
ARIZONA HISTORICAL SOCIETY

949 East Second Street
Tucson, AZ 85719

Library & Archives
(520) 617-1157

ahsref@azhs.gov

MS 1122
BENT FAMILY COLLECTION
Papers, 1924-1994

DESCRIPTION

Correspondence, research notes, photographs, and published articles dealing with the discovery, attempted authentication, and history of iron artifacts discovered near Tucson in 1924. Highlights include extensive correspondence by both Thomas Bent Sr. and his son in an attempt to located supporting information to prove authenticity of the finds. Many newspaper clippings and published articles document the controversy. Photos in the collection depict work at the excavation site in 1924-1926 and pictures used in Bent's manuscript, "The Tucson Artifacts" printed in 1928 and 1964.

7 Boxes, 3.0 linear feet

ACQUISITION

Gift from Thomas W. Bent, Jr. in 1994.

ACCESS

There are no restrictions on access to this collection.

COPYRIGHT

Requests for permission to publish material from this collection should be addressed to the Arizona Historical Society, Tucson, Archives Department.

PROCESSING

The collection was processed by William D. Tackenberg, January 1999.

ARRANGEMENT

Arranged into four series: Correspondence and personal papers, 1956-1994. Research materials, 1924-1990. Manuscripts and published materials, 1928-1990. Photographs, ca. 1924-1926 and 1956.

HISTORICAL NOTE

In September, 1924 the first iron artifact was discovered by Charles E. Manier near an old ruined lime kiln site on Silverbell Road, seven miles north of Tucson. The location was on property owned by Thomas W. Bent (?-1972). Over the period of the next two years 24 "Tucson Artifacts" or "Lead Crosses," as the artifacts came to be called, were removed from the site. The strange objects were decorated with Christian crosses, Moslem crescents, Hebraic seven branched candlesticks, Freemasonry symbols, and other signs. Latin and Hebrew phrases were also scratched on surfaces.

Theories on the artifact makers, how old they were, and their overall significance became debated. Individuals from the University of Arizona, including Prof. Byron Cummings of the Arizona State Museum, witnessed and attested to the authenticity of the discoveries. The *Arizona Daily Star* provided extensive coverage and support for the story. Against local support for Bent and Manier eastern newspapers, *The New York Times*, and other museum curators voiced doubts as to the authenticity of the finds.

The various explanations for the artifacts included: 1) Phoenician sailors who reached America, 2) Spanish explorers, 3) Mormons, 4) Quetzalcoatl, and 5) the record of a Roman-Jewish settlement from 775 A.D. to 900 A.D. Arguments raised against all these theories including incorrect dating (use of A.D.) on some items before this had become common usage, use of modern words in the inscriptions, and the understanding that a Mexican sculptor, familiar with the classics, had once lived on the site for ten years in the 1880s-1890s.

Throughout the controversy Thomas Bent continued to believe that the artifacts were authentic. In 1928 he prepared a lengthy report entitled, "The Tucson Artifacts" in which he presented the entire story in great detail. Bent's son, Thomas W. Bent Jr., donated the entire collection of printed materials and the artifacts themselves to the Arizona Historical Society in 1994.

SCOPE AND CONTENT NOTE

This collection reflects Bent's work in the discovery and excavation of artifacts at the Silverbell location and the research and correspondence by him and his son in an attempt to learn more about the artifacts and justify their authenticity. Extensive correspondence is present between Bent and individuals within Arizona and across the country in an effort to obtain information about the finds including Gaston Burrige and Prof. Byron Cummings of the Arizona State Museum, Dr. Cyclone Covey, Dept. of History, Wake Forest University, and Bernice & Jack McGee of Fort Worth, TX. Five notebooks contained research notes, contracts, excavation data, newspaper clippings, and photos related to the discovery and subsequent investigations. Manuscripts in the collection include a copy of "The Tucson Artifacts" printed in 1964 by Bent and other publications referencing the artifacts published by other authors. Photos include pictures of the excavation work and discoveries in 1924-1926 as well as displays of the artifact collection.

Correspondence in the collection is subdivided between that of Thomas Bent Sr. and Thomas Bent Jr. (son). Both sets of papers are arranged alphabetically by correspondent and reflect both communications about the artifacts and personal topics. Some individuals, including Dr. Covey, communicated extensively with Bent for information in preparation for

publication of articles. Individuals in the Arizona State Museum coordinated with Bent during the initial discovery as well as later when the University took over the excavation site. Almost all letters appear to reflect favorably on Bent and the authenticity of the artifacts.

Research materials contained in the collection reflect excavation and investigation statements and information on other archeological sites and artifacts of interest to Bent. Bent maintained an extensive collection of research notes both during the period of excavation in 1924-1926 and later in the effort to document the discovery. Various sketch locations of the finds at the Silverbell site are included. Various testing and investigation reports include an assay report, and radiocarbon dating. Folder 31 contains news clippings of the discovery and early controversy over the authenticity of the artifacts carried in the *Arizona Daily Star* and *The New York Times*. Photos include pictures taken at the site in 1924-1926 and other artifact photos of interest to Bent. Boxes 6 and 7 contain indexed research cards with library call slips, notes, and typed reference cards organized by subjects.

The manuscript and published materials series is highlighted with Thomas Bent's "The Tucson Artifacts" originally put together in 1928 and later printed in 1964. After the 1964 printing Bent distributed many copies to museums, universities, and supporters. The series also contains other publications on the artifacts and Bent's role in the discovery as well as articles on other topics that reference the Tucson finds. Outlines on notecards record the discovery and research indicate a possible oral presentation to some group. Folder 43 contains additional news clipping of the discovery and controversy. Photos in the last series depict the artifacts on display and the work at the excavation site in 1924-1926. Six glass plates and 40 lantern slides are also available.

BOX AND FOLDER LIST

Box 1

Series 1: Correspondence and Personal Materials, 1956-1994

Subseries A: Correspondence of Thomas W. Bent, Sr., 1956-1992.

Folder 1-8: Correspondence, A-McGee 1964-1992

Box 2

f.9-11 Correspondence, McGee-Z 1964-1971

f.12 Miscellaneous Letters, Sketches, Etc. 1956-1971

Subseries B: Correspondence of Thomas W. Bent, Jr., 1956 -1994

f.13 Correspondence, A-L 1971-1994

Box 3

f.14-19 Correspondence, M-Z 1956-1993

f.20 Institute For the Study of American Cultures 1992-1993

f.21 Planning for 1989-1990 Re-Examination of Silverbell Site 1989-1990

Series II: Research Materials, 1924-1990

f.22 Book 1, Sections A and B 1924-1953
Excavation and Investigation Statements
Communication With Church of Jesus Christ of Latter
Day Saints, Salt Lake, City, UT

f.23 Book 1, Section C 1929-1957
Letters With University of Arizona Individuals

f.24 Book 2, Section A 1924-1925
Agreements and Contracts

f.25 Book 2, Section B 1961-1964
Copyright Material Information
Authorization Letters

f.26 Book 2, Section C 1925
Early Excavation Data (Records and Statistics)

f.27 Book 2, Section D and E 1925-1947
Material on Persons and Organizations Interested
Publicity and Stories

Box 4

f.28 Book 3, Sections A-D 1925-1963
Investigative Report by George Howley
Assay Reports

f.29 Book 3, Sections E-L 1956-1961
Radiocarbon Dating Reports

	Metal Analyses	
f.30	Book 3, Sections M-P Sun Worshipers Story of Navigating Serpent	1924-1963
f.31	Book 5 Newspaper Clippings	1924-1926/1956
f.32	Book 6 Printed Materials/Articles Mostly Not Directly Related to Artifacts	1924-1971
f.33	Book 6 (Photos) Some Tucson Artifacts Other Artifacts Unrelated to Bent's Artifacts	
f.34	Miscellaneous Research Notes, Translations, and Rubbings	1925
f.35	Research Materials from Peter L. Steere (University of Arizona Library)	1990

- Also see Box 6 and 7 for Research Notes on File Cards

Series III: Manuscripts and Published Materials, 1928-1990

f.36	"The Tucson Artifacts" by Thomas W. Bent	1928
------	--	------

Box 5

f.37	"The Silverbell Artifacts" (Draft) by Jan Eppinga	1990
f.38	"Calalus 775-900 A.D.: A Re-Examination of the Bent Artifacts" by Cyclone Covey	
f.39	"The Tucson Artifacts-Revisited" (Draft) by Chris Hardaker	1986
f.40	Articles or Publications Referencing the Tucson Artifacts	
f.41	Documents/Background Information Set to Lawyers	1971
f.42	Presentation Outlines	
f.43	Newspaper Clippings	1925-1926/1970

Series IV: Photos, 1925-1992

f.44	Artifacts on Display	
f.45-48	Artifacts at Excavation Site	1925/1956
f.49	Artifacts and Researchers	1925
f.50	Panoramic Photos	1925?
f.51	Photos From Thomas W. Bent Jr. Correspondence	1992
f.52	Unidentified Prints	1989

Box 6

Indexed File Cards-Research Notes, Library Call Slips, etc

Box 7

Research Cards-Organized by Subject and Related to Artifacts