

**TRANSACTIONS  
OF THE  
TENTH REGIONAL ARCHEOLOGICAL SYMPOSIUM  
FOR  
SOUTHEASTERN NEW MEXICO  
AND  
WESTERN TEXAS**



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MIDLAND WELL SITE 41MD-18  
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ABSTRACT

In 1971, Midland was chosen the site for the newly formed Federal District Court of Texas. The Federal Building site was selected on an area of downtown Midland where some of the first buildings in the settling of Midland were built. In the spring of 1972, the removal of the present buildings was started.

After a couple of months of periodical visits, we started making a visit every day a little before 5:00 P.M., so we could talk with the operators of the dirt moving machines. We had alerted them to the possibility of three wells dug in the early 1880's in this area. One of the wells was uncovered late on a Friday afternoon as one of the operators with his machine had started removing the dirt for the basement of the Federal Building. He had a good selection of bottles which had come from the eight feet of dirt he had already removed. We talked with the superintendent and were given permission to investigate this area over the weekend.

INTRODUCTION

The settling of West Texas had been hindered by the concept that water was very scarce. Captain Marcy's expedition commissioned by the government to find a southern emigration route in 1849, mapped a route through this area by locating natural surface water sources. As a result of the favorable report of Captain Marcy, five years later (1854) Captain Pope was commissioned by the government to survey a route for a railroad along this route. The proposed route would be from Fort Smith, Arkansas to San Diego, California. The Civil War interrupted the railroad building and hindered the financing of this project for several years afterward.

The Texas and Pacific Railroad Company was formed and the route began. As the railroad advanced west from Fort Worth, pass the Colorado River, the water supply for the railroad crews became a very important item. It became necessary for the Texas and Pacific Railroad to contract for

water to be supplied. One such man that contracted for this work was Tom (Pat) Monahan.

One good source of water was the Big Spring, but as crews moved further west, the longer the hauling became. One day out searching for a new source of water ahead of the crews, Monahan found surface water in an area of sand dunes. This prompted his lazy nature to try digging for sub-surface water closer to the railroad's road bed. Monahan dug a three foot square shaft. Monahan's well supplied such an abundance of water that when the Texas and Pacific Railroad started operating in September 1881, they dug another well 20' X 20' X 80' lined with sandstone and brick, with brick steps built from the bottom to the top of the casing at such time the water level might be lowered. This well was called Truelove's well, for the land owner. It was a stop on the schedule of the railroad for cooling the engines and taking on water. Later the name Truelove was dropped and Monahan was used.

As the Texas and Pacific Railroad advanced their rail beds west through Texas, they were experiencing great financial difficulties. The Texas Railroad Commission requirement that a house be built every 10 miles for the maintenance men and their families couldn't be fulfilled right away. Instead, a box car was set off every 10 miles. One such box car was set off on the south side of the rail bed halfway between Fort Worth and El Paso, Texas with the white lettering on each end reading "Midway".

The water supply for the box car occupants was supplied by barrels hauled from the Monahan's well, but the need for more water increased and the Railway Company set a tank off at the side of the box car.

Midway became a supply center and mail depot for ranchers already in the area. It wasn't long before enterprising individuals accepted the challenge for opportunity to open businesses around the box car. The demand on the railway's water became so great they no longer could supply the small community. Ranchers in the area having dug wells and placed windmills over the well was the solution to the problem of water supply.

Three wells were dug for water in Midway in 1884. These three wells were hand dug and fitted with a hand pump for the use of everyone as a water source. They were located at Abilene (Main) Street and Iowa (Wall) Avenue; Iowa (Wall) Avenue and Weatherford Street; and Abilene (Main) Street and Texas Avenue. A couple of years later it was recorded that Midway was known as the windmill town with nearly every house having a windmill.

By September 12, 1881, the first scheduled train ran toward El Paso from Fort Worth. In 1884 Midway applied for a post office, but was turned down because Texas already had a Midway. The name Midland was selected and accepted by the U. S. Postmaster. On February 28, 1885, Midland County was carved out of Tom Green County. On June 15, 1885, Midland County held their first county election. The first County Commissioner Court was held August 10, 1885. Midland was growing by leaps and bounds. In April, 1910, Midland suffered their first tragic fire. The bucket brigade was not able to save the whole block of buildings being consumed. This tragedy stimulated the citizens to get the first water system installed. Again Midland was hit by a fire on December 9, 1910. An oil heater exploded in W. A. Holloway's Livery Stable, and before the fire was brought under control by the local firemen, the fire had destroyed W. A. Holloway's Livery Stable, Midland Grocery and Dry Goods Company, Martin Camp Jewelry, Miss Maggie McCormick Millinery Store, Bigham and Lee Vehicles and Implements Store, Midland Metal and Manufacturing Company and Klaproth's Saddlery.

#### EXCAVATION

The well was excavated by a simple method of removing dirt with the hand and picking up the larger objects. When the fill no longer could be reached from the top, the bucket lift method took over.

All the material fill was screened through a quarter inch screen. This was a very dangerous job because of the broken glass, nails and other metal artifacts.

A crew of Midland Archeological Society members started May 5, 1972 at 9:00 A.M. to locate the well opening. The operator of the heavy dirt mover had deposited a very hard surface by the forward and backward movement of the heavy machine. It took about an hour to finally determine the well opening. The first two feet of fill were a deposit of very dark brown soil. The next 12½ feet were thru limestone. Water level was reached at 19 feet. The bottom of the well was very firm but the lifting of the bucket full of water and mud became very hard. The fill was taken down another foot and one-half below the surface of the water. We had reached below the depth the contractor was removing the dirt for the basement of the building. The total depth of the excavation was 20 feet 6 inches which included 8 feet removed by the contractor.

First Level 8 feet, May 5, 1972 Dirt Contractor

Second Level 8 feet to 11 feet 9:00 A.M. to 6:30 P.M.,  
May 6, 1972

Third Level 11 feet to 17 feet Bottle Hunter

Fourth Level 17 feet to 20 feet 6 inches 9:00 A.M. to 5:00  
P.M., May 7, 1972



### ARTIFACTS

We recovered many whole bottles and dishes, but 75 percent of the glass, china and clay items were broken. We recovered whole bottles from the lower level of the well, which could indicate that at the time the well was first being filled up, still had a high level of water in it. No one item was in the majority of being used or discarded more than any other item.

The iron scrap went from an enameled dish pan near the bottom of the well to a spoke wheel off a child's red wagon. The iron scraps were covered with a layer of rust, which indicated the well retained a great deal of moisture.

Some unusual items recovered were large clock parts, a hand and springs; china doll arms and legs; small china dog; hand mirror with the metal back still in tact; silver salt or pepper shaker; one clear glass light bulb; and a piece of a stalactite possibly from Carlsbad Caverns.

### CONCLUSION

This Midland well was a hand dug well and very possibly one of the three wells mentioned as being dug in 1884. Some time after 1884 the lot the well was on was bought and the well became the supply of water for the household. The well was used until some time after 1910, which was the year a public water system was installed. When the household became a user of the public water system, they abandoned the well, but no well could be left open, so the household filled it with trash from the house and yard.

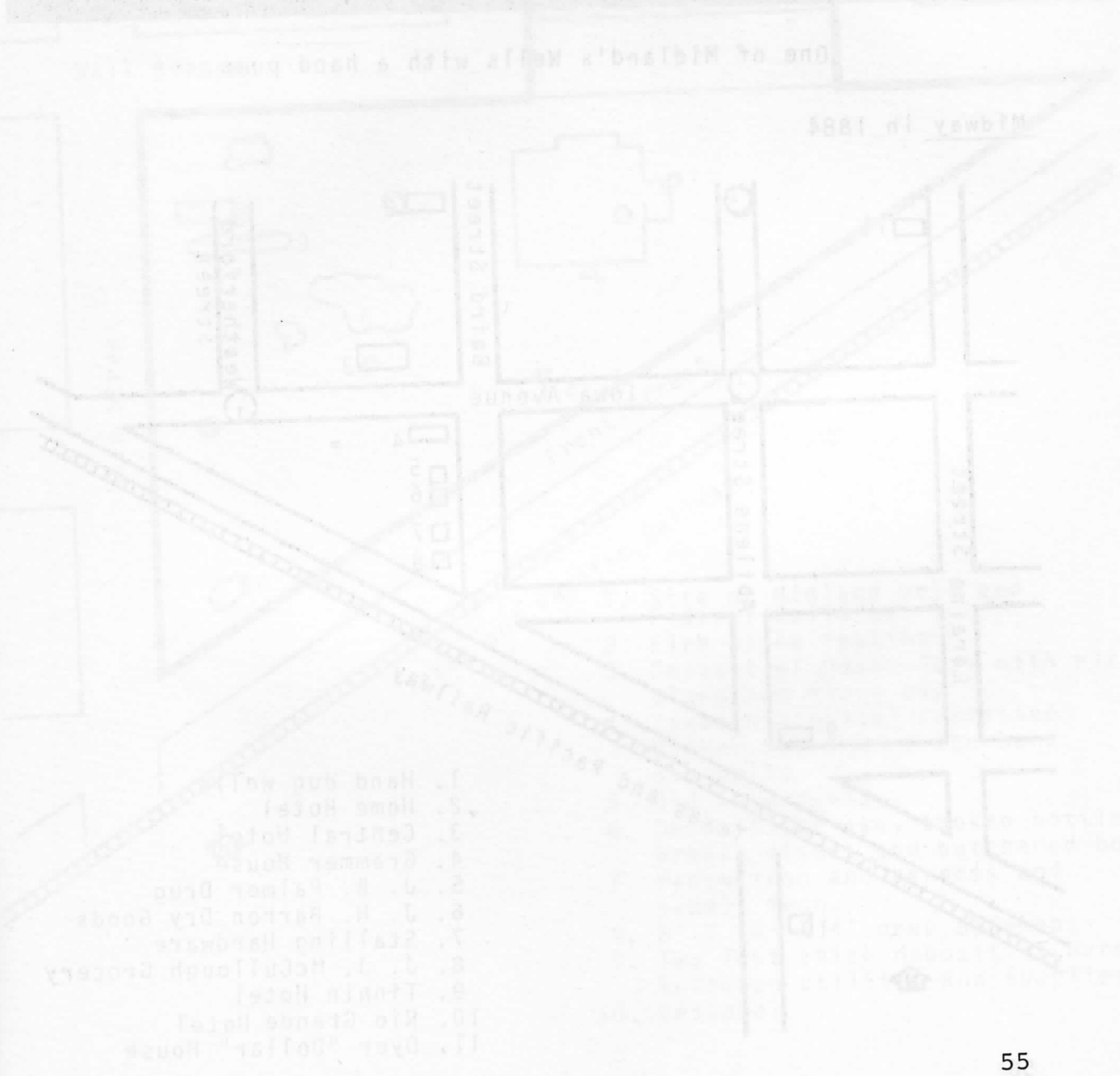
The well probably was filled by 1925. This area of Midland was fast becoming the business section of the town. Many of the buildings that now stand on Main Street were built between 1920 and 1930. The building that covered the well before the clearing started for the Federal Building was the original building built in this time period.

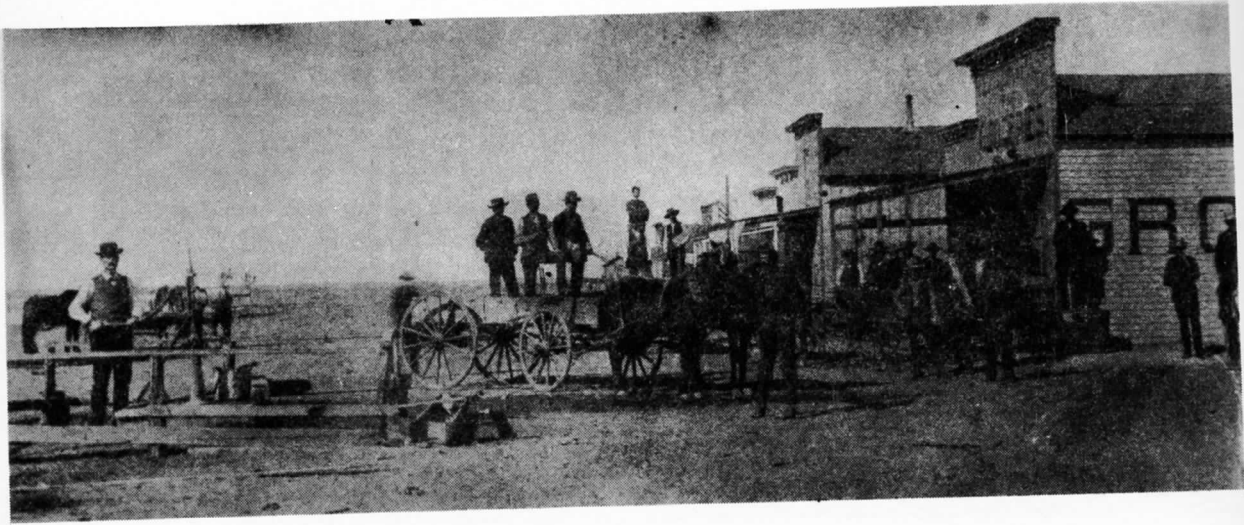
### ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We wish to thank the operator of the dirt mover, Julian Rosales that located the well; Mr. Billington, the superintendent for the Area Builders, for allowing us to excavate the well. The members of the Midland Archeological Society, Dr. T. E. Spires, Ronnie Cauble, Dennis McIntosh and Wade Hobbs, who labored so willingly are to be thanked.

Also, we wish to thank Mrs. John P. McKinley for her assistance in some of the local history. We wish also to thank

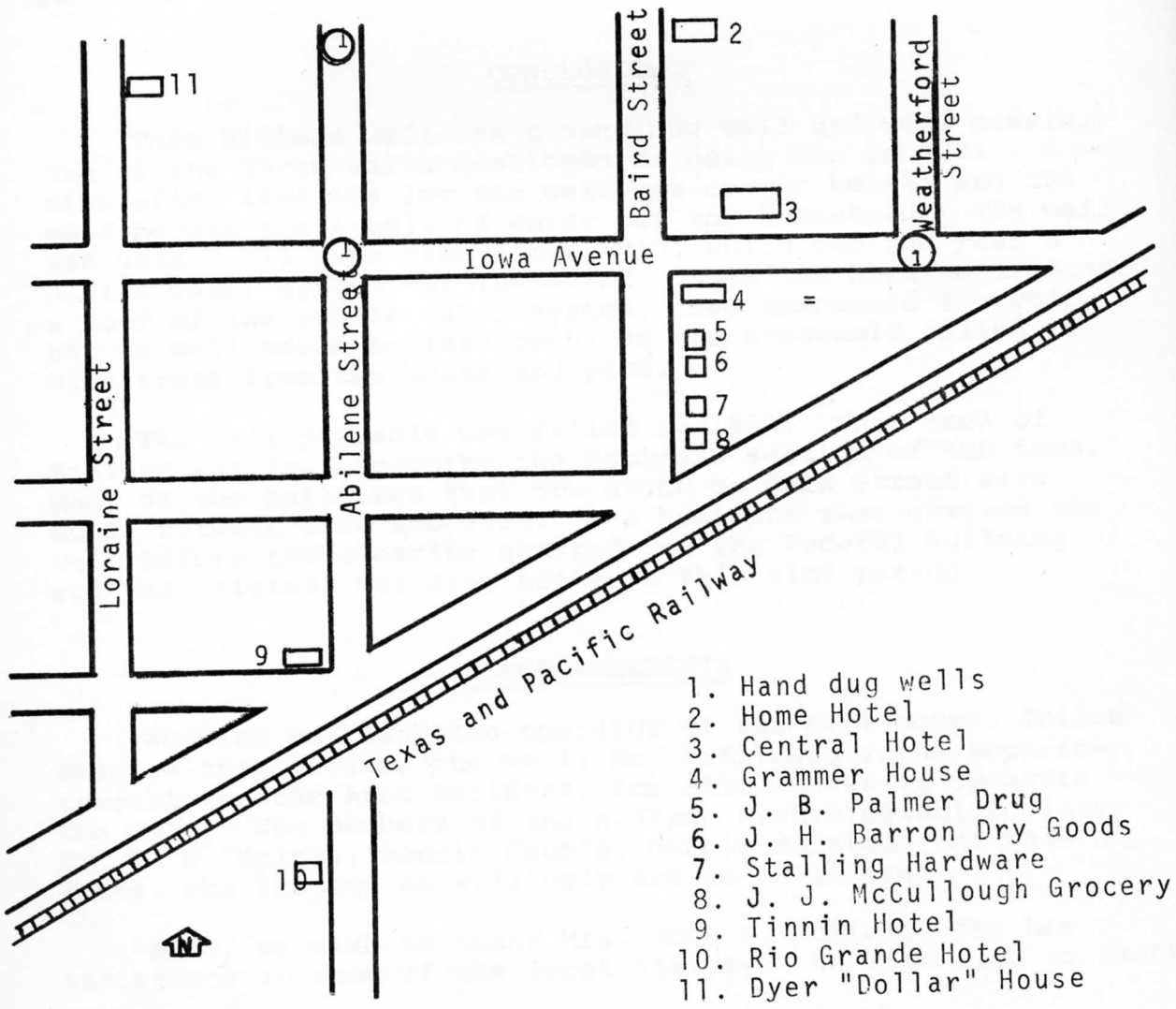
Mrs. Ada Phillips for furnishing information about the clay insulators found in the well and helping to locate the buildings in this area.



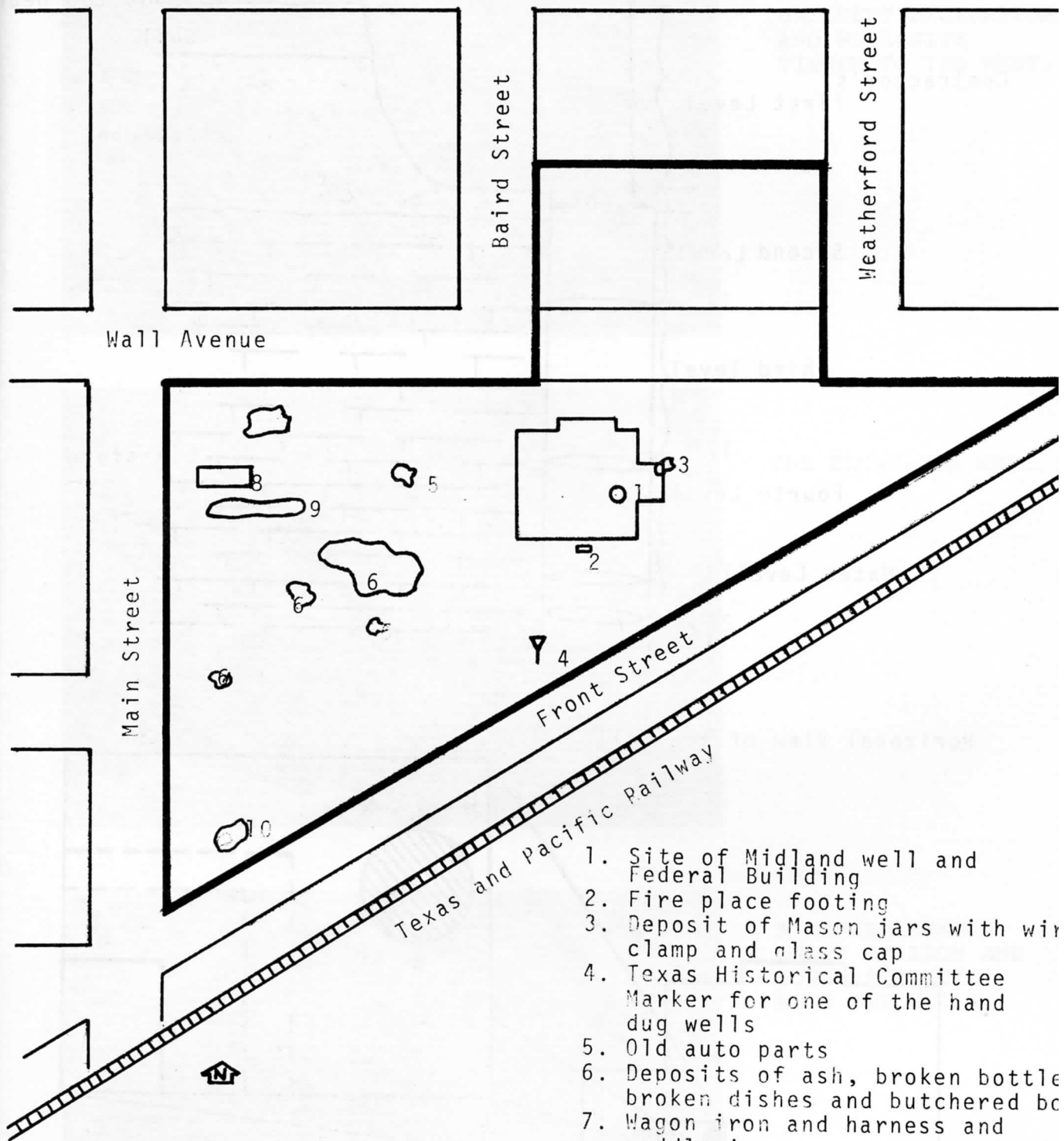


One of Midland's Wells with a hand pump.

Midway in 1884



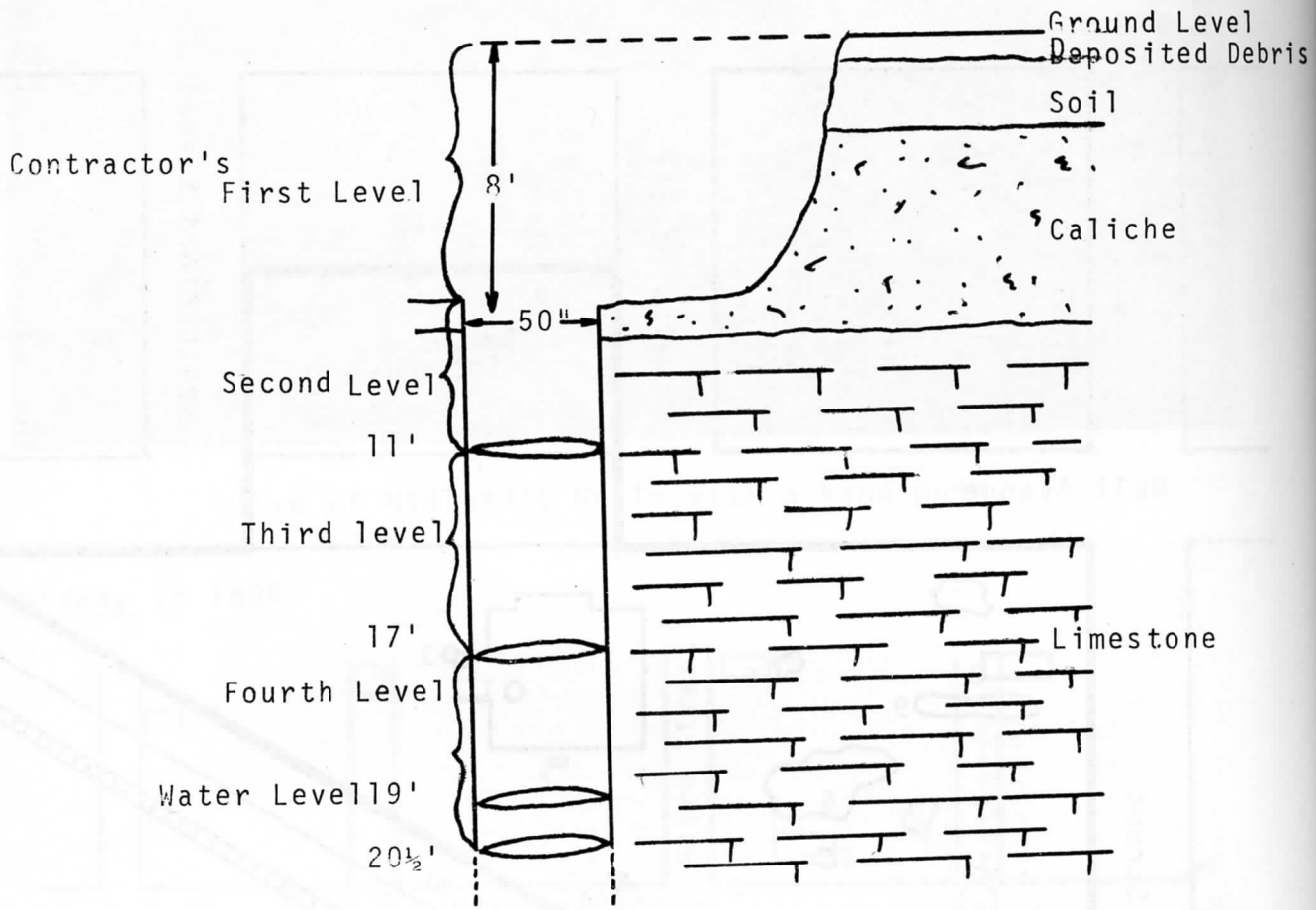
Federal Building Site 1972



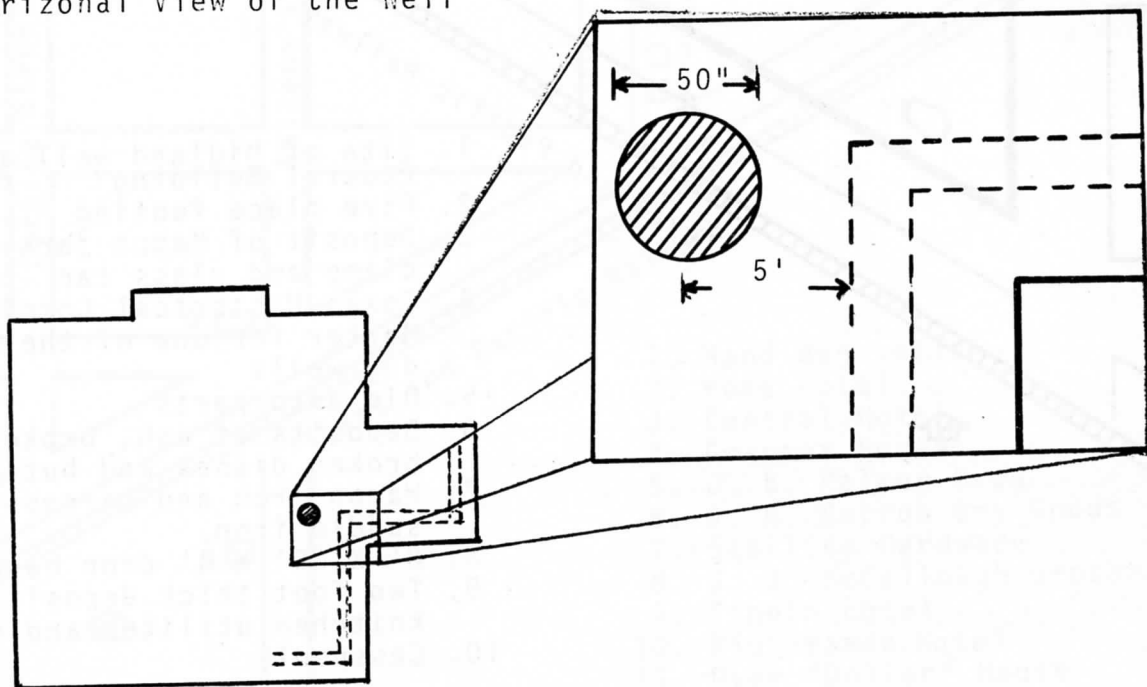
1. Site of Midland well and Federal Building
2. Fire place footing
3. Deposit of Mason jars with wire clamp and glass cap
4. Texas Historical Committee Marker for one of the hand dug wells
5. Old auto parts
6. Deposits of ash, broken bottle, broken dishes and butchered bone
7. Wagon iron and harness and saddle iron.
8. 8' X 20' X 4' deep basement
9. Two foot thick deposit of burr knitchen utilites and supplies
10. Cesspool



# Vertical View of the Well



# Horizontal View of the Well





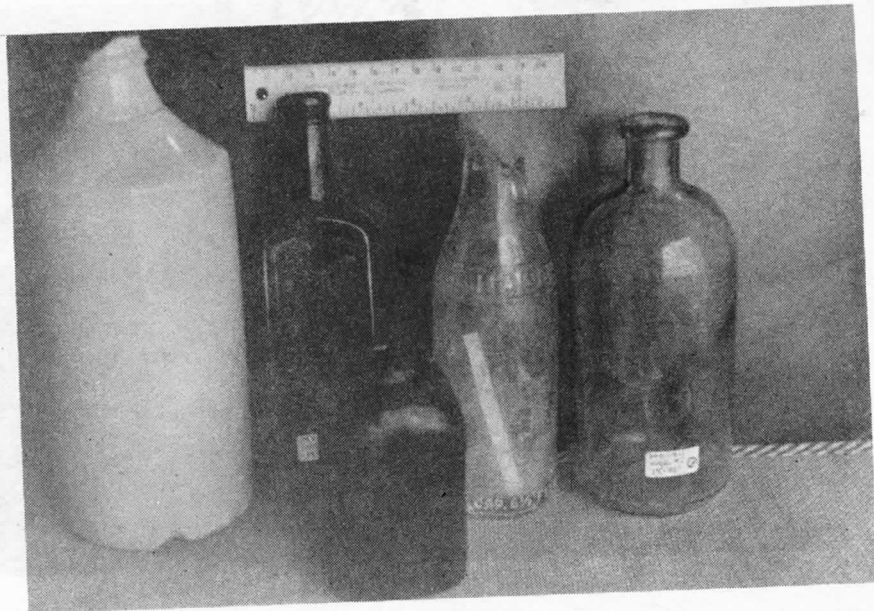
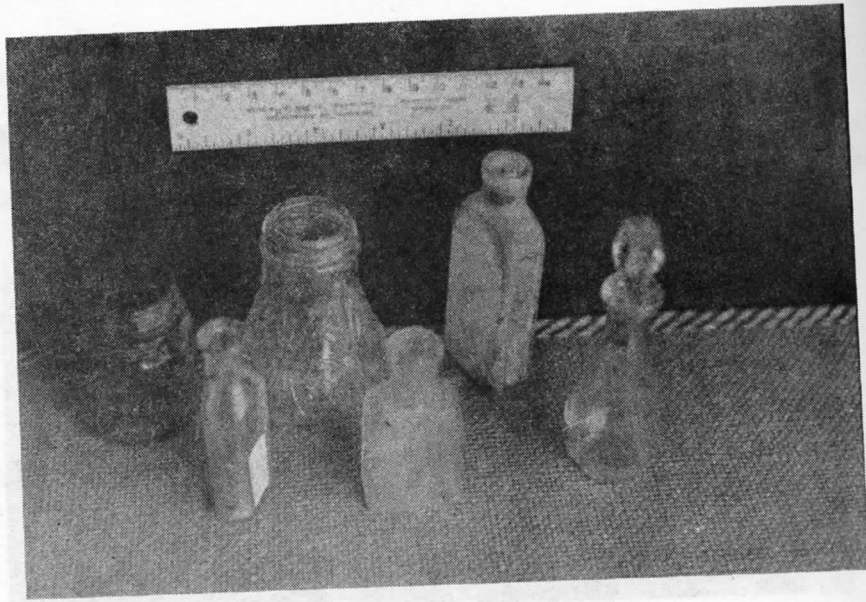
THE AREA OF THE  
FEDERAL BUILDING  
BASEMENT EXCAVATION  
AND WELL SITE  
VIEWED TO THE WEST.



THE EXCAVATED WELL.



A MISCELLANEOUS  
GROUP OF IRON AND  
BONE ARTIFACTS  
FROM THE WELL.



THESE THREE PICTURES  
REPRESENT A SAMPLE  
OF THE BOTTLES  
RECOVERED FROM THE  
WELL.

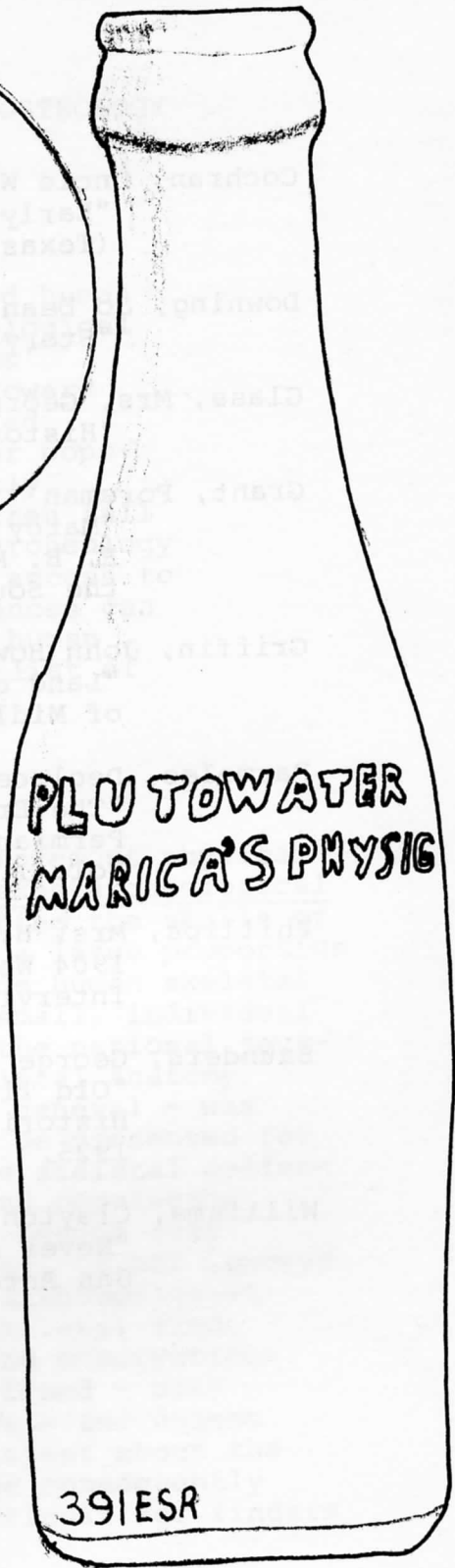


A  
Frederick Hampson Glass Works  
Salford 5, Lanc., England, 1851-?

A



B  
Adolphus Busch Glass Manufacturing Co.,  
Belleville, Ill.,  
1886-1907



C

Pluto Water  
America's Physic



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