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Plant Remains from the Washington Square Mound site (41NA49), Nacogdoches, Texas

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Plant Remains from the Washington Square Mound site (41NA49), Nacogdoches, Texas

Leslie L. Bush

Introduction

Botanical remains were identified from 27 lots from the Washington Square Mound site (41NA49). The primary occupation at the site is Middle Caddo period in age. The first pooled set of calibrated radiocarbon dates from the site fell into the period A.D. 1268-1302 (Corbin and Hart 1998:74), while a recent set of five calibrated dates from samples of plant remains discussed in this article range from A.D. 1279 ± 17 (Feature 115); (2) A.D. 1358 ± 57 (Feature 9); and three dates on charred corn from Features 36, 81, and 86 range from as early as A.D. 1394 to as late as A.D. 1437 (see Perttula 2016:Table 1). These dates as a group fall in the Middle Caddo period; there is limited evidence at the site for other, smaller occupations, including Late Caddo and Late Woodland/Early Caddo. At least three mounds were visible in the nineteenth century. Much of the site was never plowed, a situation that has resulted in intact shallow deposits and unusually large pottery sherds, although a high school has been built over parts of the non-mound site area.

Labels of botanical lots that included excavation dates indicate a range from 1979 to 1983, associating the botanical remains with Stephen F. Austin State University Field School excavations that took place during this time. At least nine features are represented in the botanical lots. Four are described as charcoal-filled pits (Features 8, 9, 51, and 86), one as a pit (Feature 115), and one as a post mold (Feature 18) (Corbin and Hart 1998:61, 63, 64). Feature 36 was a corn cob concentration (Corbin and Hart 1998:65). Botanical lots for Features 62, 81, and 199 are also present.

The Washington Square Mound site is situated in the city of Nacogdoches, Texas, on an interfluve between Banita Creek and La Nana Creek, which drain into La Nana Bayou and the Angelina River. The area lies squarely in the Pineywoods ecological zone, the westernmost extension of the great Southeastern Evergreen Forest that reaches across the southeastern United States to the Atlantic coast (Braun 2001:281). The dominant vegetation type in an upland area such as Washington Square during presettlement times would have been a shortleaf pine community, where shortleaf pines (*Pinus echinata*) share dominance with dry-site oaks such as southern red oak (*Quercus falcata*), post oak (*Q. stellata*), and blackjack oak (*Q. marilandica*), hickories (*Carya* spp.), and elms (*Ulmus* spp.) (Bezanson 2000:26-27; Diggs et al. 2006:88-89). Springs and marshy areas nearby would have offered aquatic and wetland plants such as river cane (*Arundinaria gigantea*) (Bezanson 2000:31-32, 42; Diggs et al. 2006:834-836, 845). A spring-fed pond is reported to have existed north of the site, and a marshy area to the southwest (Corbin and Hart 1998:50).

Pollen studies indicate that use of the modern and recent vegetation is appropriate for understanding the plants and attendant animal resources available to occupants of the sites during prehistoric times (Albert 2007; Bousman 1998). Some fluctuations in rainfall and temperature have taken place, however. In addition, more frequent fires would have made the understory in the uplands less prominent than today (Diggs et al. 2006:81). Early explorers in East Texas and other parts of the Eastern Woodlands noted the open, park-like nature of many woodlands (Diggs et al. 2006:80-81).

Methods

Labels of the botanical lots indicate that some were designated as carbon samples and others recovered though fine screening using 1/16-inch (1.6 mm) mesh. In four cases, large amounts of clay sediment obscured the botanical remains. These lots were placed in no-see-um mesh with triangular openings of 0.5 x 0.4 x 0.3 mm and soaked overnight in a solution of 12 cups of tap water to one cup of baking soda (NaHCO₂). The samples were rinsed of clay and dried in their mesh bags before sorting.

Botanical lots were sorted and identified according to standard procedures (Pearsall 2015). Equipment was cleaned between samples, and latex gloves were worn when handling material to help preserve suitability for radiocarbon dating. Wood charcoal from Lot 1149 was handled without gloves, so this material may not be suitable for dating.

Botanical lots containing only one or two items were placed on a sorting tray and examined and identified under a Micros stereozoom microscope at 7-45 X magnification. Larger botanical lots were first size-sorted through a stack of graduated geologic mesh. Materials that did not pass through the No. 10 mesh (2 mm square openings) were completely sorted under the microscope, and all botanical remains other than rootlets were counted, weighed, recorded, and labeled. Rocks, soil clumps and rootlets that did not pass through the No. 10 mesh were weighed and recorded as "Non-botanical > 2 mm." All materials that passed though the No. 10 mesh ("Residue < 2 mm") were scanned under the microscope. Whole corn cupules and material not previously identified in the larger size fraction were removed from residue, counted, weighed, and labeled.

Whole corn cupules were measured according to methods set out by Robert Bird (1994). In cases where cupules were conjoined in a rank, cupule height (sometimes referred to as thickness) was determined by measuring the entire rank and dividing by the number of cupules present. Cupule depth was too shallow to be accurately measured.

Identification was attempted for 20 carbonized wood specimens selected at random from those larger than 2 mm from each sample. When fewer than 20 fragments were present, smaller fragments were selected in decreasing order of size until either all fragments were identified, 20 fragments were identified, or identification became impractical. Wood fragments were snapped to reveal a transverse section and examined under a stereoscopic microscope at 28-180 X magnification. When necessary, tangential or radial sections were examined for ray seriation, presence of spiral thickenings, types and sizes of inter-vessel pitting, and other minute characteristics that can only be seen at the higher magnifications of this range.

Botanical materials were identified to the lowest possible taxonomic level by comparison to materials in the Macrobotanical Analysis comparative collection and through the use of standard reference works (e.g., Core et al. 1979; Davis 1993; Hoadley 1990; InsideWood 2004-onwards; Martin and Barkley 1961; Panshin and de Zeeuw 1980; Wheeler 2011). Plant nomenclature follows the PLANTS database (USDA, NRCS 2015).

Results

A summary of plant parts and taxa identified in the botanical lots is shown in Table 1. Detailed information including number of specimens and weight is given by lot number in Table 2, and corn cupule measurements are provided in Table 3.

Table 1. Plants identified from the Washington Square Mound site (41NA49).

Corn	Cupules and glumes
	Kernels
Seeds	Maygrass
	Pine
	Indeterminable
Nutshell	Acorn
	Hickory
	Hickory/walnut family
Stems	River cane
	Small grass
Wood	Beech
	Elm, hard group
	Hickory
	Honeylocust
	Live group oak
	Persimmon
	Pine
	Red group oak
	Red mulberry
	Sweetgum
	White group oak
	Indeterminable
Bark	Pine
	Indeterminable
Cone scales	Pine
Indeterminable	Starchy fragments, probably corn kernel
	Indeterminable

Plant remains recovered are typical of Middle Caddo period sites. Corn and nutshell, especially hickory, are common. River cane and pine cone parts are also present. Wood charcoal reflects trees that would have been available in the local forests. One lot (Lot 1149, recovery method unknown) yielded two maygrass seeds, which are sufficiently small that they are rarely found in investigations where flotation is not used as a recovery method. Two plant taxa not found in these samples have been previously identified from the Washington Square Mound site: ash wood charcoal and carbonized bean cotelydons (Gennett 1983). Ash trees would likely have been present along the creeks near the site. The beans are reported from Feature 44, which Corbin and Hart describe as "2 Deer Bones," and may belong to the latest Caddo component (Corbin and Hart 1998:65).

Corn cupules at the Washington Square Mound site are smaller than corn measurements reported for other Caddo sites (Table 4). There is some variability in the assemblage, however. More than half of the cupules measured (184 of 312) came from Lot 1149 (Feature 199), where cupules were smaller than the site mean (width = 3.6 mm, height = 1.73 mm). Cupules measured for this study are smaller than previously-measured cupules from the same feature, which averaged 5-6 mm in width (Gennett 1983). Cupules from two contexts, Lot 221 (Feature 36) and Lot 594 (context unknown), had cupule widths averaging more than 5 mm.

Table 2. Floral samples from the Washington Square Mound site (41NA49). All plants carbonized unless otherwise indicated.

Lot #, Context, Recovery Method	Plant part	Botanical name	Common name	Number of Individual Specimens	Weight (g)	Comments
Carbon sample Carbon sample 109 N227 W102 Level 3, 20-30 cm. Recovery method	Botanical Rachis Stem Wood Wood Wood Wood Wood Wood Wood Woo	Indeterminable Zea mays Arundinaria gigantea Carya sp. Fagus grandifolia Hardwood Quercus sect. Lobatae Quercus sect. Quercus Ulmus sp.	Indeterminable Corn Cane Hickory Beech Hardwood Red group oak White group oak Elm	1	0.01 0.03 0.03 0.01 0.04 0.02 0.04 2.08	cob frags with 4 whole cupules
not noted. 198 Feature 18 N 156 W 96 Carbon sample In 2 bags One bag soaked overnight in NaHCO3 solution.	Botanical Nutshell Nutshell Nutshell Rachis Seed Wood Wood Wood Wood Wood Wood Wood W	Indeterminable Carya sp. Juglandaceae Quercus sp. Zea mays Indeterminable Zea mays Carya sp. Diffuse-porous hardwood Hardwood Not examined for species Pinus sp. Quercus sect. Lobatae Quercus sect. Quercus Quercus sp.	Indeterminable Hickory Hickory/walnut family Acorn Corn Starchy fragments Corn Hickory Diffuse-porous hardwood Hardwood Not examined for species Pine Red group oak White group oak Oak	107 37 16 204 35 5 5 13 13 173 6	0.36 1.33 0.12 0.49 0.15 0.01 0.03 0.03 0.03 0.03 0.03 0.03 0.03	cupules, 5 whole prob corn kernel frags kernel frags

Table 2. Floral samples from the Washington Square Mound site (41NA49). All plants carbonized unless otherwise indicated, cont.

Lot #, Context, Recovery Method	Plant part	Botanical name	Соттоп пате	Number of Individual Specimens	Weight (g)	Comments
198	Botanical	Indeterminable	Starchy fragments	3	0.02	prob corn kernel frags
Feature 18	Botanical	Indeterminable	Indeterminable	36 <u>.</u>	0.17	
N 156 W 96	Nutshell	Carya sp.	Hickory	S	0.04	
Recovery method	Nutshell	Juglandaceae	Hickory/walnut family	5	0.04	
not noted.	Nutshell	Quercus sp.	Acorn	4	0.01	
	Rachis	Zea mays	Corn	4	0.02	cupule frags
	Seed	Zea mays	Corn	4	0.02	kernel frags
	Wood	Carya sp.	Hickory	9	0.04	
	Wood	Hardwood	Hardwood	3	0.03	
	Wood	Liquidambar styraciflua	Sweetgum	1	0.05	
	Wood	Not examined for species	Not examined for species	248	1.04	
	Wood	Pinus sp.	Pine	1	0.01	
	Wood	Quercus sect. Lobatae	Red group oak	3	0.02	
	Wood	Quercus sect. Quercus	White group oak	9	0.04	
	Residue < 2 mm				0.35	
221	Rachis	Zea mays	Corn	4	0.05	removed for 14C
Feature 36	Rachis	Zea mays	Corn	49	0.48	whole cupules, 2 conjoined
N 227 W 104	Rachis	Zea mays	Corn	206	1.02	cupule frags and glumes
Recovery method	Stem	Arundinaria gigantea	Cane	2	0.01	
not noted.	Residue < 2 mm				1.22	
Soaked overnight in NaHCO3 solution	Non-botanical > 2 mm				0.13	
229	Nutshell	Carya sp.	Hickory	8	0.38	removed for 14C
Feature 9	Nutshell	Quercus sp.	Acorn	2	0.01	
Carbon sample	Rachis	Zea mays	Corn	4	0.02	whole cupules, not soaked
Soaked overnight in	Rachis	Zea mays	Corn	1	0.02	whole cupule, not soaked
NaHCO3 solution	Rachis	Zea mays	Corn	14	80.0	whole cupules
after hickory nutshell	Rachis	Zea mays	Corn	190	0.48	cupule frags and glumes
and some corn	Seed	Indeterminable	Indeterminable	1	0.01	
and pine wood						
removed.	Seed	Zea mays	Corn	1	0.01	kernel frag

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Lot #, Context, Recovery Method	Plant part	Botanical name	Common name	Number of Individual Specimens	Weight (g)	Comments
229, cont.	Wood Residue < 2 mm Non-botanical > 2 mm	Pinus sp.	Pine	28	0.41 3.41 1.69	
378 Feature 8 Fine screen	Cone scales Botanical Nutshell	Pinus sp. Indeterminable Quercus sp.	Pine Indeterminable Acorn	8 1	0.01	
	Seed Stem Wood Wood	Zea mays Zea mays Arundinaria gigantea Hardwood Liquidambar styraciflua	Corn Cane Hardwood Sweetgum		0.01 0.03 0.09 0.01	kernel frag
	Wood Wood Wood Residue < 2 mm Non-botanical > 2 mm Ceramic, plain body sherd	Quercus sect. Lobatae Quercus sect. Quercus Quercus sp.	Red group oak White group oak Oak	2 2 3	0.02 0.01 0.03 4.73 12.52 7.65	
529 N227 W114, 30-40 cm. Recovery method unknown.	Wood	Liquidambar styraciftua	Sweetgum	-	0.29	
562 N215 W160 . Level 4, 30-40 cm. Recovery method unknown.	Rock			1	0.25	
563 N216 W161 Level 5, 40-50 cm. Recovery method unknown.	Wood	Quercus sect. Quercus	White group oak	-	0.30	
594 Context unknown Carbon sample	Cone scales Botanical Nutshell	Pinus sp. Indeterminable Carya sp.	Pine Indeterminable Hickory	270 10 2 19	1.62 0.04 0.01	selmin eloqm
	Nacius	Lea mays	Colin	17	77.0	witore cupures

Table 2. Floral samples from the Washington Square Mound site (41NA49). All plants carbonized unless otherwise indicated, cont.

Lot #, Context, Recovery Method	Plant part	Botanical name	Common name	Number of Individual Specimens	Weight (g)	Comments
594, cont.	Rachis Wood Wood Residue Non-botanical > 2 mm	Zea mays Carya sp. Quercus sp.	Corn Hickory Oak	53	0.26 0.14 0.01 2.96 0.05	cupule frags and glumes
Feature 81 Fine screen	Botanical Nutshell Nutshell Rachis Rachis Rachis Rood Wood Wood Non-botanical > 2 mm Residue < 2 mm	Indeterminable Carya sp. Juglandaceae Quercus sp. Zea mays Zea mays Zea mays Carya sp. Hardwood	Indeterminable Hickory Hickory/walnut family Acorn Corn Corn Horkory Hardwood	16 52 3 3 3 4 4 4 10 13 2 2 2 2 2 2 2 2 2 2 3 3 3 3 3 3 3 3	0.09 1.47 0.17 0.01 0.03 0.03 0.03 1.27 1.33	removed for 14C whole cupules cupule frags
F96 N214 W161 in 2 bags Recovery method not noted. 601 Feature 72. Fine screen 602 Context unknown Fine screen in 2 bags combined in lab	Cone scales Rachis Wood Residue < 2 mm Rocks Cone scales Botanical Botanical Nutshell Nutshell Seed Wood Wood Wood Wood Non-botanical > 2 mm	Pinus sp. Zea mays Carya sp. Pinus sp. Indeterminable Indeterminable Carya sp. Juglandaceae Pinus sp. Hardwood Not examined for species Ulmus sp.	Pine Corn Hickory Pine Starchy fragments Indeterminable Hickory Hickory And Hickory Eine Hardwood Not examined for species Elm	104 8 8 8 11 175 175 2 2 2 2 2 18	0.60 0.01 1.23 9.11 9.11 0.67 0.09 0.09 0.02 0.01 0.01 0.01 0.01 0.01	glumes prob corn kernel frag

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Lot #, Context, Recovery Method	Plant part	Botanical name	Common name	Number of Individual Specimens	Weight (g)	Comments
Feature 86 Context unknown Fine screen	Cone scales Botanical Botanical Nutshell Nutshell Rachis Rachis Rachis Rachis Wood Wood Wood Wood Wood Wood Wood Woo	Pinus sp. Indeterminable Indeterminable Carya sp. Juglandaceae Zea mays Zea mays Zea mays Zea mays Zea mays Zea ways Quercus sp. Quercus sect. Quercus Quercus sp.	Pine Starchy fragments Indeterminable Hickory Hickory/walnut family Corn Corn Corn Hickory Sweetgum Pine Red group oak White group oak Oak	4 5 7 1 1 0 1 0 0 7 2 7 8 9 9 9 9 9 9 9 9 9 9 9 9 9 9 9 9 9 9	0.01 0.03 0.06 0.38 0.04 0.03 0.07 0.07 0.01 0.01 0.01 0.02 0.02 0.01 0.03 0.03 0.03 0.03 0.03	prob corn kernel frags whole cupules, removed for 14C cupule frags whole cupules kernel frags
604 W214 E160 Carbon sample	Cone scales Botanical Nutshell Wood Wood Nood Residue < 2 mm Non-botanical > 2 mm	Pinus sp. Indeterminable Quercus sp. Carya sp. Quercus sp.	Pine Indeterminable Acorn Hickory Oak	11 22 1 6	0.03 5.00 0.01 0.01 3.12 0.10	
605 Fine screen	Botanical Nutshell Rachis Wood Wood Wood Residue < 2 mm	Indeterminable Juglandaceae Zea mays Pinus sp. Quercus sect. Lobatae Quercus	Indeterminable Hickory/walnut family Corn Pine Red group oak White group oak	0 0 0 - 0 4	0.01 0.01 0.01 0.01 0.01 0.01	

Table 2. Floral samples from the Washington Square Mound site (41NA49). All plants carbonized unless otherwise indicated, cont.

Lot #, Context, Recovery Method	Plant part	Botanical name	Common name	Number of Individual Specimens	Weight (g)	Comments
611 Feature 51 Fine screen Soaked overnight in NaHCO3 solution	Bark Nutshell Nutshell Wood Wood Nood Nood Nooh-botanical > 2 mm	Pinus sp. Carya sp. Juglandaceae Carya sp. Hardwood	Pine Hickory Hickory/walnut family Hickory Hardwood	2 3	0.01 0.01 0.01 0.01 0.01 1.87 2.12	
738 N249 W52 Level 2, 10-20 cm Recovery method not noted.	Botanical Wood Rock	Indeterminable Morus rubra	Indeterminable Red mulberry		0.57 0.20 0.21	
1040 Feature 115, N222 W103, recovery method not noted, in 2 bags	Nutshell Wood	Carya sp. Diospyros virginiana	Hickory Persimmon		0.25 0.12	removed for 14C
N226 W106 Level 2 10-20 cm, recovery method not noted	Bark Wood	Quercus sect. Lobatae	Red group oak		0.65	
N256 W55 Level 4, 30-40 cm, recovery method not noted	Wood* Rock	Pinus sp.	Pine	2 1	0.35	
N226 W108 Level 3, 20-30 cm Recovery method not noted.	Wood* Wood Bone	Pinus sp. Quercus virginiana	Pine Coastal live oak	7 7 7	0.62 0.44 2.19	

Table 2. Floral samples from the Washington Square Mound site (41NA49). All plants carbonized unless otherwise indicated, cont.

Lot #, Context, Recovery Method	Plant part	Botanical name	Соттоп пате	Number of Individual Specimens	Weight (g)	Comments
Feature 199 (Gennett 1983) Rachis Recovery method Seed not noted. Seed Seed Seed Stem Stem Wood Wood Wood Residue Non-bor Non-	Rachis Rachis Seed Seed Seed Stem Wood Wood Wood Wood Nood Nood Nood Nood	Zea mays Zea mays Indeterminable Phalaris caroliniana Zea mays Poaceae Carya sp. Hardwood Quercus sect. Lobatae Quercus sect. Quercus	Corn Corn Indeterminable Maygrass Corn Grass family Hickory Hardwood Red group oak White group oak	164 382 2 2 2 1 1 1 1 15	0.77 0.01 0.01 0.01 0.01 0.01 0.01 0.03 22.03 0.28	whole cupules cupule frags and glumes kernel frags < 2 mm Gloves not worn when handling wood charcoal from this sample. May not be suitable for radiocarbon dating.
Level 2, 10-20 cm. Reovery method not noted.	Wood	Pinus sp.	Pine	∞	0.48	
1161 N222 W10 Level 2, 10-20 cm. Recovery method not noted.	Botanical	Indeterminable	Indeterminable	-	0.68	
Unknown Lot # Feature 62, carbon sample	Wood	Gleditsia triacanthos	Honeylocust	11	0.25	

Table 3. Dimensions of corn cupules from the Washington Square Mound site (41NA49). All cupules unattached unless otherwise indicated. Measurements in millimeters.

Lot	# cupules measured	Mean width	Mean height (thickness)
43	4	3.58	2.78
198	5	4.46	1.70
221	53	5.15	2.26
229	19	4.49	1.78
594	19	5.72	2.24
595	14	3.33	1.63
603	14	4.58	1.94
1149	184	3.60	1.73
Site total	312	4.09	1.87

Table 4. Corn cupules (Zea mays) measurements from selected Caddo sites.

Site	Cupule mean width (mm)	Cupule mean thickness (height) (mm)	Number of cupules measured	Reference
Washington Square Mound (41NA19)	4.1	1.9	312	this article
Dragover (3MN298) loose cupules (Fea. 11, 38, 97)	4.3	1.8	36	Trubitt et al. 2016
Dragover (3MN298) Fea. 97 cob fragment	4.3	2.7	53	Trubitt et al. 2016
Oak Hill Village (41RK214) Fea. 86*	4.8	3.1	~10,220	Elson et al. 2004
Musgano (41RK19)	4.8	2.2	1380	Bush 2014a
41PN175 Fea. 87	4.8	2.3	39	Bush 2015
W. A. Ford (41TT852)	5.0	2.9	10	Bush 2014b
Shelby Mound (41CP71)	5.0	2.8	52	Bush 2014c
Pine Tree Mound (41HS15)	5.3	2.3	106	Bush 2012
Stallings Ranch (41LR297)	5.4	3.1	35	Bush 2008
41CP183	5.4	2.1	24	Sherman et al. 2015
Eli Moores (41BW2) Cob #1	5.8	3.5	21	Perttula (ed.) 2014
Henry M. (41NA60) Lot 292	6.1	1.9	20	Perttula et al. 2010
Ramos Creek (34MC1030), all others	6.4	3.1	87	Dowd and Regnier 2014
Winding Stair (3MN496)	6.5	n/a	256	Williams 2000
Eli Moores (41BW2) loose cupules	7.1	3.4	60	Perttula (ed.) 2014
Indian Creek 2 (41SM404) Fea. 1	7.1	3.4	8	Nash 2012
Sha'chahdínnih (41MR211)**	7.2	2.8	229	Goldborer 2002
Hanna Village (16RR4)	7.4	3.5	9 cobs	Shea 1980
Ramos Creek (34MC1030) Lot 448.3	8.4	3.3	5	Dowd and Regnier 2014

^{*}Mean of measurements given in Table 91. Number of cupules estimated from 108 measurable cobs, row numbers distributed as given in Table 91, assuming 10 measurable cupules per rank.

^{**}Mean of measurements given in Appendix Tables 3A, 3B, 3C and 3D

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