

ELYSIAN VIADUCT

Construction and Archeology Update

SEPTEMBER 2016



IN THIS ISSUE

- Project Summary.....1
- Project Location1

- Hidden History in Houston.....2
- Archeology Timeline2
- What has TxDOT found?2

- History of Frost Town.....3
- Demographic through time.....3

- Next Steps4
- Get Involved.....4

Project Summary

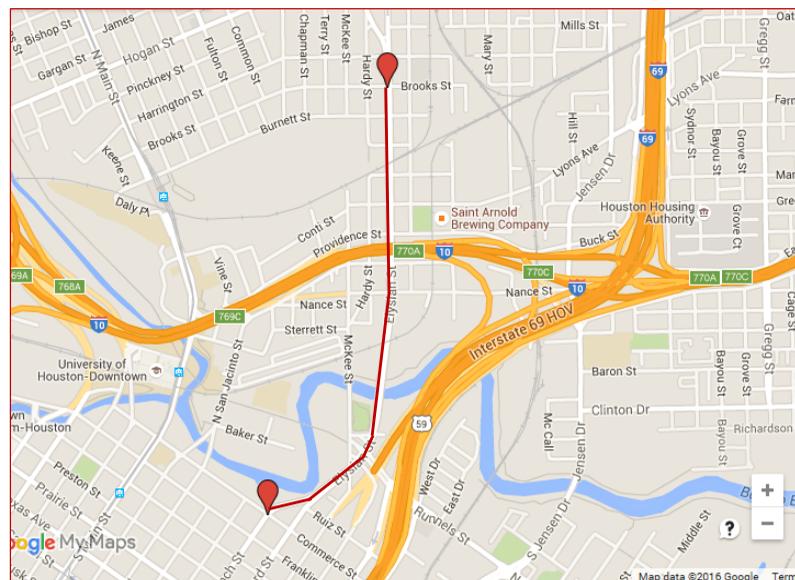
This project includes the reconstruction of the Elysian Viaduct (bridge structure) from Brooks Street to Commerce Street, in Houston (Harris County). The Elysian Viaduct project is approved for construction to improve safety as well as accommodate population growth, enhance mobility and improve connectivity in the local area. The Houston District let the Elysian Viaduct road contract in September 2013 and the contract was awarded and signed in March 2014. Due to delays with acquiring right-of-way, the State issued another construction bid and it was awarded to Balfour Beatty in June 2016 for \$35.6 million.

The project improvements include:

- Replacing and widening the bridge structure to accommodate paved shoulders and increase the structural integrity to current design standards, as well as improving the roadway approaches
- Adding shoulders to the four-lane roadway within a varying right of way (ROW) width from 90 feet to 120 feet
- Adding a five-foot wide sidewalk along the northbound lanes (east side) between Runnels and Ruiz Streets

This project does require additional Right-of-Way and displacements.

Project Location



A Hidden History in Houston

The modern landscape of Houston, the fourth largest city in the United States, is one of constant change. In dramatic contrast to the city’s Gulf Coast neighbor, New Orleans, where history and tradition are woven into the look and feel of everyday life, Houston is the embodiment of its “Space City” name. In a city that is always looking to the future, tangible reminders of the past can be elusive. These reminders are not gone, however, only buried beneath the surface. They provide the foundation on which Houston is built.

Frost Town, Houston’s first neighborhood, dates to the 1830s and was located just a few blocks north of Minute Maid Park. What began as a community of predominantly immigrant German laborers in the 1830s became home to many African American families following emancipation, and later a vibrant Hispanic neighborhood during the early decades of the 20th century. At Frost Town, the rich ethnic diversity that embodies the City of Houston today is revealed as not new, but a fundamental part of the city’s heritage.

Archeology Timeline

Archeologists from Prewitt and Associates, Inc. (PAI) began Data Recovery excavations at the Frost Town site in early May, 2016. Excavations will continue through early November, at which time construction crews will demolish the bridge structure and begin removing the debris. The Frost Town archeological area will be one of the first areas cleared, allowing archeologists an opportunity to complete their excavations in areas that were not accessible prior to demolition.

What has TxDOT Found?

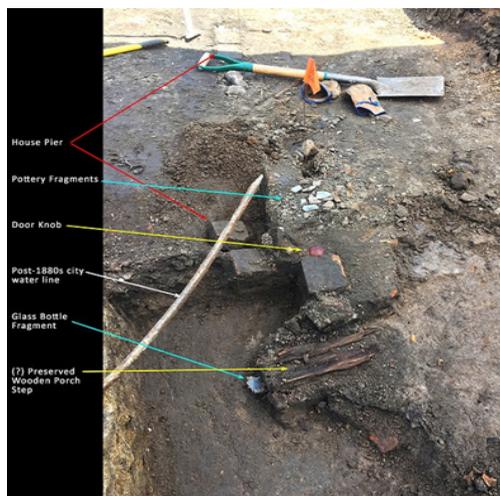
So far, archeologists have documented several “features,” including a 19th century rainwater cistern at Frost Town, in collaboration with the Houston Archeological Society. A cistern is a system used to collect and store rainwater for household and other uses.

The goal of initial hand excavations will be to identify each feature’s type and age as precisely as possible. Cultural features that are related to Frost Town occupations will be given the most attention, especially ones that are deemed to be relatively intact and have good archeological contexts.



Archeologists excavate a 19th century cistern at Frost Town.

The remains of a house lot discovered during 2016 archeological excavations at Frost Town.

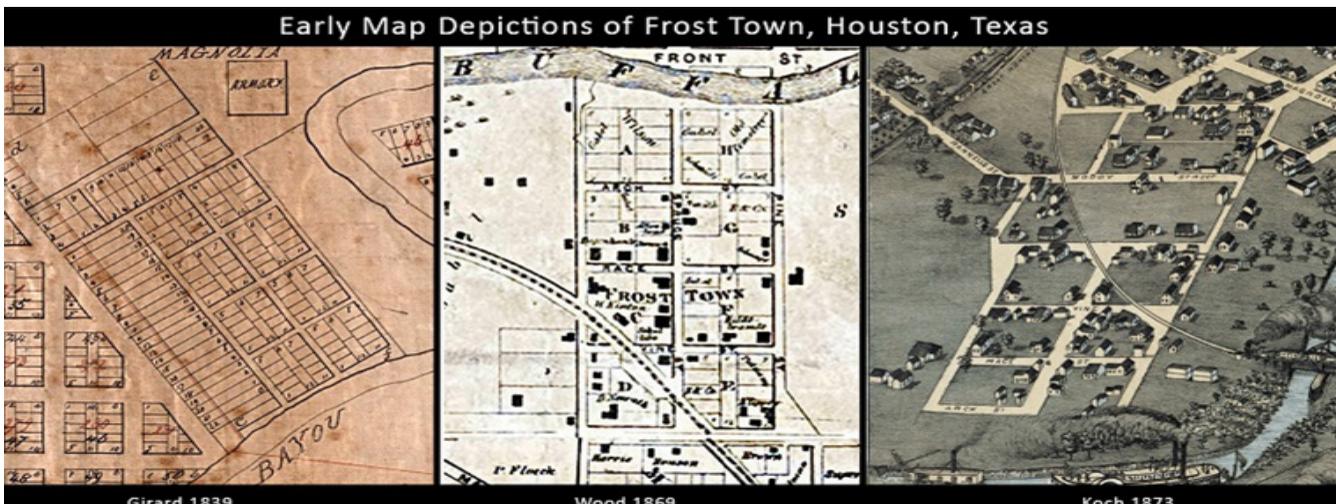


Archeologists at Frost Town recover a blown glass inkwell.

The History of Frost Town

The community of Frost Town was located within a prominent horseshoe bend along the southern banks of Buffalo Bayou. The property, located less than one half mile east of Allen’s Landing, was part of an 1824 Mexican land grant made to John Austin, but the earliest settlement at this location may date as early as 1822.

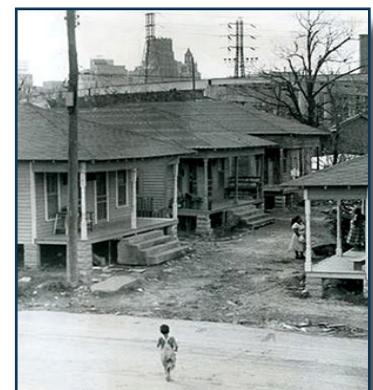
Jonathan Benson Frost built a home and settled there sometime after July 1836, and Austin sold this portion of his land holdings to the Allen brothers in August 1836. Frost then bought the land where he had located his home, including about 15 acres in the horseshoe bend, from the Allen brothers in April 1837. A platted subdivision is illustrated within the bayou bend at this location on an 1839 map of Houston, which by this time had become known as the community of Frost Town.



Early maps show that Frost Town was originally comprised of eight city blocks that were designated as Blocks A–F. By the 1880s, Frost Town had expanded to include additional blocks east, west, and south of the original eight-block area. The residential area to the south, called the Moody Addition, was commonly referred to as part of Frost Town in Houston City Directories printed between 1880 and 1905. Two bird’s eye views of Houston show that the Frost Town area was a well-developed neighborhood by 1873 and densely settled by 1891.

Demographic through Time

German laborers were among the earliest residents of the Frost Town community, and they would continue to dominate the demographic of the neighborhood for many decades. Germans immigrants settled in virtually every area of Houston, but the Second Ward became an unofficial hub of German-American culture and social life during the nineteenth century. During the last quarter of the nineteenth century, early European immigrant families moved to other areas, and Frost Town changed into a predominantly African American neighborhood. At the turn of the century, Frost Town had 143 households, of which 56 percent were black, 44 percent were white, and none were Hispanic.



A 1957 photo of the 600 block of El Barrio Alacran, Houston, Texas.

In 1920, the Frost Town population was nearly 50 percent black, 20 percent white, and the Mexican population increased to 30 percent. The neighborhood continued to change, and in the 1930s the population was 66 percent Hispanic, 24 percent black, and 10 percent white. During this period, the old Frost Town neighborhood became known as El Barrio del Alacran – the Scorpion neighborhood.

Next Steps

Construction Timing

August 2016:

- Construction authorized to start

Late 2017/Early 2018:

- Temporary closure of Elysian Viaduct (specific timing to be determined)

Construction will last an estimated 32 months; however, timing is subject to change. Once the specific construction schedule is known, more information will be provided.



Get Involved

The public is encouraged to stay updated about the project by:

- Reviewing the Frost Town Archeology Site Video at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qPDyQt6TfMU>
- Signing up for an Elysian Viaduct email subscription by visiting www.txdot.gov and Search: **Elysian Viaduct**
- Checking the Houston TranStar site for closure and detour information at: <https://traffic.houstontranstar.org/layers/>
- Following us on the TxDOT Houston Twitter site at: <https://twitter.com/TxDOTHoustonPIO>

Or, scan with your phone or tablet:



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