

# "Origins Unknown": Perforated Token from Historic Fort Smith, Arkansas

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## Historical Background

Following the Louisiana Purchase in 1803, federal officials promoted the removal of southeastern Indians to a "permanent Indian frontier" within the territory of the acquisition. In 1809, the Osage tribe forfeited their traditional hunting territory along the White and Arkansas rivers to thousands of displaced Cherokees. The new Cherokee-Osage boundary became a source of friction, in the subsequent years, and resulted in frequent clashes between both nations. To deter hostilities, the United States government established Fort Smith on the disputed boundary.

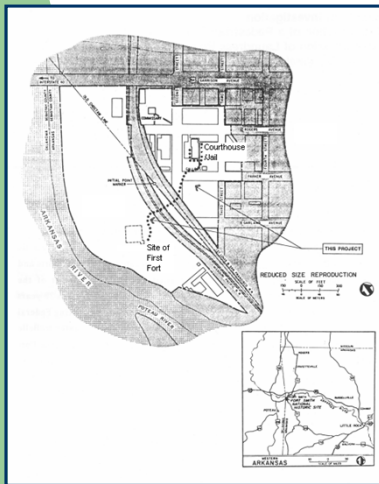


Figure 1: Location of Pedestrian Trail and Fort Smith National Historic Site

District Court for the Western District of Arkansas during its use. The historic occupation of the site is commonly divided into three periods: First Fort (1817-1824), Second Fort (1838-1871), and Judicial (1872-1896).

In 1986, the park proposed construction of a pedestrian trail that would connect the park visitor center to Belle Point, crossing the locations of both historic military forts (Figure 1). As proposed by public law, an archaeological investigation was conducted to mitigate adverse effects to significant remains from proposed trail construction.

## References

Coleman, Roger E.  
1990 Archeological Investigation for Construction of a Pedestrian Trail and Identification of Laundress Row, Fort Smith National Historic Site, Arkansas. *Southwest Cultural Resources Center Professional Paper, No. 30*. Southwest Regional Office, Division of Anthropology, National Park Services, Santa Fe, New Mexico.

Coleman, Roger E., and Clyde D. Dollar  
1984 *Historic Landscape at the Fort Smith National Historic Site (1817-1896)*, Fort Smith, Arkansas. Report on file at Fort Smith National Historic Site.



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Fort Smith National Historic Site (3SB0079) was established on September 13, 1961, and is historically and archaeologically complex. It is located at the confluence of the Poteau and Arkansas rivers in the northwestern corner of Sebastian County, Arkansas. The park is a three-sided, 69.83 acre tract bounded on the west by the Poteau and Arkansas rivers and on the remaining two sides by the City of Fort Smith. The Union Pacific and Missouri and North Arkansas railroads cross the park and divide it into three geographic sections: the second fort site, a narrow median strip between the railroads, and the first fort site on Belle Point. The park contains a multicomponent prehistoric site and two historic military forts. The second fort served as a jail and courtroom for the United States



Figure 2: Perforated Token, Front View

## Can You Identify this Artifact?

Diameter: 2.5cm  
Thickness: 0.1cm  
Level: 0.5-1.0'

Figure 3: Perforated Token, Rear View



## Archaeological Investigations

The trail route was investigated from 1985 to 1988. The route crosses three park areas: the visitor center lawn, the railroad median strip, and Belle Point. These geographic divisions are also culturally/historically distinct. Earlier investigations were primarily concerned with tracing the foundations of both fortifications and neglected to sample domestic and activity areas. The proposed trail route offered an opportunity to investigate the exterior of the first Fort Smith and the interior and the exterior of the second Fort Smith. Known historic Structures at Fort Smith were plotted by Coleman and Dollar (1984:Fig. 11), revealing the presence of several buildings near the present-day median strip, which Coleman's investigation identified as the 1870s "Laundress Row."

On May, 29, 1896, a bill granted lands inside the garrison of the first fort to the City of Fort Smith. The Old Fort Reserve Addition was surveyed and sold to private landowners. By 1900, several large brick buildings were built, and the area became the industrial and warehouse district for the city of Fort Smith. The courthouse/jailhouse was turned into a civic center (see Figure 1). This occupation is known as "Coke Hill," and it is from this occupation that Coleman asserts most of the artifacts in this excavation area derive. Hallmarks of the Coke Hill occupation include round nails, crown bottle caps, plastic, clear and amethyst tinted glass, decal printed ceramics, concrete, hard fired brick, terra-cotta tile, and machine finished bottle necks.

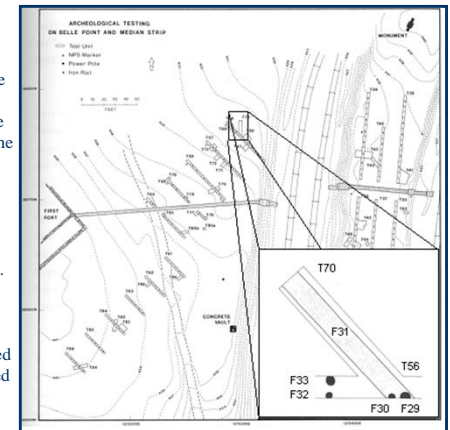


Figure 4: Archaeological testing showing locations of excavation areas on Median Strip and Belle Point.

At the request of the National Park Service in 2005, the Arkansas Archeological

Survey began cataloging the collections from the 1985-1988 excavations. During this process, a curious artifact was encountered, a perforated token of unknown origin (see Figures 2 and 3). The perforated token was discovered in Test 56, Section 7 during excavations on Belle Point, as seen in Figure 4. Other artifacts found in the same unit include a piece of a hard rubber or bakelite comb, as well as a whiteware rim sherd and a yellow-ware sherd. The yellow-ware sherd could have been part of a Mocha-ware pattern vessel. Other artifacts found within the same test trench include a porcelain animal statue foot, a blue transfer print sherd, a utilitarian stoneware mixing bowl rim, a US Army eagle button worn by US Army enlisted men between 1850 and 1900, and a striped opaque marble, most likely a form from the Christensen Agate Company, produced between 1925 and 1933.

Coleman notes that the ground surface on Belle Point appears to be uniformly disturbed to a depth of "one foot." Forty-five subsurface archaeological features were encountered during the testing phases on Belle Point, including three features that were found in Section 7 of test trench 56---Features 29, 30, and 31. Feature 31 is a 2.0 foot wide utility line trench encountered at 1.1 foot below surface oriented north/south following the axis of West Fort Smith. This feature postdates 1904, when Belle Point was annexed to the city as the West Fort Smith Addition. Features 29 and 30 intrude into Feature 31, and appear to be post molds for an extant fence-line. Clearly modern objects were found at the lowest level of this artifact-bearing deposit. The site was disturbed in 1962, when Belle Point was landscaped by bulldozing. Coleman states that "photographs of this activity suggest radical mixing and movement of site deposits occurred" to a depth of 0.5-1.0' (Coleman 1990:48).

Fort Smith National Historic Site  
National Park Service  
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