

News Release



CONTACT: Suzy Hartgrove: 713-837-7719
Email: Suzy.Hartgrove@cityofhouston.net

Houston designates Frost Town as City's first archeological site

HOUSTON, October 21, 2009 – Houston City Council designated Frost Town at 80 Spruce Street as an archeological site and protected historic landmark. The designation coincides with Texas Archeology Month sponsored by the Texas Historical Commission.

Frost Town was first settled in 1836 and would become the first residential suburb of the City of Houston, then-Capitol of the new Republic of Texas. Frost Town was located in a bend on the south bank of Buffalo Bayou approximately ½ mile downriver from the present site of downtown Houston. The 15-acre site was purchased from Augustus and John Allen by Jonathan Benson Frost, a Tennessee native and a recent veteran of the Texas Revolution, who paid \$1,500 (\$100 per acre) for the land in April 1837. Frost built a house and blacksmith shop on the property, but died shortly after of cholera. His brother, Samuel M. Frost subdivided the 15 acres into eight blocks of 12 lots each, and began to sell lots on July 4, 1838. By 1839, nearly 70% of the lots were sold. Two lots were set aside for a cemetery, where Jonathan Frost himself was buried.

Frost Town's early development mimics that of nearby Houston's with one notable exception. Whereas downtown Houston first developed as a mix of residences and businesses, Frost Town was primarily residential in character. Early property owners in Frost Town provide an important glimpse into the social and business life of early Houston, and included Michael DeChaumes, a French-born architect who was responsible for some of the earliest architect-designed buildings in Houston; Peter Gabel, a prominent local German-American brewer; and William Settegast, another German-American Houstonian who was a real estate partner of George Hermann.

By late 1840s, there were approximately 75 families living in Frost Town. Many of the early families were German immigrants, although the makeup of the neighborhood was not exclusively German. By the late 1800s, railroad lines criss-crossed the area, and the land surrounding Frost Town was used increasingly for industrial purposes. By the 1930s, the ethnic makeup of the neighborhood had shifted to Mexican-American, and the neighborhood came to be known as Barrio Del Alacran. In the 1950s, Schrimp's Field on the east edge of Frost Town was redeveloped as the Clayton Homes public housing project, and the Elysian Street Viaduct and Highway 59 were constructed through the area. In the 1990s, the last remaining house in Frost Town was demolished and the former Frost Town streets were removed. Today, James Bute Park marks the former community.



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Several archeological studies of Frost Town have been performed at different locations over the past 18 years. Archeological testing in 2004, uncovered archeological remains at 80 Spruce Street dating to Frost Town's 19th century occupation. The site's location is also favorable for Pre-historic occupation due to its relatively high elevation, good drainage and close proximity to flowing water, although no archeological testing has confirmed artifacts from the Pre-historic period. A Texas State Archeological Landmark designation is currently pending for Frost Town, including the 80 Spruce Street location.

Each October, Texas Archaeology Month (TAM) Texas Archaeology Month as an opportunity for Texans to understand the depth and richness of Texas heritage, historical significance of the state's archeological sites, importance of proper archaeological practices, and contributions of archeologists. The Texas Historical Commission sponsors Texas Archeology Month in association with the Texas Archeological Society and the Council of Texas Archeologists.

Houston's Historic Preservation Ordinance recognizes and protects the city's historic sites. By preserving the city's valuable historic resources, residents and visitors are visibly reminded of our culture and heritage, boosting civic pride and economic prosperity. More information is available online at the Planning Department web site at www.houstonplanning.com under Historic Preservation.