

## **'New' Artifact Moved Into Freestone County Historical Museum**

**Freestone County: The Times; Jan 19, 2024**



A rather large artifact was moved into the Freestone County Historical Museum grounds recently. This tanning vat was carved from a cottonwood tree and had been in use from the 1860's. Tim and Lea Hedrick of Teague donated the piece.



It had been handed down through the generations. Mr. Hedrick obtained the log from his grandfather, Paul Fulton of Donie.

"We are very proud to have such a historic item donated to the museum from the 1860's," said the folks at the Museum. "It is an awesome addition to our collection and it is so amazing that this artifact has survived over 160 years."

When Linda and Marvin Mullen were unloading the log vat, they noticed letters carved inside. It appears to read the following: 1 IMA 1 Y.

*(NOTE: Tim Hedrick mentioned when he delivered the vat to the museum that his grandfather had used the vat around the farm and at one time they even used it as a cattle trough. It had been used as a bench on the front porch then later stored in a barn for many years.)*



If anyone has information about what these markings may be, please contact the museum at 903-389-3738.

The Freestone County Historical Museum is located at 302 East Main Street in Fairfield. They are open 10:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. on Wednesdays, Fridays and Saturdays.

Below is an article written by former Sheriff Sonny Sessions, who was an avid Freestone County historian. The article was previously published in the Freestone County Times on June 14, 2005.

### **Confederate Hide Tannery**

In the mid 1960's Hugh Whitaker made me aware of a Hide Tannery that operated during the Civil War making leather that was used to make shoes for the soldiers and other needs. It was located about 5 miles east of present day Donie on a spring branch that became known as Tanyard Branch near Old Zion.

This Tannery was started shortly before the Civil War by Egbert Beall who came to Texas in the late 1850's. It is said the reason for Beall coming to Texas was his brother was killed at Goliad. For his brothers service in the Texas War for Independence and being killed at Goliad he received a league of land in Bell Co. After his marriage to a half Indian girl from the Keechi Reservation he traded this land for some Spanish horses as there no trees to build fences and such. They came to Old Zion near present Donie where he purchased land.

Beall operated a freight line from Houston and Galveston to Freestone Co. He built the first plank house in the area with lumber he brought in on this. The road trip to Houston and Galveston is reported to have taken about 3 months, feel sure oxen were used.

It is believed that this was the only tanning shop in this part of Texas. It is reported a large working force was required as this a big operation. Beall served in the Confederate forces during the War with the Tannery operated by his wife and slaves. A son John Beall was killed while fighting alongside his father in the War. The cowhide tanned was mostly made into shoes for the Confederate soldier.

Hugh Whitakers grandfather Robert came back with Egbert Beall at the end of the War to operate the Tanyard, which closed between 1865 and 1870. The vats used at the Tanyard were constructed of hewn logs, which were fitted together at the ends. The vats were about four feet above the ground. The cattle hides were soaked in the vats in water and oak tree bark. The oak bark acted as a tanning and preserving agent on the hides.

When Hugh Whitaker and I visited the site in the 1960's little was left. Impressions of the vats were still visible in the ground. It is reported there were 6 small vats 8'X 10' and one larger 10'X 20'. Am sure nothing left here today as the area been mined for lignite for the utility plant.

Hugh Whitaker also reported his father J.L.R. Whitaker was one of the last to use oxen on his farm. The steers were named Brad and Barry. He was also the first to have an Oliver Walking Cultivator.

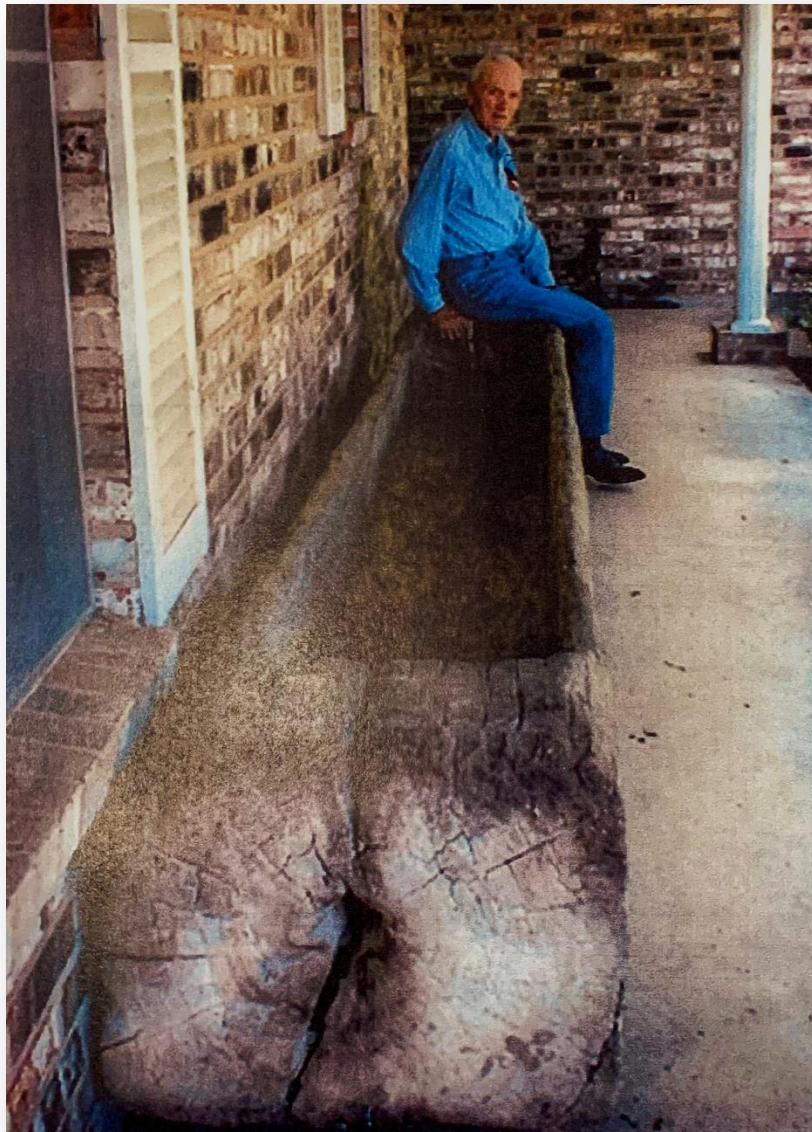
Much of this information came from Hugh Whitaker and a school paper done by one of his students Paul Smith in May 1965 on Texas History.

Egbert Beall lived in Donie until his death in 1907 and burial in the Old Zion Cemetery where there once was also a church and school. The school consolidated with the Donie School District in 1927.

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EDITORS NOTE: It must be noted that there were several creeks named "Tan Yard Branch" in Freestone County. One was in the Turlington Community, northeast of the Antioch Baptist Church according to the 1918 Freestone County Soil Survey Map. Another was a tributary of Keechi Creek between Plum Creek and Lanely, as noted on the 1964 Geological Survey Keechi Quadrangle map. Freestone County History Book Volume I, p. 500-501, mentions in the Joe Ervin and Hannah McAdams family history that Joe Ervin was skilled in carpentry and leatherwork. The Confederacy requested his services for making saddles and shoes for the soldiers. Much of his service time was spent at the Confederate Fort at Adkins Mill Pond near Mt. Zion. A tannery was set up where he produced leather goods." This would be in the area that shows up on the Keechi Quadrangle. It was part of the Samuel Defer land grant.





**Paul Fulton sitting on the vat on his front porch in Donie, Texas.  
Photo from Tim Hedrick**

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*The following school report was donated by Peggy Session from the collection of Sheriff J. R. Session historical research. It came in several months after the Hedricks donated the Confederate tanning vat to the museum. The photos were detached; as the tape had disintegrated, so they may not be matched up with the correct title. We are not sure who the people are in the photos. The museum is so very thankful that this history has been preserved for future generations. It is an amazing piece of Freestone County History.*

**The men and children in the photos have not been identified. Please contact the museum if you can provide an identity.**

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# CONFEDERATE TANYARD OF DONIE

Donie was born in Mississippi on September 1, 1836. He came from Mississippi to Texas in the late 1840's. Donie's reason for coming to Texas was that his brother had been killed at Gettysburg. For his brother's services in the army, Donie received a league of land in Bell County. While there he met and married a half-Indian girl from the Texas History Society. After his marriage he traded his land in Bell County for some Spanish horses. Although it was good land, he did not want it because it was open and did not have the track with which he could build fences. That is why he bought some wooded land at Old Eden near Donie. Although it is not known how much land was bought, it was a large sum.

## Fairfield High School

After he settled, he began to operate a freight line from Houston and Galveston to Freestone County. On this freight line he carried food supplies and board plenty, and which he built the first plank house in Old Donie. The round trip from Houston and Galveston to Freestone County took ten by months.

Shortly before Paul Smith

May 17, 1965 in the war, the shop was operated by his wife and slaves, but it was closed down very soon after the end of the war.



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CONFEDERATE TANYARD OF DONIE

Egbert Beal was born in Mississippi on September 4, 1836. He came from Mississippi to Texas in the late 1850's. Beal's reason for coming to Texas was that his brother had been killed at Goliad. For his brother's services in the army, Beal received a league of land in Bell County. While there he met and married a half-Indian girl from the reservation at Keechi. After his marriage he traded his land in Bell County for some Spanish horses. Although it was good land, he did not want it because it was open and did not have any trees with which he could build fences. That is why he bought some wooded land at Old Zion near Donie. Although it is not known how much land was bought, it was a large sum.

After he settled, he began to operate a freight line from Houston and Galveston to Freestone County. On this freight line he carried food supplies and board planks with which he built the first plank house in Old Donie. The round trip from Houston and Galveston to Freestone County took three months.

Shortly before the Civil war, Egbert Beal opened a tanning shop. While he fought in the war, the shop was operated by his wife and slaves, but it was closed down very soon after the end of the war.



Egbert Beal had twelve children while living at Donie, but only three survived to become adults. The others died at an early age or were killed during the War. His three surviving children were Tom, Joe, and Molly.

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1 Interview---Marvin Beal---May 7, 1965

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Egbert Beal is buried in the Old Zion Cemetery. One of his sons, John Beal, was killed while fighting in the Civil War along with his father.

The tanyard was located on a branch, which was named Tanyard Branch after the tanyard. Cow hides were tanned there and then they were made into shoes for Confederate soldiers. A large working party operated the tanyard because it was very large. At this time tanyards were very scarce and this was the only one in this part of Texas.

Mr. J. L. R. Whitaker's father, Robert, came back with Egbert Beal after the Civil War was over to operate the tanyard, but it soon closed down.

The tanyard was located near the Old Zion Church and Cemetery. The Old Zion School consolidated with the Donie Independent School in 1927.

Joe Beal, a great-nephew of Egbert Beal, now lives in Coleman, Texas. It is one mile north of the house where the tanyard was located.

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2 Interview---J. L. R. Whitaker---April 30, 1965

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The tanyard, which was on Tanyard Branch, went out of operation after the Civil War. The vats were made of hewn logs which were fitted together at the ends. Vats were four feet deep, but rose above the ground. These vats were still intact fifty or sixty years after the tanyard closed. Cattle hides were put into the vats, which contained water and the bark off trees. The bark acted as a preserving agent on the hides.

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3 Interview---Jim Fulton---April 30, 1965

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The old tanyard which was operated during the Civil War made shoes for the army. Egbert Beal lived in the house near the tanyard until he moved to the Beal farm. The tanyard was operated until shortly after the Civil War and closed sometime between 1865 and 1870. Beal lived in Donie until his death on April 17, 1907.

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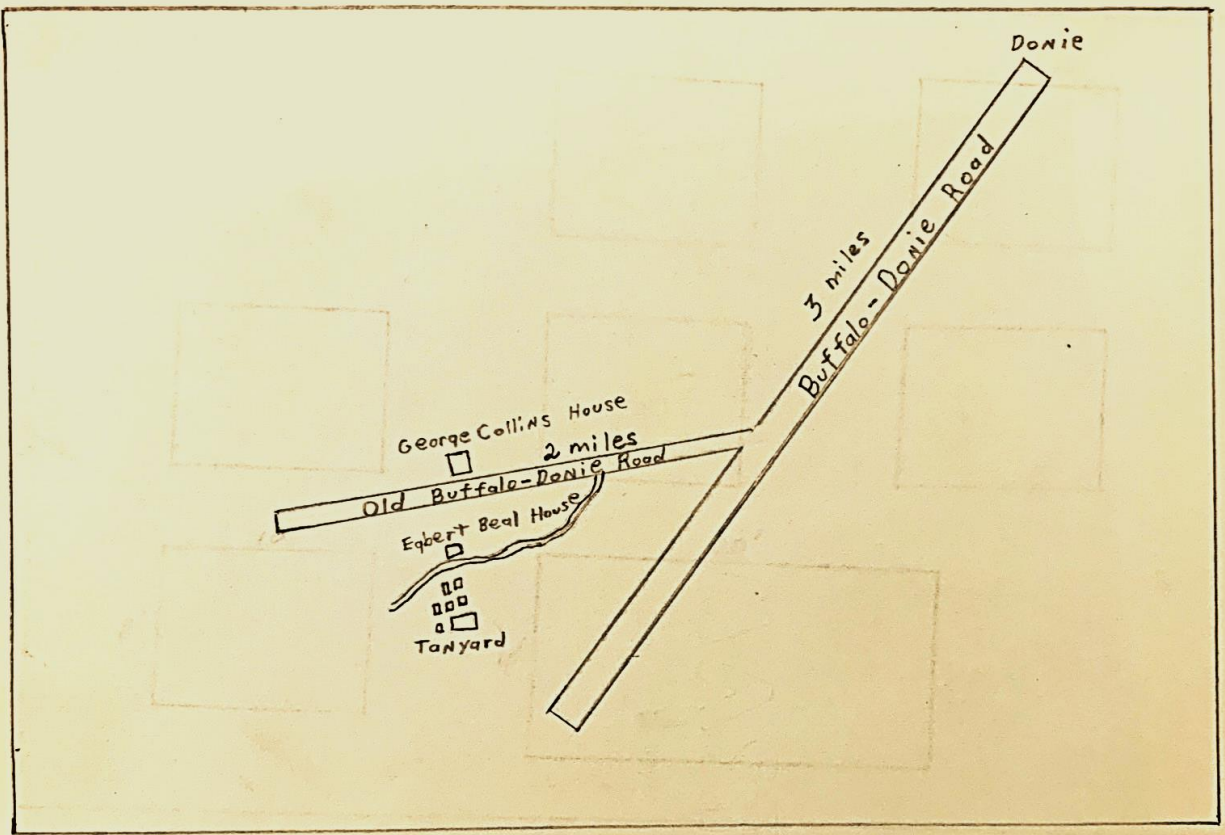
4 Interview---Ray Hall and Paul Pierce---April 30, 1965

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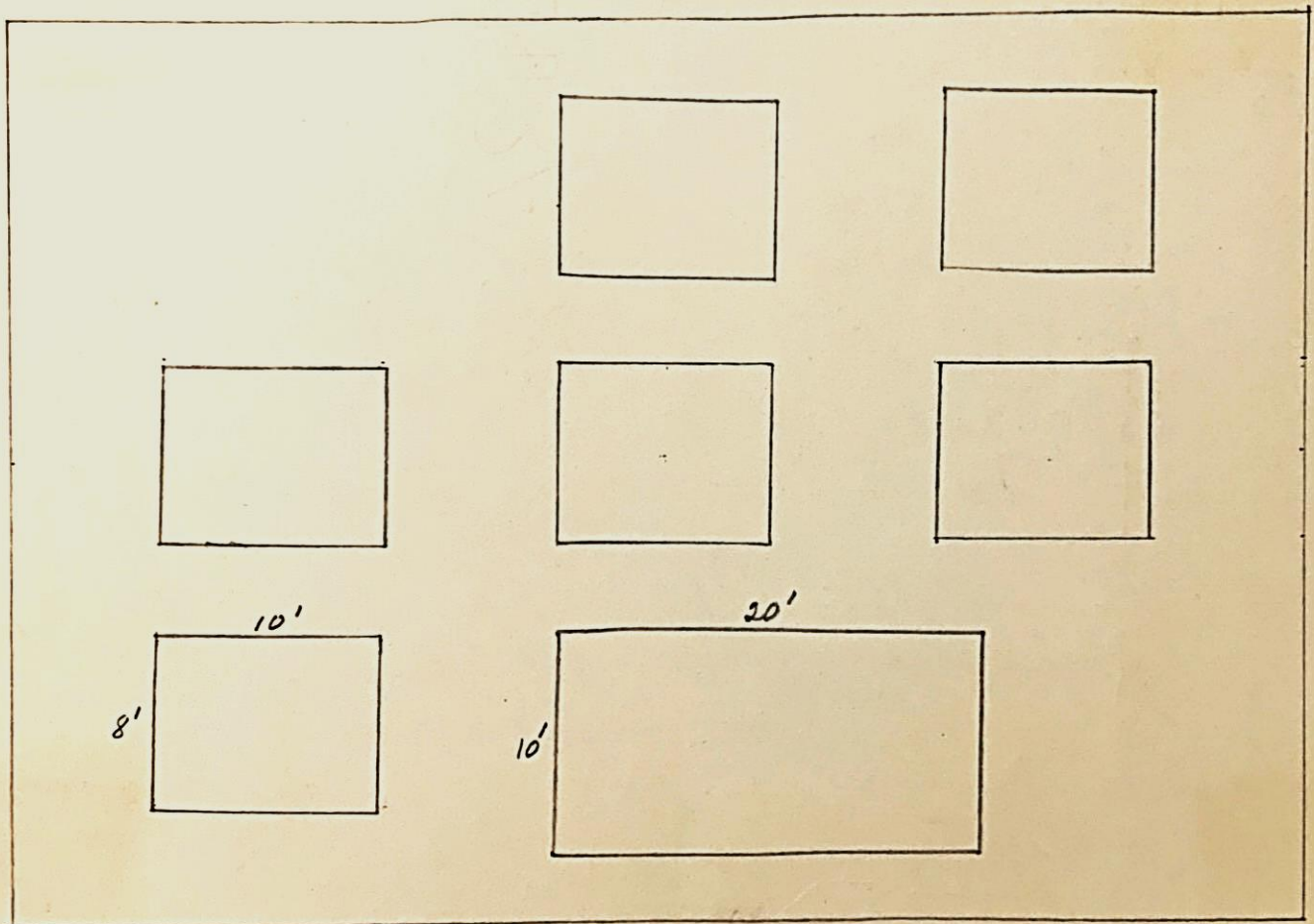
The tanyard was located five miles east of Donie near the Old Buffalo-Donie road. It is one mile north of Mr. George Collins' house, where Mr. Paul Pierce now lives, and three-fourths of a mile north of the Old Buffalo-Donie road.

Today nothing is left of Egbert Beal's house except a pile of rocks which was formerly the chimney. Impressions of the vats are still visible in the ground. There were six small vats that were eight by ten feet in size and one large one which was ten by twenty feet. There are many large sweet gum trees around the vats and the undergrowth is very heavy. It is said that until 1900, there was no undergrowth there. Water was very handy to the house and tanyard for a small stream ran between them. If the ground were dug up around the impressions, it is probable that portions of the vats would be found.

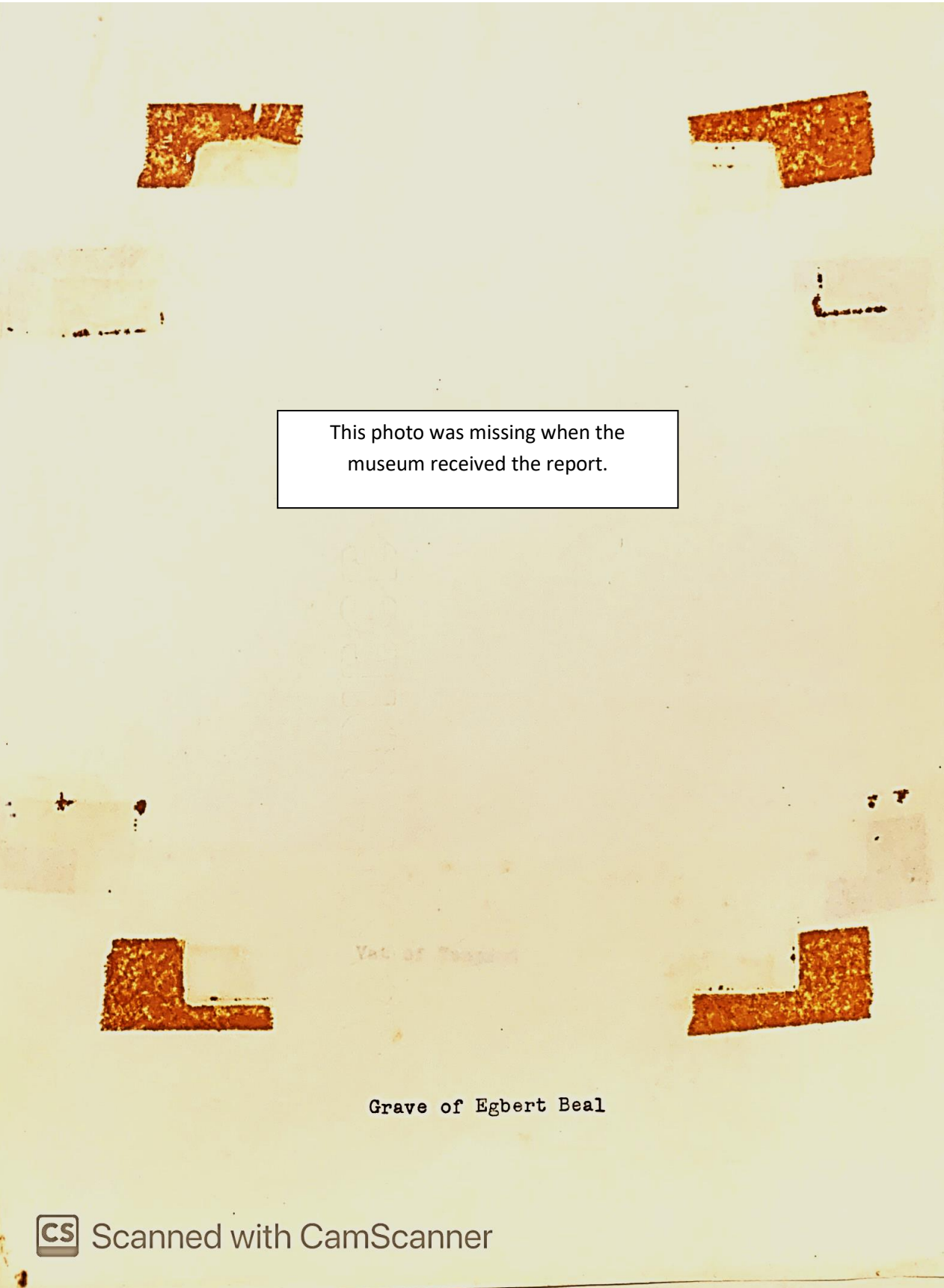


Location of Tanyard





Dimensions of Tanyard

A photograph of a grave site, likely a headstone or marker, which is mostly obscured by a large white rectangular box. The box is positioned in the center of the image. The background is a light-colored, possibly stone or concrete, surface. There are four corner markers, which are small, rectangular, reddish-brown objects, placed at the corners of the area around the box. The markers are located at the top-left, top-right, bottom-left, and bottom-right corners. The text "Grave of Egbert Beal" is visible at the bottom of the image, and a watermark "Scanned with CamScanner" is at the bottom left.

This photo was missing when the  
museum received the report.

Grave of Egbert Beal





Vat of Tanyard





Rocks of Chimney





Vats of Tanyard



