

Archeological Investigations in Denton County

TxDOT Project, Dallas District

Bolivar: The Once Wild West

Nestled at the intersection two highways in Denton County is a small Texas town. Today, Bolivar is mostly a ghost town but during the 19th century it was a burgeoning frontier town in part of the old west.

In 1861 Ben Brown, a farmer, moved to the area from Bolivar, Tennessee and suggested changing the town's name from New Prospect to Bolivar. He persuaded residents to vote for the name Bolivar by providing them free drinks! Bolivar was the first settlement west of Collin County, Texas. Here, many large ranches connected with the Jesse Chisholm Trail. One cattle baron, John Chisum, had several herds in Bolivar that provided beef to the Confederacy during the Civil War.



Horse Shoe

PROJECT INFORMATION: TxDOT proposes to widen FM 455 between Sanger to the east and Bolivar to the west. The project involves expanding FM 455 from a two-lane rural highway to a four-lane divided urban highway with turn lanes. In rural areas, the project will add a raised median with left turn lanes at some cross streets. In addition, the project will reconstruct the bridges at Duck Creek and Moores Branch of Clear Creek to accommodate the wider roadway. Construction is scheduled to begin in August 2022, but utilities relocation will begin in the coming months.

LOCATION IS EVERYTHING: There were many large ranches in Bolivar, including the Wilson, Forester, Chisum, and Waide Ranches. By 1867, the U.S. Government had put in a military telegraph line through the area with a station in Bolivar. The road along it became known as the Wire Road. In addition, two stagecoach lines had stops in Bolivar where they often rotated horses.

BUSTLING BOLIVAR: A historic marker in town states that "The town thrived and could count three hotels, several stores, a gin, flour mill, a sawmill, a blacksmith shop, saloon, a church and a school." In the late 1800s, Jesse Sartin moved his stagecoach stop into a new hotel in Bolivar with a unique flowing well in the lobby. As a result of the growing cattle ranches in the area, many cowboys frequently stayed in one of Bolivar's hotels and patronized its saloon. Bolivar attracted others, too. Outlaw Sam Bass and his men saw Bolivar and the surrounding area as a haven. In fact, Sam Bass once boldly attended a local dance!

Archeologists have uncovered artifacts from the Sartin Hotel and Bolivar's blacksmith shop at sites within Sanger city limits, though these businesses were historically part of Bolivar. The artifacts help tell the story of the once wild Bolivar.

Read more about the stories TxDOT has uncovered along the road.

Visit www.txdot.gov,
Keyword: "Beyond the Road."

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Cuff Links found at Site 41DN617

Site 41DN593

Archeologists unearthed the Sartin Hotel, built in the 1870s. Site discoveries included the remains of the water feature pond and well, lamp glass, a bronze spool, iron rings, metal tools, whiteware fragments, miscellaneous hotel hardware and more!

Site 41DN617

Tom Cook, a freed African American slave on the frontier, owned a blacksmith shop and had a second craft as a farrier. Evidence suggests that the shop was opened by the 1870s. Archeological surveys at this site uncovered sheet iron, ceramic ware, a forged iron hook, iron scrap, square nails, wagon/buggy hardware and other blacksmith-associated artifacts. Tom Cook was recognized in a 1918 Denton County history book as one of the best citizens who “never failed to answer the roll call in a time of danger...”