

PRELIMINARY REPORT
OF ARCHAEOLOGICAL TESTING
AT THE TONKAWA BLUFF, VICTORIA CITY PARK,
VICTORIA, TEXAS

Anne A. Fox

Center for Archaeological Research
The University of Texas at San Antonio
Archaeological Survey Report, No. 70

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Photocopy Reprint
May, 1984

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The following information is provided in accordance with General Rule of Practice and Procedure, 355.01.011c, Texas Antiquities Committee:

1. Preliminary testing for delineation of archaeological site 41 VT 10, located in Victoria City Park, Victoria, Texas
2. Victoria City Park
3. Victoria County, Texas
4. Thomas R. Hester, Principal Investigator; Anne A. Fox, Project Archaeologist and author
5. City of Victoria, Texas
6. Texas Antiquities Permit Number 195
7. Published by Center for Archaeological Research, The University of Texas at San Antonio, San Antonio, Texas; January 1979

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Many people have helped to make this project possible. We are grateful to Kemper Williams, Chairman of the Victoria County Historical Commission, and Jack Murphy, Parks Director, for recognizing and understanding the need for careful archaeological work on the site. E. H. Schmiedlin has been helpful and supportive in numerous ways throughout the project.

Archaeologist Roland Beard visited the site and gave us the benefit of his observations of Mr. Jarratt's excavations. Dr. Robert Shook of Victoria Junior College provided us with copies of John Jarratt's notes and manuscripts, without which this report could not have been completed in such detail.

We are indebted to Albino Garza, foreman, and Danny Svellik and James Poore, Jr., who worked carefully and cheerfully in miserable weather, operating the trenching machine and helping to flag artifacts. Donald Dusek of the Parks and Recreation Department was most cooperative, and Mrs. Lorna Dusek came out and helped for a day with artifact recording.

INTRODUCTION

In October 1978, the Center for Archaeological Research was requested by Mr. Jack Murphy, Director of Parks and Recreation for the City of Victoria, to aid the City in determining the approximate extent of a Spanish Colonial site in the City Park. The location of the site has been known since the early 19th century (Linn 1883:333-334), but its full extent and the details of its origin and construction have never been determined.

A program of archaeological testing was proposed for delineating and assessing the site. Under a contract between the City of Victoria and the Center for Archaeological Research (letter dated November 14, 1978, Mr. Jack Murphy), work was begun on November 27, 1978. The testing was carried out by Anne Fox, Research Associate of the Center, and Cristi Assad of the Center staff. The project was directed by Dr. Thomas R. Hester, Center Director, and Mr. Jack D. Eaton, Assistant Director.

HISTORY OF THE SITE

The Victoria City Park site, designated 41 VT 10 by the Texas Archeological Research Laboratory in Austin, consists of both a prehistoric occupation site and the sub-surface remains of a group of Spanish colonial structures. It is located on a bluff overlooking a bend of the Guadalupe River, on the east bank just north of the original town site. Known as the Tonkawa Bluff, the area has long been popular as a picnic spot and arrow head hunting site (see Fig. 1).

Judging from artifacts recovered by John L. Jarratt of Victoria and by several professional archeologists who visited the site in 1931 and 1932, the southern part of the site, which includes the south slope of the bluff (see Fig. 1), has been occupied since the Early Archaic period (ca. 5000 B.C.). The upper foot or so of this area contains pottery of the Late Prehistoric period, and on the surface were found sherds of historic Indian and Spanish ceramics, as well as European pottery discarded by late 19th century inhabitants of the area (Jarratt 1932:12). In 1920 the landowner began removing the top soil from this slope and selling it in Victoria by the wagon load for yard dirt (*ibid.*:1). By 1965 the area had been further altered in the process of constructing a golf course, and a YMCA building had been built "about where the main part of the Indian Village was located" (Jarratt 1966a:4). A surface inspection of the slope and surrounding areas during the 1978 investigation yielded only a few chert flakes and an occasional sherd of late 19th century pottery.

On the northern edge of the bluff top are located a group of sandstone foundations. These were described by John J. Linn, who settled in Victoria in 1830, as having been a church, the foundation of which was still visible in 1883 when he wrote his memoirs. Linn implied that the church had been built for the Tonkawa Indians by the Franciscan fathers, who had taught the Indians to speak Spanish, to weave cloth and blankets, to practice agriculture, and to raise cattle and horses (Linn 1883:333-334). In 1922 the ruins were still visible, though overgrown with mesquite and huisache (Jarratt 1966b:3). The City of Victoria bulldozed the northern part of the site in 1958 in order to

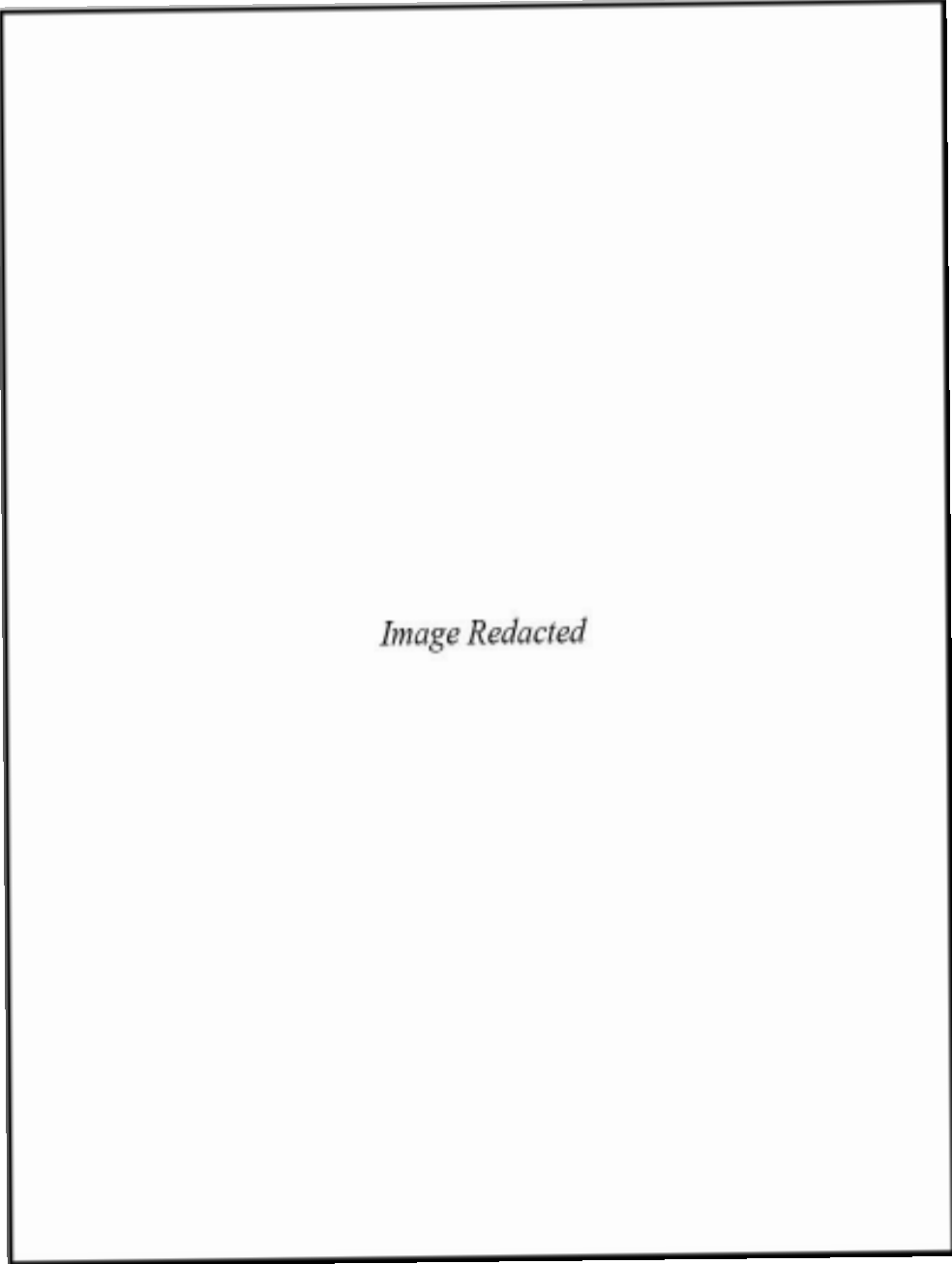


Figure 1. *Map of Site*
41 VT 10.

construct baseball fields north of the bluff, removing the ruins and as much as one and one-half feet of topsoil, which contained much of the Spanish and Indian midden material that Jarratt had found there in 1930 (Jarratt 1932:4). In 1965 Jarratt uncovered a portion of the foundations and called attention to the damage being done to the site by heavy equipment driving across the area. He also removed two historic period burials exposed by the disturbances which were located southeast of the ruins. The City promptly erected a fence around the exposed wall footings and halted traffic across the site.

RECENT INVESTIGATIONS

When plans were first announced in spring 1978 for construction of a rose garden on the Tonkawa Bluff, local historians became concerned that the project might damage the prehistoric and historic remains in the area. In April a representative of the Texas Historical Commission visited the site and expressed the opinion that the proposed park development would not disturb the archaeological site. However, in order to be sure that this was the case, local amateur archaeologist E. H. Schmiédlin suggested to Park Director Jack Murphy that a row of auger test holes be dug across the area in question to ascertain whether any structural or artifactual remains might be located within the garden site (see Fig. 1). Results of these test holes indicated that the Spanish Colonial deposits cease well to the east of the proposed garden.

In the meantime, Mr. Kemper Williams, Chairman of the Victoria County Historical Commission, initiated discussions between the author and the Texas Historical Commission concerning an application to put the Spanish site on the National Register of Historic Places. It was concluded that such a move would not be possible until the limits of the site could be determined, which would require archaeological testing.

During the week of November 27, 1978, the author directed an archaeological investigation at site 41 VT 10. Measurements were taken and a map drawn of all visible traces of walls previously exposed by Jarratt in 1965. The outline of Jarratt's proposed reconstruction of the original buildings and walls was staked out on the ground (Jarratt 1966a:12; and Fig. 1). The entire area was carefully examined for any sign of structures which might still protrude above the present ground surface. Except for an occasional sandstone rock, no surface evidence of outer walls or other structures was noted outside the 50 x 50 ft. fenced area on the north side of the site. A check of the visible wall outlines indicates that Jarratt's measurements were quite accurate and that his plan will prove useful for any future subsurface investigations at the site.

A small trenching machine operated by park personnel was utilized to excavate two perpendicular trenches across the center of the site. The trenching operation was closely monitored to record soil changes and artifacts which were exposed by the machine. Each artifact was numbered, bagged and marked with a flag as it was discovered, producing a highly visible record of the artifact concentrations across the site. No walls or footings were encountered in the trenching. One area which may have subsurface disturbance was recorded just south of the fenced ruins.

ARTIFACTS RECOVERED

A variety of artifacts was recovered from post hole auger testing and trenching operations (see Table 1). The assortment is typical of Spanish Colonial sites dating to the early 18th century, and includes the following:

<u>ceramics</u>	
<u>majolica</u>	- Puebla Polychrome San Luis Polychrome Aranama Polychrome Puebla Blue on White
<u>porcelain</u>	- Chinese blue on white
<u>earthenware</u>	- green lead-glazed utility wares storage jars unglazed Indian-made wares
<u>metal</u>	- thin copper fragment
<u>chert</u>	- numerous flakes
<u>bone</u>	- animal bone fragments
<u>shell</u>	- river mussel shell
<u>clay</u>	- chunks of baked clay

For estimating the date of site occupation, ceramics are the most useful and accurate artifacts. Comparison of the site 41 VT 10 ceramics with those from other Texas sites indicates that the Spanish occupation on the Tonkawa Bank apparently took place in the first half of the 18th century. This is determined by the fact that Puebla Polychrome majolica and San Luis Polychrome majolica have not been found on Texas sites settled after 1730. This is reinforced by the absence of certain types of lead-glazed earthenwares which appear only on sites settled after 1750 (Fox 1977:4). In addition, the entire collection bears a strong resemblance to the artifacts recovered from excavations at the Mission Valley site of Presidio La Bahia (personal observation), which was occupied from 1726 to 1749.

The chert flakes and Indian-made ceramics probably reflect the presence of Indians at the site during the Spanish occupation. Pieces of bone and shell represent foods consumed by the inhabitants. The chunks of baked clay may well be remains of jacal structures of poles, branches and mud which burned, baking the clay daub in the walls. Identical fragments were recovered at Presidio La Bahia in Mission Valley which bore imprints of twigs and branches used in jacal construction (personal observation).

A few late 19th century artifacts were found scattered over the surface of the site. These artifacts reflect the presence of a farmhouse to the south of the site at that time, and are similar to those found on the surface of the south slope mentioned above.

CONCLUSIONS

Distribution of artifacts within the test excavations (see Fig. 1) confirms Jarratt's contention that a large amount of topsoil has been removed from the northern part of the site. However, it appears that the southern third of the Spanish occupation area may still be relatively intact. The fact that Jarratt

TABLE 1. DISTRIBUTION OF ARTIFACTS RECOVERED FROM 41 VT 10

TRENCH A--NORTH TO SOUTH										TRENCH B--EAST TO WEST									
	Unglazed Ceramics	Lead Glazed	Majolica	Baked Clay	Chert	Bone	Shell	Total		Unglazed Ceramics	Lead Glazed	Majolica	Baked Clay	Chert	Bone	Shell	Total		
0-10					3	1		0									0		
10-20					2			4							1		2		
20-30								0							8				
30-40								2											
40-50								0											
50-60	1			1	2	1		5		1				1			2		
60-70					1			4		1				1			25		
70-80					1			1		1				1			19		
80-90	1			1		4		7		1				2			4		
90-100				1		8		16		1				1			7		
100-110						3		19									1		
110-120						1		12									1		
120-130						4		14									1		
130-140					2	2		7									1		
140-150						1		3									3		
150-160								2									0		
160-170					1			2						1			2		
170-180								4									0		
180-190						2		2									0		
190-200								0									0		
200-210								1									0		
210-220						1		2							1		2		
TOTAL	2	56	0	4	14	28	2	106		2	43	4	1	3	29	2	34		

could still locate wall footings suggests that there are probably more structural remains present even where topsoil removal was most severe. These could take the form of wall footings similar to those he recorded:

a layer of yellow sand was first put into trench excavated for foundations...trench then was filled with river gravel and rock...the whole cemented into a solid mass...the building then erected on this (Jarratt 1966c:9).

There may also be post holes from other types of structures such as the jacals mentioned above, as well as fences and walls. Although no indication was found in the test trenches, a stockade wall may have been built around the perimeter of the site. The location and arrangement of such features would give clues about the use of the site and the purpose for its construction.

As to the identification of the ruins, there have been a number of theories about the origin of the sandstone structures on the Tonkawa Bank. Jarratt has suggested that they may represent an intermediate location of Presidio La Bahia or of Mission Espiritu Santo. Founded in 1722 on the Garcitas Creek, these establishments were moved in 1726 to Mission Valley about six miles to the northwest of the City Park. It is just as possible that this was an outpost or *visita* of the mission, or perhaps a mission ranch headquarters which was later converted to a mission for the Tonkawa Indians. Thus far, no documents have been found which positively identify the site.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Citizens of Victoria and the surrounding area are particularly fortunate in having a rich cultural heritage of which they should be proud. In addition to many prehistoric occupation sites along the nearby rivers and creeks, there are a number of early Spanish mission and presidio sites in the area and numerous handsome 19th century homes and other structures which are visible reminders of the past. Of the historic sites, perhaps the least appreciated and understood are those of Spanish origin. Unfortunately, most of the visible remains of the Spanish settlements in Victoria County are located on private property and are therefore not available for public viewing and interpretation. This fact emphasizes the importance of the Spanish site in the Victoria City Park as an opportunity to demonstrate and interpret the Spanish era in local history. An exhibit could be prepared which would tell the story of Spanish settlement in the area, using the site as an example.

The most important immediate concern should be to prevent any further damage or deterioration of the archaeological remains. No further traffic should be routed across any portion of the area except where necessary for mowing and other maintenance. This is particularly important on the northern half of the site, which has been severely denuded of protective topsoil, and in the area where the burials were found. It is gratifying to note that posts have been erected around the perimeter of the area to prevent vehicles from driving or parking on the site. Another problem which will be more difficult to handle is the riding of horses across the bluff top. It may be that public education will help to deter this unintentional destructiveness.

Archival research should begin before any educational display is planned. Since Jarratt's research in the 1960's, a great many new archival materials have become available from Spain, France and Mexico. Information on the origin and purpose of the Tonkawa Bluff site can probably now be found among these records.

As part of an educational exhibit, the wall footings could be carefully exposed by archaeologists and then reconstructed to just above ground level so as to be evident to the visitor. At the same time, testing within the ruins would reveal whether any floors or living surfaces remain which might contain artifacts for use in interpreting the site. The area which contains burials should be enclosed in some manner and covered with six inches or more of topsoil for protection since Jarratt found that the burials have only two or three inches of soil over them at present (Jarratt 1966a:8).

An important part of the project might be to perform archaeological excavations to the west of the presently known foundations, in the area where Jarratt found indications of walls but did not excavate further. Clues about the original purpose of the Spanish site may lie in this direction, and it is possible that original floor levels may not have been disturbed by the 1958 bulldozing.

After studying Jarratt's notes and manuscripts, it becomes apparent that there is a great deal more to this site than is presently known. A complete survey of the area between the bluff and Spring Creek should be considered as an important part of any future work at the site. Jarratt (1966c:14) records two Indian campsites north of the bluff within this area and hints at the possibility of an acequia or irrigation ditch along the edge of the valley wall. If the Indian occupation sites have somehow remained undisturbed, they may contain valuable information about use of the bluff top area through time.

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