

TEXAS CONNECTION

Activity #70 Soil Stories



Extra Resources

Rice University
<http://news.rice.edu/2008/01/17/geoscientists-use-radar-to-locate-lost-graves/>

Rice University
<http://news.rice.edu/2010/07/22/rice-students-search-for-slavery-era-graves-at-prairie-view-cemetery/>

Prairie View A&M
Journal of History and Culture
Summer 2009, page 53
<http://www.pvamu.edu/tiphc/publications/>

Prairie View A&M University
Research at Wyatt Chapel
Community Cemetery
<https://www.pvamu.edu/tiphc/research/>

Wyatt Chapel Community
Cemetery historic marker
http://www.9key.com/markers/marker_detail.asp?atlas_number=5473008115

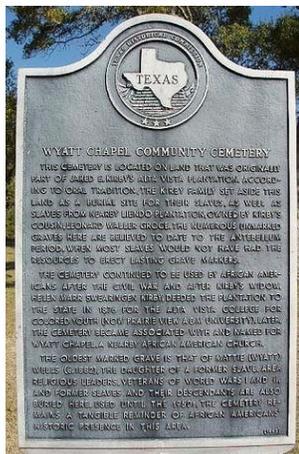
Wyatt Chapel Community
Cemetery information
<http://www.findagrave.com/cgi-bin/fg.cgi?page=cr&CRid=2293572>

Texas Overview

Soil Stories shows students how the physical characteristics of soil help qualify some areas as potential historic landmarks. In this assignment, students examine the physical characteristics of soil and then predict the appropriate land use.

To understand, we must go back to the 1840s-1860s — a time when Texas had cotton plantations and slaves who worked on them. In 1860, 31 percent of the Texas population was made up of slaves.

This story focuses on an area of fertile ground by the Brazos River in Waller County on what is now the Prairie View A&M University campus. Two large, profitable cotton plantations, Alta Vista and Liendo, were located in this area. After the Civil War, the widow of the man who owned Alta Vista sold it to the State of Texas. That land now serves the location of Prairie View A&M.



In the northernmost area of the campus are Pond Creek and Wyatt Chapel Cemetery. According to oral histories, slaves from both the Liendo and Alta Vista plantations were buried in the area near Pond Creek. The cemetery adjoins Wyatt Chapel Baptist Church, which was established in 1894.

A few headstones indicate the person on the marker was buried after the Civil War, but there is no evidence of graves before the Civil War. Oral histories provide the only clue that this cemetery was a burial site for slaves. Floods from the Brazos River would have wiped out any markers or headstones from that time.

This is where our soil enters the story. The area soil is comprised of three to six feet of sand on top of a very hard layer of clay. The clay layer is so hard that even modern day equipment has extreme difficulty penetrating it. Thus, the top layer of sand is where all burials would have taken place. The physical characteristics of the sand make it a good medium for ground

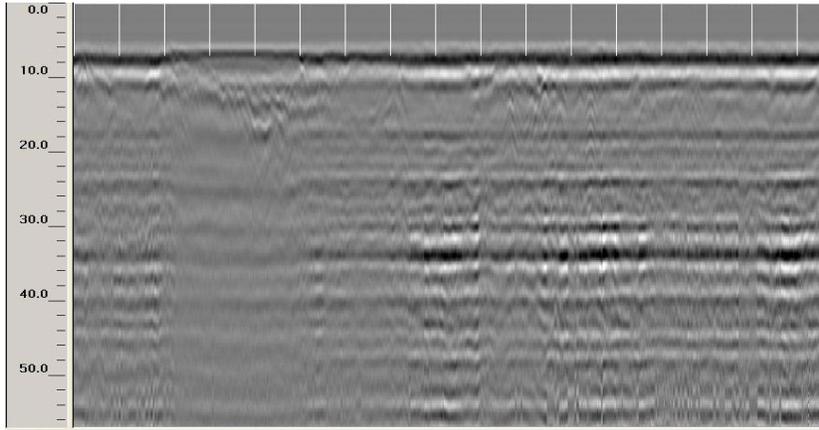


Project Learning Tree is sponsored in Texas by

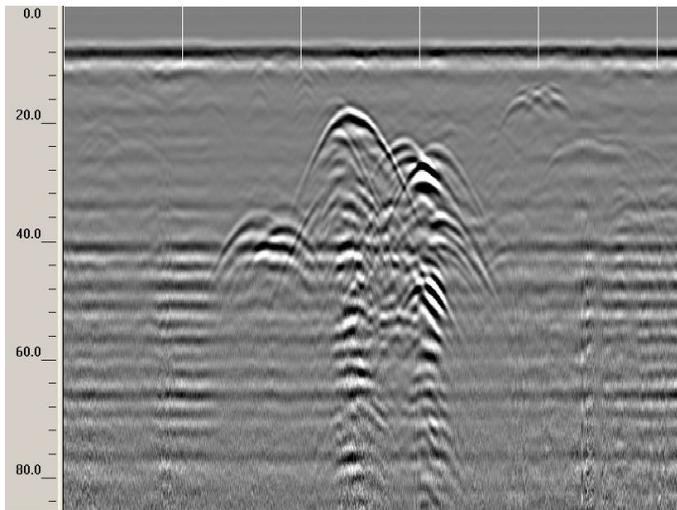


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penetrating radar. The radar could possibly locate the unmarked slave burials sites. A team from Rice University in Houston spent summers in 2007 and 2009 studying the area. Using ground-penetrating radar, they located several “anomalies” including two that were excavated and identified as burial sites. All sites were marked so archeologists and historians can further study the area and possibly identify its cultural and historical significance.



Normal, ground-penetrating radar image of the Wyatt Chapel Community Cemetery area.



Radar Image that shows an anomaly that could be a burial site.

If not for the uniformity of the sandy layer of soil in this area, an important piece of Texas history could have been lost.