

HISTORICAL ARCHEOLOGY

Tom Cook Blacksmith Shop

Directly across the road from the hotel was a blacksmith shop that was owned and operated by a freedman named Thomas Cook. Blacksmith shops were once common all over Texas, but few have survived. Only a handful of blacksmith shops have been identified as archeological sites, and even fewer have been investigated in Texas. The Tom Cook Site is the only documented blacksmith shop in Texas associated with a formerly enslaved man.

Tom Cook was enslaved when he was brought to Tarrant County, Texas, from South Carolina in 1857. He was probably in Tarrant County in 1865 during emancipation, but he appears in Bolivar by 1872. In the 1880 U.S. Census, Cook was a blacksmith in Bolivar living with his wife Lethia and eight children. In 1882, he purchased the Bolivar lot—the location of his blacksmith shop—from an English blacksmith named James Barwis. It is likely that Cook worked at the shop for Barwis before buying it.

Tom Cook died on January 5, 1898, and his family eventually moved to Quakertown, a prominent black community in Denton. With help from Denton County Museum staff, direct descendants of Tom Cook were found still residing in Denton County. They were happy to get involved in the project and helped find others in the local community who could contribute to the oral history research.

At the site, archeologists excavated a dugout dwelling where the Cooks once lived. They also found the blacksmith shop's likely location and a corral area where Cook did his farrier work. Among the thousands of recovered artifacts are: blacksmith tools and residue; broken parts of wagons and agricultural implements; farrier tools, horseshoes and horseshoe nails; and household items like ceramic bowls, plates, and jugs, glass bottle and jar fragments, and children's toys.



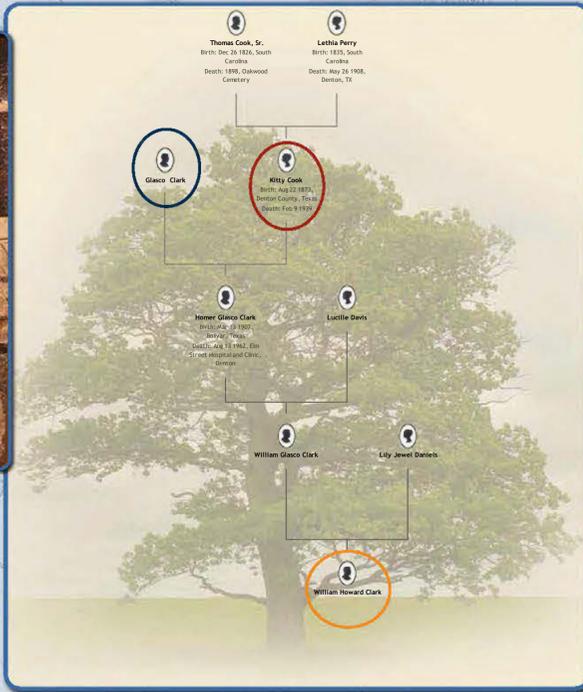
Tom Cook is buried in the Knox cemetery in Denton County, not far from Bolivar. The headstone reads: Thomas Cook / Born / Dec. 28, 1826 / Died / Jan 5, 1898. Image from *Find-A-Grave* online.



Four generations of Tom Cook descendants live in Denton. Clockwise from left: Halee Clark Wright, Betty Clark Kimble, William Howard Clark, and Mylah Willis-Clark. The Clark family has been intimately involved in the research and outreach, and Howard Clark and his daughter, Halee Wright, are part of the project team.



Family tree showing how William Howard Clark (at the bottom) is related to Tom Cook, the blacksmith. The family photo shows Glasco Clark and his wife Kitty Cook Clark, and two sons Andrew (standing) and Homer. A more complete history of Tom Cook's family has been revealed by archival and oral history research. Image used courtesy of the Clark family.



The bit end of a pair of tongs (top) represents one of Tom Cook's personal blacksmithing tools. He probably made these tongs and then discarded them when they got worn out. Tom Cook probably kept and reused the long handles on another pair of tongs. An illustration from the 1897 *Sears and Roebuck Company Catalogue* (bottom) shows a similar pair of blacksmith's tongs.



A farrier uses a clinching tool (right) to bend the ends of the horseshoe nails as he puts on a horseshoe. Image is from the *American Farriers Journal* online.



Tom Cook's clinching tool for shoeing horses.



This photograph shows the dugout structure when the excavation was nearly completed. The blue columns are locations of large postholes that once held up the roof of the family's home. The yellow columns are locations of suspected large posts, but these areas were already disturbed.



During several visits to the site, blacksmith Kelly Kring (right) gave impromptu lectures to the archeological crew. He identified and described blacksmithing artifacts and residue, which helped the archeologists understand what they were finding.



A plate sherd of blue transfer-printed ware.



A child's clay marble.



A bent and clinched (tip cut off) horseshoe nail.



A ceramic pipe bowl from a smoking pipe.



A tray of iron artifacts recovered from a single 1x1-m unit.



The archeologists used small magnets to test the soil for "hammerscale"—the tiny particles of iron that fly off when a blacksmith's hammer hits a red-hot iron object. Concentrations of hammerscale revealed the location of the anvil inside the blacksmith shop.



The artifacts found at the site revealed that Tom Cook was a first-rate blacksmith who knew his trade well. But Tom was more than just a blacksmith. He was a church minister, a freemason, a respected citizen in Bolivar, and a mentor to Fred Moore (who became an educator and community leader in Denton).



This photograph shows the partially excavated rock-lined dugout house (foreground) that was likely occupied by Tom Cook and his family. The red box shows where the blacksmith shop once stood, and the area behind it was probably a corral where Tom Cook kept his clients' horses and did farrier work. Image is from *A Frontier Fur Trade Blacksmith Shop, 1796-1812*, by John D. Light and Henry Unglik, 1984.