



Plow Share (Point)
Collins Homestead & Cotton Gin, Birdston Valley Community
(1893-1940s)

This type of steel plow share, or point, was likely part of a Blackland plow, which was popular in Texas, Oklahoma, Arkansas, and Louisiana for its ability to cut through dense, waxy clay. This type of conventional, or blacksmith, plow was patented by W.B. Vestal on March 28, 1893 and used until the 1940s when tractors became common.



American Pattern Hand File
Collins Homestead & Cotton Gin, Birdston Valley Community
(Early to mid-20th century)

This file may have been used for sharpening cotton gin saws or farm tools.

The Richland Creek Archaeological Project, Freestone and Navarro Counties, Texas

From 1982-1984, the Southern Methodist University Archaeology Research Program (ARP) performed archaeological survey and excavations across the 47,750-acre area that would become the Richland Chambers Reservoir. The goal was to identify and mitigate impacts to significant cultural resources within the reservoir footprint ahead of construction. The ARP investigated a total of 106 prehistoric and historic sites. Several of the sites were identified as parts of freedom colonies, including Birdston Valley and Cheneyboro. Today, these sites are among only a handful of freedom colonies and towns that have been archaeologically investigated in Texas.

Birdston Valley Community

The story of the Birdston Valley Community began in 1873 when Mingo Burleson, a man formerly enslaved on the Burleson Plantation, purchased 250 acres from M.E. Johnston for \$2,000. Upon his death in 1877, his land was left to his wife, Nancy Burleson (85 acres), Henry and Sarah Cooper (83 acres), and Isom and Cheney Collins (82.5 acres). In 1886, Anderson Eakles, son of Nancy Burleson, and his wife Crasy purchased land to the east. In a short time, the Birdston Valley residents built a cotton gin, church, masonic hall, and cemetery. Cotton gins are rarely attributed to Black ownership, and its presence at the Collins homestead demonstrates the economic strength of this community. By the early 20th century, the Collins (1877-1900) and Cooper (1877-1902) families had sold their land and moved to nearby towns like Streamman and Corsicana. Their land was subsequently (ca. 1900-1940) controlled by White landowners and worked by tenant and day laborers. The Eakles remained on their land until 1932. Descendants of the Birdston Valley community continued to maintain the cemetery and other buildings.



Metal Buttons
Collins Homestead & Cotton Gin, Birdston Valley Community
(Early to mid-20th century)

These are three of ten buttons recovered from the Collins homestead. The "Dixie King" button was from Dixie King "Union Made" overalls or workwear, sold in Texas in the 1910s-1940s. During that time, a pair of overalls ranged from \$0.90 to \$4.25. The "Lone Star" button may have come from men's workwear or a coat. The painted button may have come from a women's blouse.



Shoe Parts
Cooper Homestead, Birdston Valley
(ca. 1895-1930)

Early shoes were made of leather and rubber, and their parts were stitched and nailed together. Laces would have been threaded through metal, in this case copper or brass, eyelets. Shoe makers began using all rubber heels in 1895. Shoes were not cemented together until after 1924 when strong glues were developed.

Archaeology in the Birdston Valley Community, Navarro County, TX

Richland Chambers Reservoir

Cooper Farmstead

Collins Farmstead & Cotton Gin

Burleson Farmstead

Eakles Farmstead

Tenant Farmer Residences

Birdston Valley Baptist Church & Cemetery

Scan for Birdston Valley Community in USA News

Church similar to the Birdston Valley (formerly Goodwill) Baptist Church

SMU's Archaeology Research Program crew (below) excavating at the proposed Richland Chambers Reservoir site.

Photographs (above) and architectural drawings (below) of a Cumberland-style home, likely built by Willis Cooper, adopted son of Henry and Sarah Cooper.

Scan for Birdston Valley Texas Historical Marker

Jarney & Main 1987



The Great Western Gloves Tag
Cooper Homestead, Birdston Valley
(1901-1920)

This tag would have been fastened to a pair of Great Western Auto Gloves used for driving. The company that made them, Elsworth & Thayer Manufacturing Company, was based out of Milwaukee, Wisconsin from 1901-1920.



Cloth
Cooper Homestead, Birdston Valley

This cloth may have been part of a women's blouse or handkerchief. If you look closely, you can see flowers printed on the fabric.



Corsicana Vehicle Company Tag
Baker Farmstead, Cheneyboro Community
(1892-1895)

The Corsicana Vehicle Company was chartered with \$50,000 in capital on May 15, 1892. The Austin Weekly Statesman newspaper states that the company opened to sell all types of wholesale goods and merchandise. According to the Galveston Tribune, however, the company was short-lived, as they entered a receivership in 1895 after they fell into debt. This tag represents the purchase of locally produced goods.

Richland Creek Archaeological Project Legacy Collection, Archaeology Research Collections, SMU