Substantial Indian Find Located At Louisiana's Bloodhound Hill

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NEW ORLEANS (AP) --

Phil Freeman used to exercise the state prison's dogs on Bloodhound Hill at Angola. Back in 1976, he found some old beads and trinkets washed out of the ditches along the road.

Some of the Tunica still remain in Louisiana, particularly around Marksville. The son of the late former chief, Joe Pierre Jr., lives in Kenner. But the tribe's lore crumbled as the survivors spread out during the 19th century, and little is known other than what the colonial French scribbled into their records.

The Tunica first were recorded by DeSoto in 1541 as residents of North Mississippi, in the area of the county named after them just southwest of Memphis. In 1699, the French said the Tunica lived near old Fort St. Pierre on the Yazoo River bluffs north of Vicksburg, Miss. By 1706, they had moved into Louisiana.

Freeman's curiosity helped find exactly where. Alan Toth, assistant state archeologist, said the first digs in late 1976 produced a number of artifacts. He said they support French claims that the Tunica were unusually adept at commerce.

"We did just enough digging to confirm the site, find a few artifacts and find part of a house," Toth said. More digging, he said is needed to learn more about the customs, eating habits and homesteads of the small tribe.

Most of the artifacts will be on display in October at the state museum in New Orleans. In addition to Freeman's beads, archeologists working on the first dig found flintlock rifles, pots, pans, large and small bells, and pottery. Toth said he believed such artifacts explain why the French considered the Tunica rich, and said excavation of grave and home sites will further uncover the tribe's history.

"This will illuminate their cultural history considerably," Toth said. "The French histories don't tell us much. They say the Indians traded, but they don't tell us what. Now we know more about what they owned."

Toth said that a study of the Tunica is essential to learning the history of development in the river valley. "We actually are working with a tribe that was really important," he said.