

# Face

## time

### County artifact more than an odd figurine



**This fragment of a pipe bowl excavated at the Abner Jackson Plantation historical site is unique among other pipes discovered at the site due to its intricate face carving.**

In the early-to-mid 1990s, an excavation in Lake Jackson unearthed an oddity: a small, odd-looking piece of a figurine. Was it a doll?

The broken piece is about an inch and a half long and made of clay. Excavators found it among other shards of dinnerware, bottles, buttons and children's toys, all at the Abner Jackson Plantation.

Turns out it was a smoking pipe.

It was a figurehead pipe, in particular, dating from the 1840s to the 1860s, and it has not been determined who the pipe belonged to or who or what it was modeled after, said Lake Jackson

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Historical Association Curator Angela Villarreal.

“Often referred to as a figurehead pipe, the faces in figurehead pipes usually depicted people well-known at the time, including celebrities or characters from stories and mythology,” Villarreal said. “It is unclear if this pipe is in reference to any person or character, specifically.”

All that she knows of this specific pipe’s origin is its excavation location.

In the late 1980s, the Lake Jackson Historical Association acquired several acres of the original Jackson Plantation land, giving them the opportunity to investigate the site, she said.

“In the 1990s, two Texas Archeological Society field schools were conducted, and archaeologist Joan Few led both,” Villarreal said.

Excavations were focused on the remnants of several of the more visible structures of the former plantation, including the Main House and the Sugar Mill. There were two Texas Archaeology Society field schools held at the Jackson Plantation site during the summer of 1994 and 1995.

“Besides the numerous architectural and structural features that were discovered, many items of a more personal nature were found including old bottles; shards of dinnerware including a white granite plate; children’s toys including marbles and broken parts of porcelain dolls; buttons including metal, bone, pearl, white china and black glass buttons; and old clay smoking pipes,” she said. “One clay pipe stood out from the rest, having a face instead of a design.”



## About Artifacts

This regular feature tells the stories behind items found in Brazoria County museums. This month we feature an item at the Lake Jackson Historical Museum.

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**David Thomas explains that even though the face pipe is not the only pipe found at the Abner Jackson plantation, it is the most intricately and uniquely carved one discovered to date.**

An array of figurehead pipes made in the shape of presidents were manufactured and used in the mid 1800s, says “President Pipes: Origin and Distribution” by Michael A. Pfeiffer, Richard T. Gartley and J. Byron Sudbury.

“Anthropomorphic terra cotta tobacco pipe fragments have been found in historical archaeological sites across the United States,” the researchers state. “... In 1979, the ambitious task of documenting what was known about USA clay



**Although only a fragment of the pipe was found, it is the centerpiece of the pipe display at the Lake Jackson Historical Museum.**

tobacco pipe production resulted in an illustrated survey and review article titled *Historic Clay Tobacco Pipemakers in the United States of America* (Sudbury 1979). This landmark study reported 19th Century President pipes made in New Hampshire, New York, Texas, and Virginia, but also recognized that President pipes and other anthropomorphic pipes of the same age and quality (Sudbury 1979: Plate 30) had been recovered in mid-19th century archaeological contexts whose place of manufacture was unknown.”

Using tobacco imported from Virginia, clay pipes began trending in England during the late 16th century, and then British colonizer Sir Walter Raleigh helped bring them in fashion to the American colonies.

“Over the objection to smoking by the church and King James I, production of clay pipes soared,” Villareal said.

By 1700, clay pipes were mass-produced in England for local use and overall export, and by the 1800s, people in Holland, France and Germany manufactured pipes carved in all kinds of odd designs.

“During this time, clay pipes became an elevated art form. In addition to personalities, plants, animals, coats of arms, royal affairs, sporting events, and names of inns – you



**Other clay pipes with faces carved on the bowl were found during excavation at the Jackson Plantation site.**

name it – were celebrated on clay pipes,” Villareal said. “By the 1930s, however, they lost appeal due to world wars and the competition from cigarettes.”

During excavations throughout Brazoria County, archeologists found other clay pipes, including figurehead pipes located at another plantations, Texas Historical Commission Curator Angela Pfeiffer said.

“Figural (figurehead) pipes were found at the Levi Jordan

Plantation,” Pfeiffer said.

The pipes were found some time during the excavations by Ken Brown, circa the 1980s to late 1990s.

“According to our current records, the pipes are just dated as being from ‘the 1800s’ until further research can be completed,” she said.

*The Lake Jackson Historical Museum, 249 Circle Way, is open 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. Tuesday through Saturday. Admission is free.*