

## *T.M.C. BUTTON - HOW RESEARCH FOUND ITS IDENTITY*

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### ABSTRACT

A brass gold-plated coat button found at the old port town of Quintana, Texas (41BO135) showing a fouled anchor and a banner embossed with the initials "T.M.C." is reported. Research indicates that this button is from the uniform of a member of the "Texas Marine Corps."

### THE ARTIFACT

The discovery of a mysterious gold-plated brass military button has catalyzed some research into an obscure area of Republic of Texas history, and we'd like to share this story with you. Found in 1991 at the site of the old port town of Quintana (41BO135) at the mouth of the Brazos river, the button revealed an intriguing design showing a fouled anchor and a banner embossed with the initials "T.M.C." ending in a sleeve cuff and hand holding a highly curved sword. The button is pictured in drawings by Barbara Feiner (Figure 1). We have attempted photographs of the button, but the corroded nature of the surface prevents a good likeness. It was a "Sanders" type military button, of coat size, and held a backmark of "Scovills and Co. Waterbury," similar to military buttons of the Republic of Texas and Civil War periods. Investigation of several historical button references (Albert 1976, Hughes and Lester 1981, Wyckoff 1984) failed to reveal its identity. The Albert reference does show this button (in vest size) in the chapter on "Schools and Universities" as button SU387, but without any further identification. The same reference indicates the backmark was used from 1840-1850. Obviously naval in its face design, could this button be of Mexican or other foreign origin, whose sailors may have called at the port in antebellum Texas?

The button, along with many residential-type artifacts, was part of a deposition layer at the site of the old town of Quintana, in an area that has now eroded into the Intracoastal Canal and Freeport Harbor channel. Prior to this, the Brazosport Archaeological Society sought permission from the

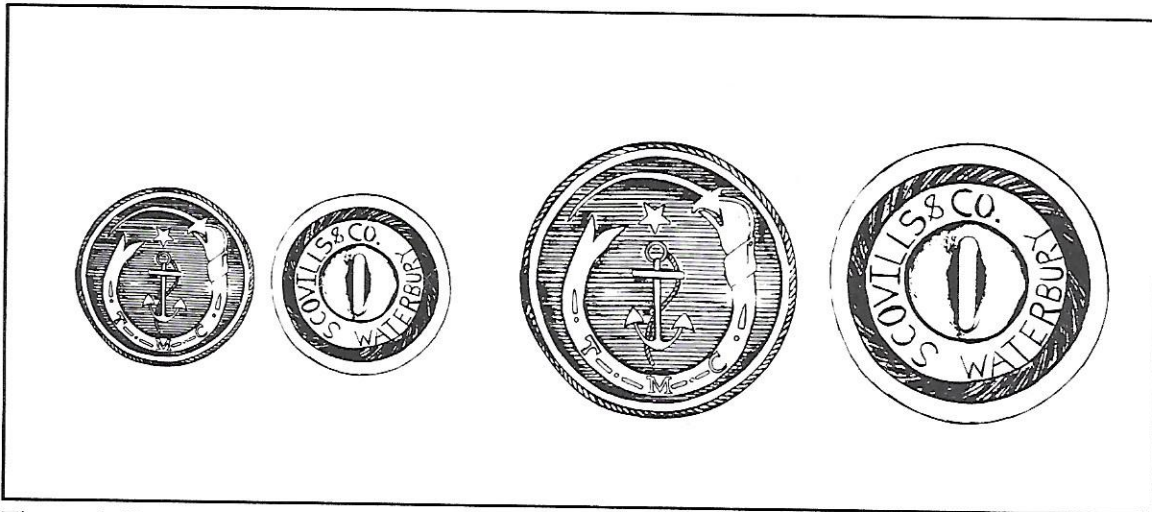
owner of the property to allow excavations, but this was denied for liability reasons. Consequently, we were constrained to let the tidal surf excavate for us, and surface collections along the public waterfront at low tide became the preferred method of study. The collected artifacts seemed to be predominantly from a pre- and post-Civil War period of deposition, based on the type of glass, ceramic, and button artifacts. The button is housed at the Brazosport Museum of Natural Science, and is part of a larger study collection of artifacts from this site.

Subsequently, construction work associated with the widening of the Freeport harbor combined with the ongoing erosion erased much of the study area. Today, as a sleepy village of beach vacation cabins, Quintana sits directly across the mouth of the Brazos River from the old town site of Velasco, where the Battle of Fort Velasco was fought in 1832, and where the Treaty of Velasco was signed by Santa Anna in 1836 after San Jacinto. Hurricanes in 1875, 1888, and 1900 destroyed much of the towns of Velasco and Quintana.

At the Texas Archeological Society's 1991 annual meeting in Austin, Ms. Juliann Pool of the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department identified the button as being from the "Texas Marine Corps." Later, she and J. Barto Arnold (of the Texas Historical Commission) provided additional references (Shelton and Luckenbach 1986; Speights 1986) which allowed conclusive identification of the button. The purpose of this article is to report this result to the Texas archaeological community and display some of the associated research, since the historical record on the Texas Marine Corps in general, and this button in particular, is so scarce.

The Shelton and Luckenbach reference mentions that "Several excavated specimens from the Texas coastal area have been located by the authors in the last year and they are the type illustrated by Al-





**Figure 1. Front and back drawings of button found at old town of Quintana. Initials stand for "Texas Marine Corps." Smaller drawing is approximate size of button. Larger shows in clearer detail. Drawing by Barbara Feiner.**

bert (SU 387). Two different sizes were dug. They are 21 mm (coat button) and 15 mm (cuff button)." We have relocated some of these referenced specimens in the possession of relic collectors known to us, and they indicate the buttons were found near Baytown and Morgan's Point near the old towns of New Washington and Lynchburg where a shipbuilding yard was located.

Additionally, a button of this type was reported found at the 1981 TAS Field School in the Choke Canyon reservoir area. Specifically, Site 41LK202 (a well) rendered a brass military button identical to the one found at Quintana, but it was not identified at the time of the written report (Fox 1986). A photo of the button can be seen as Item 'i' in Figure 8 of that report.

An article on the history of the Texas Marine Corps has been published in the journal of the U. S. Marine Corps (Moore 1978), and features artwork showing their uniform by Bruce Marshall, an Austin-based historical artist. Another artist's rendition of the uniforms for the Texas Marine Corps has also been published as part (Plate 4) of a portfolio showing Texas Navy uniforms (Hefter 1974). Apparently, large numbers of naval infantry did serve aboard ships of the Texas Navy with their own officers, especially during the buildup of the "second Texas Navy" under the favorable naval policy of Mirabeau Lamar. Individuals who served as Marines can be found in the muster lists of the ships (Devereaux 1983). In this period John Grant Tod, a veteran of both the Mexican and U. S. Navies, was appointed by Lamar to convert the "S. S. Charlston" into the Texas

Navy steamer "Zavala" which he delivered into Galveston harbor in March 1839. Tod was then dispatched to Baltimore to oversee the building of several brigs for the Texas Navy, eventually returning to command the Galveston Navy Yard. A number of these brigs arrived in Galveston in the summer and fall of 1839.

The J. G. Tod papers at the Rosenberg Library contain two or three documents involving the order, payment, and disposition of a consignment of buttons from Scovills & Co., a button manufacturer located in Waterbury, Connecticut. A letter instructing Tod to order the buttons is shown in the Speights reference, but we were unable to relocate this document in 1992. It says:

"Navy Department  
Houston, 8th July 1839

Sir

I enclose herewith a drawing of the Texas Navy button as well as that for the Marine Corps. You will have 100 Gross of large 150 Do. small of the former and one fourth the quantity of the latter struck off as soon as possible and forwarded to the Navy Agent at Galveston.

The buttons are very much needed and it is important that we should have them as soon as possible. Be particular however and see that they are executed in the best manner and of the very best materials.

To: Commander  
J. G. Tod  
Baltimore

I am Sir very Respectfully  
Your Obedient Servt.  
Louis P. Cook  
Secty of the Navy"

Unfortunately, the drawing mentioned in this note was also not found in the Tod papers, perhaps because it was forwarded by Tod to Scovills. Two documents were additionally located in 1992 in the J. G. Tod papers of the Rosenberg Library, and are shown in Figures 2 and 3. A "translation" follows

each document. One document appears to be a bill (Figure 2), and lists a consignment of several items. The document is dated 20 Nov 1839 in Waterbury, and a note at the bottom says final payment was received in New York from J. G. Tod on 2 Jan 1840.

*Jno G Tod Esqr  
Texian Naval Agt  
in United States*

*Waterbury Nov 20th 1839*

*Bot of J.M.L. & M.H. Scovill*

*7968	No	1901	5	Gross	Navy Coat Buttons	@	8.00	40.00												
										1902	5	"	"	Vest	"	@	4.00	20.00		
										1903	5	"	"	Marine Coat	"	@	8.00	40.00		
										1904	5	"	"	"	Vest	"	@	4.00	20.00	
																			<u>120.00</u>	
									Sep 15/Net	<u>18.00</u>	102.00									

*120.00  
18.00  
102.00*

*1905 32 Marine Coat 2.25 96.00*

*1906 18 Vest .20 36.00*

*1909 106 Marine Jacket .150 159.00*

*Cash Amt of net 397.00*

*397.00*

*For New York City 2nd 1840*

*From John G Tod Esqr Three Hundred  
Twenty three 35/100 Dollars in full  
for the above bill*

*J.M.L. & M.H. Scovill*

Figure 2. Bill/Receipt for Scovill Button Order. Courtesy Rosenberg Library, Galveston, Texas.

[“Translation”]:

Jno. G. Tod Esqr.  
Texian Naval Agt.

Waterbury Nov 20th 1839  
Bot of J.M.L. & M.H. Scovill

7968 No.	1901	5	Gross	Navy Coat Buttons	@	8.00	40.00		
	1902	5	"	" Vest	"	@	4.00	20.00	
	1903	5	"	Marine Coat	"	@	8.00	40.00	
	1904	5	"	" Vest	"	@	4.00	<u>20.00</u>	
								120.00	
							Sep 15/Net	<u>18.00</u>	102.00

[Continued next page]

[Scovill button order ("Translation")--Continued from preceding page]

[Total carried over from preceding page					102.00]
1905	32	"	Marine Coat "Nite @	3.00	96.00
1906	18	"	" Vest " " @	2.00	36.00
1909	106	"	Seaman's Jackets " @	1.50	<u>159.00</u>
					393.00
Cash Asset 5/Net					<u>19.65</u>
					373.35

Rec'd New York Jany 2nd 1840 From John G. Tod Esq.  
Three Hundred Seventy three 35/100 Dollars in full  
for the above bill

J.M.L. & M.H. Scovill

A second document (Figure 3) appears to be a receipt for delivery of the majority of these buttons.

*Rec'd Jany 18th 1840 from John G. Tod Navy  
Commissioner five gross large Naval Buttons  
and four gross & three doz. Small do.  
and five gross large Marine Buttons  
& three gross & eight doz. Small do.  
F. T. Wells  
Purser. U. S. Navy*

Figure 3. Receipt for Delivery of Buttons To Purser. Courtesy Rosenberg Library, Galveston, Texas.

["Translation"]:

Rec'd Jany 18th 1840 from John G. Tod Navy Commissioner five gross large naval buttons and four gross and three doz. small do. [ditto] and five gross large Marine Buttons and three Gross and eight doz. small do. [ditto]

F. T. Wells  
Purser Texas Navy

## CONCLUSIONS

A number of these buttons have been discovered in both scientific archaeological investigations and by coastal relic collectors. They appear to have been manufactured in equal quantities to the more well-

known "1840 Navy" button. Since historic archaeology in Texas is becoming more prevalent, it is likely that further discoveries of this type of button will occur, and we hope the information in this report is of use to future Texas archaeological investigators.

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