

SPOTLIGHTING THE HOLDINGS OF THE INSTITUTION MEMBERS

— *Lake Jackson Historical Museum, Lake Jackson* —

The earliest residents of Brazoria County were Native Americans known as the Karankawa, a tribe that comprised at least five independent bands with shared linguistic and cultural roots. The northern-most band, found in Brazoria, is known as the *Coco*. They first were recorded for history by Spain's Cabeza de Vaca in 1528 after he was shipwrecked on Galveston Island. In the following years, these natives encountered other Spanish explorers, as well as the French; they even battled with the infamous pirates led by Frenchman Jean Lafitte and the settlers in Stephen F. Austin's first colony, the "Old 300." Until recently, surprisingly little remained to be told about these intriguing Texans and their remarkable history.

Now, thanks to a collaboration between anthropology and forensic medicine, one particularly special artifact has provided a chance to experience the *Coco* in a most unexpected manner. Using a skull found during a construction project-turned-archeology dig, anthropologist Rebecca Storey and forensic sculptor Betty Pat Gatliff reconstructed the features of one Karankawa maiden. This Gulf Coast native lived in the 1500s and died at approximately 18 to 20 years of age. She was discov-

ered at the West Galveston archeological site 41GV5, an aboriginal burial ground. The location was exposed during construction and subsequently excavated by Dr. T. E. Pulley. Given the age of the woman and her evident health, complications during childbirth likely led to her death. Although the evidence is not conclusive, infant bones also found at the site suggest that neither mother nor child survived.

A life-like bronze bust depicts the woman's delicate features, memorializing her and the Gulf Coast indigenous people she represents. Today, we can cross the barriers of time, gaze into the face of a lost people, and contemplate the Texas of colonial and precolonial eras. The sculpture and other recent acquisitions are part of an ongoing effort to develop the Karankawa exhibit at the Lake Jackson Historical Museum and increase awareness and appreciation of the region's earliest inhabitants.—*David Thomas*

David Thomas is the executive director of the Lake Jackson Historical Society in Lake Jackson, which operates the Lake Jackson Historical Museum.



Above: See the Karankawa maiden bronze and other artifacts of the Texas Gulf Coast at the Lake Jackson Historical Museum. For additional information, visit www.ljhistory.org. Photographs courtesy of LJHM.