (from left to right) Antonio Gil Y'Barbo, a pioneering settler of Nacogdoches and creator of the Old Stone Fort; Stephen F. Austin, SFA's namesake; Sam Houston, first and third president of the Republic of Texas an American general; and Adolphus Sterne, an elected representative of Nacogdoches to the House of Representatives for the Second Legislature in 1847 and followed in the Third Legislature. Rose Daniels has several other bright paintings and murals across town. The individualistic style sets her art apart from other paintings and murals around the city.

Photo by Jordan Butts / **The Pine Log**