

Monitoring of the Future Site of the Hyatt Convention Center Hotel, San Antonio, Bexar County, Texas



by
Kristi M. Ulrich

with a contribution by
Pollyanna Held



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Abstract

From October 2005 until March 2006, the Center for Archaeological Research (CAR) of The University of Texas at San Antonio, contracted with Raba-Kistner Consultants, Inc. to monitor the construction activities of the new Hyatt Convention Center Hotel in downtown San Antonio. Located just to the north of the Lila Cockrell Theater, and within a mile of the Alamo, the site had potential for producing significant cultural resources. This project entailed the monitoring of mechanical excavations. Over the course of the project, five late-nineteenth century features were identified and recorded before removal. One additional feature was recorded prior to CAR involvement with the project. No Spanish Colonial or Native American deposits were observed.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

The Center for Archaeological Research (CAR) of The University of Texas at San Antonio was contracted by Raba-Kistner Consultants, Inc. of San Antonio to perform the monitoring tasks required by the City of San Antonio's Historic Preservation Office (SAHPO) at the location of the future Hyatt Convention Center Hotel. Over the course of four and a half months, monitoring was conducted of the mechanical excavations performed at the future location of

the hotel. Monitoring of the activities occurred from October 2005 to March 2006.

The footprint of the future Hyatt Hotel occupies the previous site of the Henry B. Gonzalez Convention Center parking garage. The site is located at the corner of Bowie and East Market Streets in downtown San Antonio, Texas (Figure 1-1). The site is located within a one mile radius of

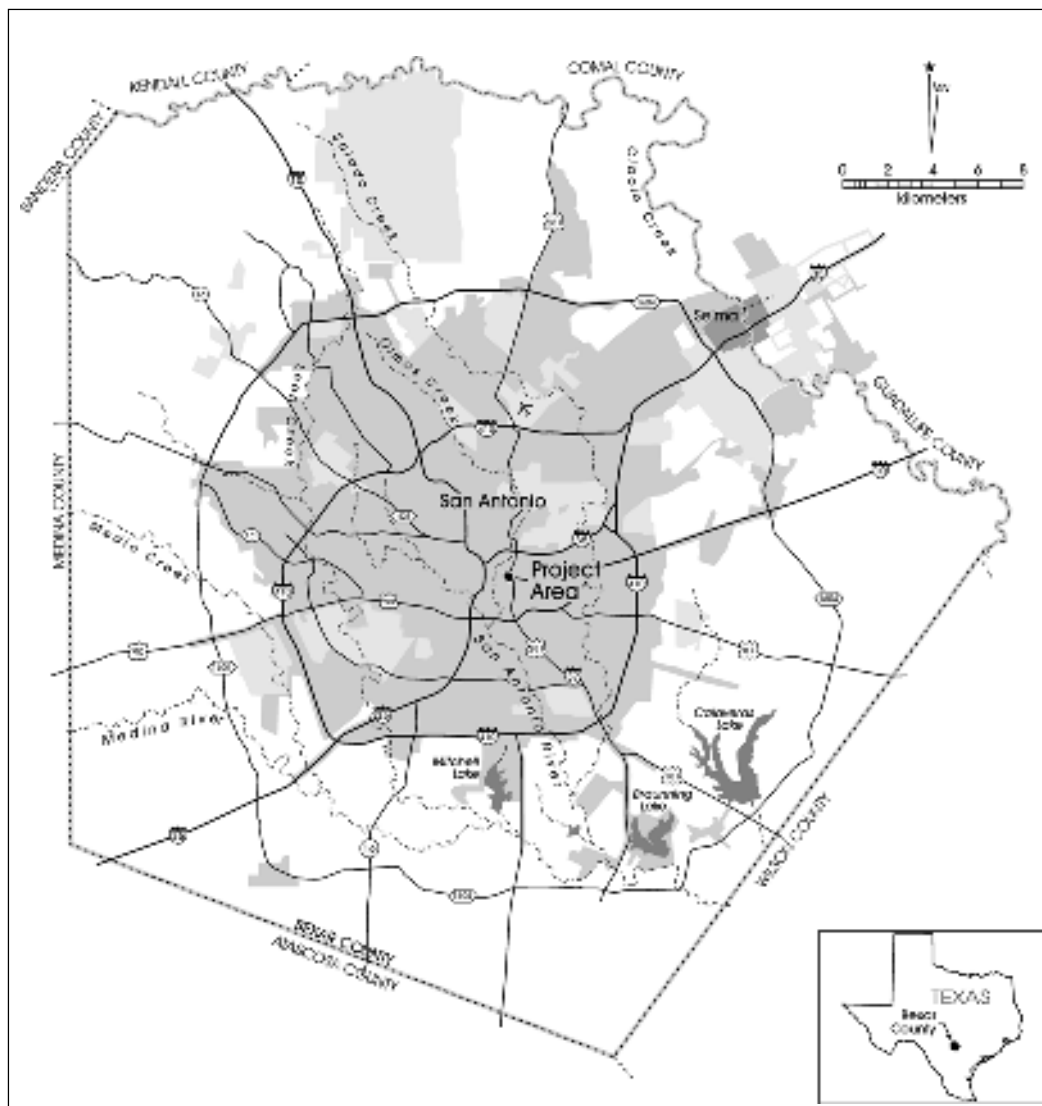


Figure 1-1. Location of project area.

Mission San Antonio de Valero (41BX6), La Villita Earthworks (41BX677), and several historic structures located within the Historic Triangle of HemisFair Park.

Prior to this project, three archival and archaeological assessments of the area had occurred in the immediate area, in relation to the Convention Center expansion (Johnson and Cox 1995; Johnson et al. 1997; Tennis and Cox 1998b). These reports summarize previous archaeological investigations that occurred in the immediate vicinity of the current project area.

Three points of interest resulted from the previous archaeological research conducted in downtown San Antonio: (1) the majority of our knowledge comes from the numerous investigations of late-nineteenth and early twentieth century historic resources; (2) with the exception of the many Spanish Colonial sites in San Antonio, very few historic sites pre-dating the 1870s have been encountered and investigated; and (3) due to the rich history of the downtown area of San Antonio, it has the potential for producing significant cultural resources. It is possible that some historic deposits and foundations may have survived the large-scale construction activities relating to the HemisFair Park between 1966 and 1968.

Based on the previous assessments and in conjunction with the SAHPO, a scope of work was designed for the project, similar to the 1997 monitoring of the Convention Center expansion. The guidelines called for documenting the presence of historic features and deposits, recording their locations, and assessing their age. For the purposes of this project, archaeologically significant resources were defined as any intact deposit pre-dating 1850, or any feature of unique nature post-dating 1850. Of specific concern was the possibility of encountering a portion of the Alamo Acequia during the large-scale mechanical excavation within the project area.

Chapter 2: Historical and Archaeological Background

Bexar County in general and the city of San Antonio specifically have a long history of prehistoric occupation and a rich historical heritage.

Prehistoric Period

The area known today as the metropolitan city of San Antonio has been inhabited by humans for more than 10,000 years. Many prehistoric sites have been located throughout Bexar County, some dating to 9000 B.C. The prehistoric use of the downtown area is still relatively unknown, but information can be inferred from other excavated sites around the county, including the St. Mary's Hall site (41BX229), and the 1997 UTSA Field School site (Hester 1978), as well as Late Prehistoric human remains recovered from 41BX917 in La Villita (Tennis 1994).

Historic Period

The Historic period of Texas is marked by the arrival of the Spanish into the territory. Accounts made during these initial visits indicate many small, autonomous Native American groups inhabiting the South Texas region (Campbell and Campbell 1985). The native groups were hunters and gatherers, and may have had up to six distinct language groups. The native groups in south Texas are believed to have been Coahuiletecan-speaking groups.

Spain did little to colonize the Texas territory until the late-seventeenth century, when French encroachment into the area encouraged Spanish expansion. The expansion took the form of missions, placed along the east Texas border to act as a buffer. In 1718, the first mission was established on the San Antonio River. The first two locations of Mission San Antonio de Valero have not been identified. Mission Valero (presently known as the Alamo) was moved to its final location in 1724.

The Acequia Madre was constructed to bring a supply of water into the mission, as well as irrigate the crops. The acequia originated near present-day Brackenridge Park, re-entering the river 3.5 miles downstream, just south of Mission Valero. Additional branches were later added to the Acequia Madre, and would have irrigated more agricultural land, including the project area.

The project area remained Mission Valero property until secularization occurred in 1793 (Cox and Fox 1983). At that time, mission assets were divided among the native inhabitants and the Adaesanos, the refugees who came to San Antonio from Los Adaes. The project area is spread over three of the land grants portioned out during secularization: Ramon de los Fuentes, Jose de la Baume, and Tomas Martinez (Figure 2-1).

The ensuing decades saw much political unrest. First, Mexico gained independence from Spain. The next several years saw Texas merge into the state of Saltillo, and then became a separate department with San Antonio as the capital. In 1836, the fight for Texas independence culminated in San Antonio with the Battle of the Alamo. Shortly after the battle, Texas won its independence. Though the Republic of Texas had separated itself from Mexico, attacks by Mexican troops still occurred until Texas became part of the United States in 1844.

The majority of the project area falls on what was once part of Beckville, a unit of land, referred to as a *suerte*, purchased by Joseph Beck in 1848, who quickly surveyed the land and divided it into lots and city blocks (Johnson et al. 1997). Beckville was one of the first organized neighborhoods in San Antonio. Several lots within the neighborhood were vacant until the mid-1860s, though Beckville was a well-established community by the 1870s (Johnson et al. 1997).

The neighborhood experienced much change over the next several decades. By the 1960s, the area had been deemed undesirable, with many of the inhabitants being of the poorer class in San Antonio at the time. When the idea for the HemisFair took full force, portions of Beckville became part of the area that underwent major construction to make way for the new structures needed to house the fair. Few houses were salvaged and moved to be utilized as part of the park. The rest were demolished to make way for the landscaping and buildings that made up the HemisFair Park grounds in 1968.

Previous Investigations

The location of the project area falls within the grounds utilized during the 1960s revitalization of the area to become

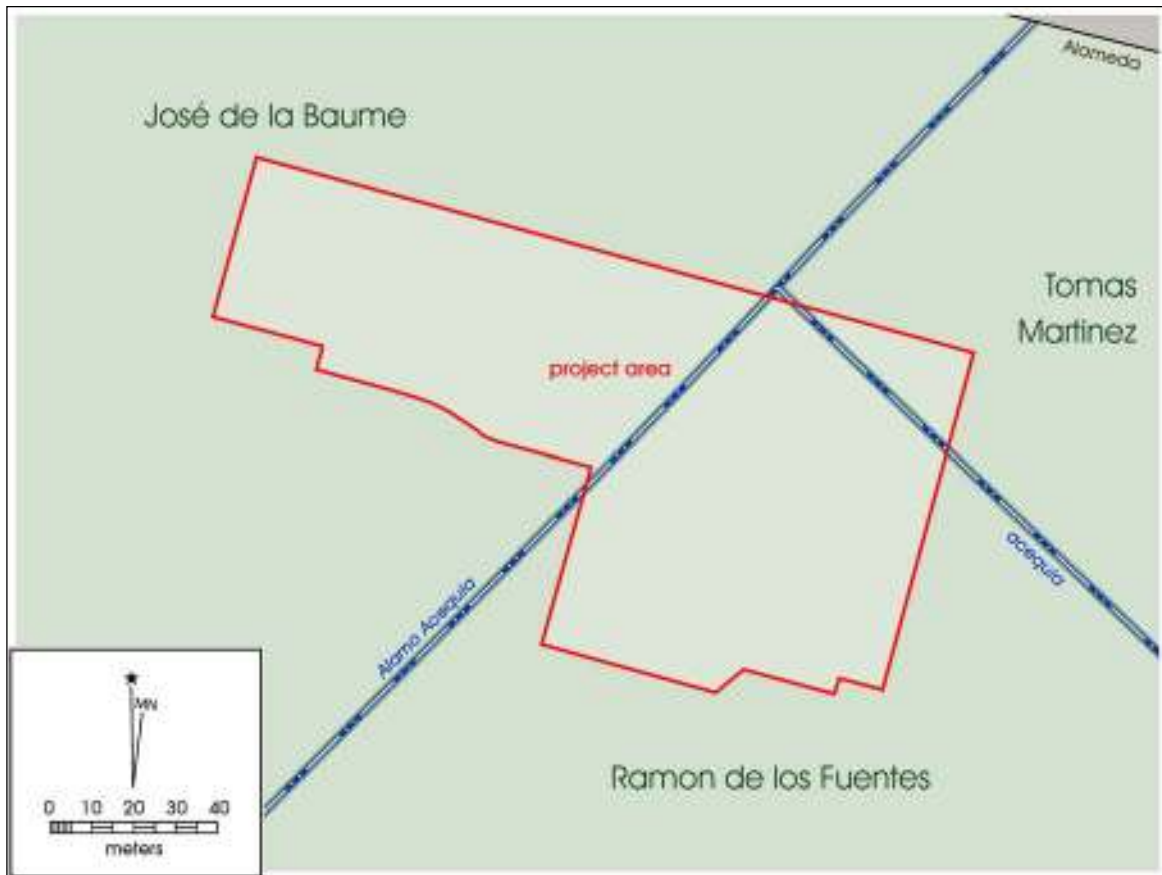


Figure 2-1. Spanish land owners and suertes (land grants), circa 1800.

part of the HemisFair grounds. At the time of the construction of HemisFair Park, very few laws concerning historic preservation existed. Many of the properties were destroyed or moved from the original locations by the time a proper review of the structures was conducted in 1983. Luckily, several of the structures were selected to be preserved, though they were moved from their original locations. These structures were renovated to become part of the attraction of the HemisFair grounds. Several of the buildings are still in use today. The majority of the known structures were relocated to the southwest corner of the HemisFair Park, know as the Historic Triangle. A few were relocated to other areas around the grounds. A portion of the original route of Goliad Street was retained as a promenade, where some of the relocated structures were placed.

The locale of HemisFair Park covers a historically significant area; few archaeological investigations were

conducted in the area. Five archaeological projects have occurred within the HemisFair Park area, one within the vicinity of the current project area.

The first archaeological investigation undertaken on the HemisFair grounds occurred during the preparation for the HemisFair exposition in 1966. During the initial construction activities on the fairgrounds, a section of the Acequia Madre (41BX8) was uncovered (Figure 2-2). This portion of the acequia had been stone-lined, giving it a distinctive outline that was easily traceable. Volunteers excavated a segment of the 50-ft. section under the guidance of Mardith K. Schuetz, curator of anthropology at the Witte Museum. The excavation revealed the depth and width of the quarried limestone-lined trench. Cultural material recovered from the acequia was related to the late nineteenth century, when the acequias were ordered to be filled in to aid in the prevention of cholera and other diseases. The excavated section was

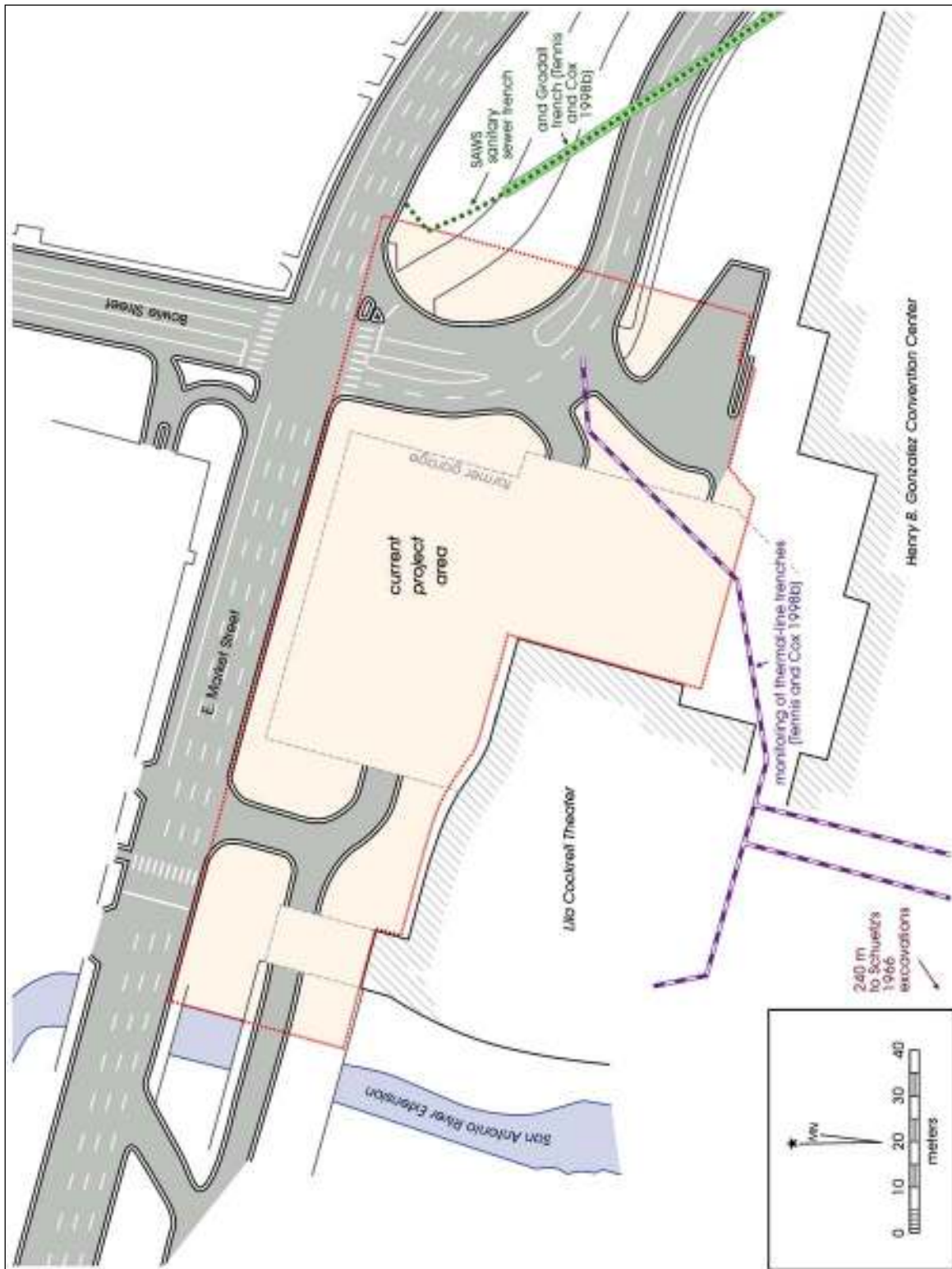


Figure 2-2. Map of previous investigations within the project area.

re-pointed and turned into a circulating water feature. The unexcavated portion of the acequia was built over by the Spanish pavilion and other structures before proper archaeological testing could be conducted (Schuetz 1970). Later archaeological investigations were performed to further research the path and condition of the Acequia Madre.

CAR conducted test excavations during late 1983 and early 1984. The project utilized backhoe trenching and hand excavations to relocate the Acequia Madre, and determine the current condition of the feature. Though the testing was conducted within seven feet of the 1966 excavations, the acequia was not initially located. Further trenching located the stone-lined acequia south of the Transportation Museum, and found that the feature was still in relatively good condition. The investigation concluded that the acequia does not run in a straight line from the location uncovered by Schuetz (1970). Further investigations were needed to determine the exact route (Fox 1985).

Efforts to locate the Acequia Madre continued in January 1989. CAR conducted trenching in regularly placed intervals from the known location at the north end of the project area. Each trench was cut until the acequia channel was located. A total of six trenches was opened to reveal the acequia path. The investigations showed that the east wall of the acequia was still in relatively good condition, while the west wall was missing. Cultural material was predominantly late nineteenth century, when the acequia no longer was in use and was filled in a single operation (Fox and Cox 1990).

In addition to locating the path of the acequia, testing was conducted at the Smith House, in concert with Texas Historical Commission (THC) recommendations. Material collected was consistent with the construction date of the house, though a few chert fragments indicated that there may have been a prehistoric component within the area as well (Fox and Cox 1990).

Installation of utilities within HemisFair Park prompted archaeological monitoring in 1992. Monitoring was conducted near the Hermann and Kampman houses, as well as the Koehler and Espinosa houses. During the course of the monitoring near the Koehler and Espinosa houses, the foundation of the Huebaum House was located. The foundation was designated 41BX982, and was the only item of cultural significance recorded during the course of the project (Cox 1992).

In 1996, the City of San Antonio requested that CAR prepare an archival study and archaeological assessment of the area designated for the expansion of the Henry B. Gonzales Convention Center (Figure 2-2). The archival report presented the history of the HemisFair Park, and paid specific attention to the portion of land that was to be directly impacted by the expansion (Johnson et al. 1997).

In response to the Convention Center expansion, two archaeological monitoring projects occurred in 1997. The first was the monitoring of mechanical excavations in conjunction with sewer and water line installations needed for the expansion. Three late-nineteenth to early twentieth century features were encountered. No pre-1850 deposits were identified during the course of the project (Tennis and Cox 1998b). The second was the monitoring of mechanical excavations relating to the realignment of Bowie Street, installation of thermal lines, and the excavation of the Convention Center expansion footprint. A total of 25 historic cultural features were encountered during the course of the project. All features identified post-dated 1850. The features included trash deposits, privies, wells, house foundations, artifact scatters, and portions of the Alamo Acequia (Tennis and Cox 1998a).

Chapter 3: Field and Laboratory Methods

The methodology utilized in this project was similar to the previously used parameters established by THC during the 1997 monitoring of the Convention Center Expansion project. These guidelines allowed for the inspection and documentation of post-1850s cultural deposits, and did not require the long-term pausing of construction activities. Cultural deposits encountered that were determined to pre-date 1850 required the cessation of digging activities to allow for controlled excavation of the area. These guidelines allow for the immediate recording of the post-1850 resources, while safeguarding possible undisturbed, earlier deposits.

Assessment and Recording Protocol

The construction of the Hyatt Hotel was an immense undertaking. Coordination of the contractors and adherence to the schedule of tasks was essential to the completion of the project. To be able to efficiently address the deposits unearthed during the massive excavation, great importance was placed on deposits that pre-date 1850. Based on THC's definition of significant archaeological deposits necessitating work stoppage for further investigation, parameters were established to assist in quickly differentiating between deposits pre-dating and post-dating 1850 in the field. Previously researched archival records were consulted to determine the dates of occupation within the project area. The project area was overlaid on an 1896 Sanborn Fire Insurance map to help aid in the identification of possible historic resources (ProQuest Information and Learning Company 2001a). Reports concerning previous investigations were consulted to determine the types of cultural resources encountered, as well as which structures had been relocated.

Field Methods

Identified cultural features exposed during the excavation were recorded in daily notes, listing the location, dimensions, depth, and artifactual material encountered. A Trimble Geo Explorer II GPS unit was used to record the location of cultural features within the project area. Photographs were taken to record the nature of the features. Diagnostic artifacts, such as wire nails, Annular ware, and yellow brick, aided in the dating of the cultural features encountered during the course of the project.

Phase I Monitoring

The first phase of construction activities at the project site correlated with the need to place subsurface electrical lines outside of the hotel footprint (Figure 3-1). Monitoring of the trenching occurred from the Service Drive of the Convention Center addition to just south of E. Market Street, and then from that point to the middle of the previous path of Bowie Street. The trenching was accomplished through the use of a CASE 9040B trackhoe with an approximately 1-m³ bucket. The depth of the approximately 1-m wide trench was at least 5 ft. below surface. According to OSHA standards, areas deeper than 5 ft. had to either be shored or stepped. Stepping would result in a wider trench in areas that exceeded 5 ft. in depth. All soil removed during trenching was placed to the side of the trench, and utilized later as fill to cover the installed electrical lines.

Phase II Monitoring

The second phase of monitoring focused on the excavation of the trench for the slurry wall guide-wall (Figure 3-2). The slurry wall, or diaphragm wall, was to be excavated to approximately 70 ft. below surface. To insure that the slurry wall remained in the correct position, a guide-wall was utilized to aid in the excavation. The guide-wall trench outlined the footprint of the future hotel. The trench for the guide-wall was 4 ft. in depth and approximately 6 ft. wide. The trench was excavated using a rubber-tired backhoe, with an approximately 1-m wide bucket. The soil from the trenching was placed next to the trench, allowing the backdirt to be scanned for content.

Phase III Monitoring

After the placement of the of the slurry wall guide-wall, a large clam digger suspended from a crane excavated to approximately 70 ft. below the surface. As the soil was removed in sections along the slurry wall path, a sodium bentonite mixture was piped into the trench to keep the walls from collapsing. When the section had reached the maximum depth, concrete was poured in, replacing the sodium bentonite mixture. After the concrete had time to cure, and the majority of the slurry wall had been created,



Figure 3-1. Photograph of mechanical excavation of utility trench, facing north.

excavation of the interior of the hotel footprint commenced (Figure 3-3). The soil inside the slurry wall was removed by a Volvo EC460B trackhoe, with a 5-ft³ bucket. The soil was removed in 10-ft. levels, to allow for a five-story, subterranean parking garage. Monitoring of this excavation was limited to viewing the profile, and usually at a distance due to the large machines and the depth of the excavations. The matrix was immediately loaded and taken to a dump site away from the project area.

artifacts were located, they were to be returned to the CAR laboratory, washed, catalogued, and curated according to current THC guidelines. No artifacts observed during the course of the project were determined to meet the temporal requirement, therefore no material was collected. Rather, the cultural material encountered was assessed in the field, class and types recorded, any identifying marks noted, and photographs of some fragments were taken. The material was then either returned to the backfill, or hauled off the premises.

Laboratory Methods

According to the guidelines set forth at the beginning of the project, only artifacts associated with pre-1850 features were to be collected from the site. In the case that such



Figure 3-2. Photograph of mechanical excavation of the slurry wall guide-wall, facing north.



Figure 3-3. Photograph of mechanical excavation of the interior of hotel footprint, facing southwest.

Chapter 4: Results of Investigations and Conclusions

Feature Descriptions

Five historic features were exposed during the course of the project, one feature (Feature 6) was revealed prior CAR involvement in the project, but was recorded by Pollyanna Held of Raba-Kistner (Figure 4-1). The features include one trash scatter, two cisterns, one red brick foundation, and two yellow brick foundations. Features are plotted on a map of the project area, with an underlying 1912 Sanborn map showing previous structures (Figure 4-2; ProQuest Information and Learning Company 2001b). Correlations between the location of the features and the Sanborn map were examined. None of the features encountered pre-dated 1850, therefore were documented quickly and removed without controlled excavation. No trinomials were assigned to any of these features because they did not meet the requirements for a significant deposit. All features are associated with residential use of the area after 1850. Diagnostic artifacts encountered date from the late 1800s to the early 1900s, though modern trash was also present throughout the project area.

Feature 1

Feature 1 was located just outside the footprint of the hotel (Figure 4-3). The feature was uncovered while trenching for electrical lines during the early stages of the project (Phase 1). The feature consists of a scatter of trash approximately 9 ft. in length and 13 ft. wide. The trench appears to have hit the western portion of the trash scatter. The trash layer began approximately 30 cm below surface (cmbs) and extended for an additional 50 cmbs. Electrical lines encased in PVC pipe appear to have been placed within the top layer of the trash deposit.

One fragment of white earthenware bears a stamped maker's mark of John Maddock and Sons. Since there is no "Ltd." added to the mark, it is possibly that the vessel was manufactured between 1880 and 1896 (Godden 1964). Other ceramic types encountered included Transfer ware, Ironstone, Semi-Porcelain Hotel ware, Yellow ware, Handpainted White Earthenware, Flow Blue, Sponge ware, Annular ware, stoneware, and undecorated white earthenware (Figure 4-4).

The ceramic fragments appear to represent cups, bowls, plates, pitchers, and a possible chamber pot. All fragments date within the 1880 to 1920 timeframe.

Various color glass fragments were noted in the trash scatter as well. One intact, aqua glass bottle was noted, with a cork finish, and a kick-up that indicated that it was possibly a wine bottle. One intact, aqua glass ink well was recovered from the top layer of the trash scatter. No identifying marks were noted, but the well appears to have no mold lines and the finish is applied. A Scott's Four Roses cologne bottle also was recovered, dating to the early part of the twentieth century. A fragment of a brown glass bottle with a brandy finish was also encountered. Other fragments included milk glass, pressed glass, possibly from a bowl or lamp fixture, clear, olive, green, aqua, purple, and brown glass. A rusted axe head was encountered in the trash scatter. A majority of the bone fragments exhibited saw and machine cut marks. A small portion showed signs of hand butchering (Figure 4-5).

The artifacts encountered in the trash scatter were consistent with a late-nineteenth to early twentieth century date. No archaeological excavation was undertaken due to the age of the deposits.

Feature 2

Feature 2 was a yellow brick foundation located near the outer western edge of the slurry wall guide-wall (Figure 4-6). The foundation was approximately 8 m long, running north-south. The top of the foundation was uncovered at 110 cmbs; with the base of the foundation at approximately 155 cmbs. The width of the wall was 35 cm. The guide-wall trench was dug several times, and during the final time the foundation portion was removed. The bricks were laid on top of a cement base that was reinforced with twisted rebar (Figure 4-7). The bricks were embossed with "LAREDO BRICK CO." The Laredo Brick Company was found in the Laredo city directory from 1920-21 to 1980 (Cook 1998), though it seems they were in business since 1891 (Gross and Meissner 1997). It was most likely founded by Andrew Hans Thaison, who arrived in Laredo in 1881 (Cook 1998). A few fragments of undecorated white earthenware were noted

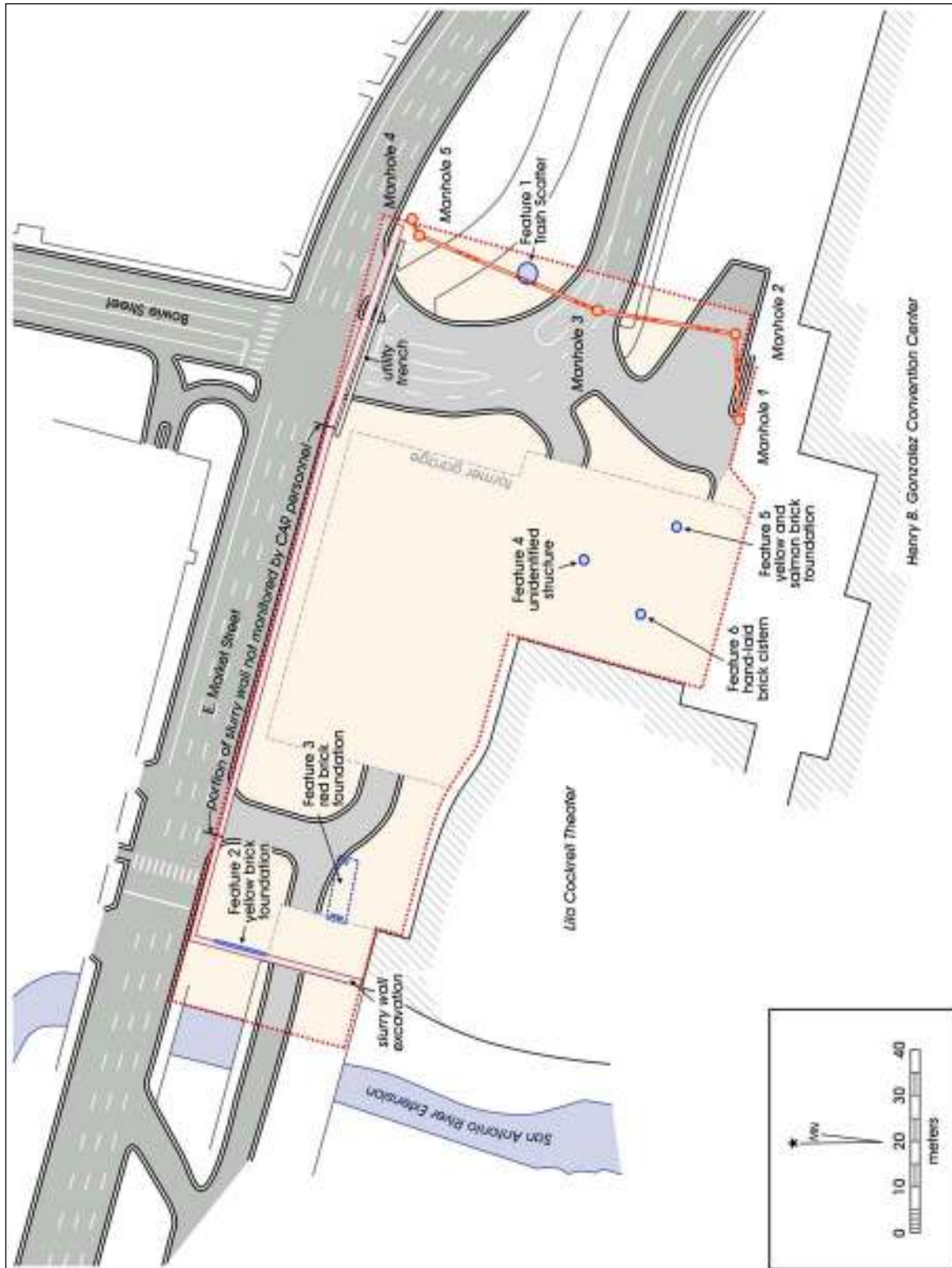


Figure 4-1. Map of feature locations.

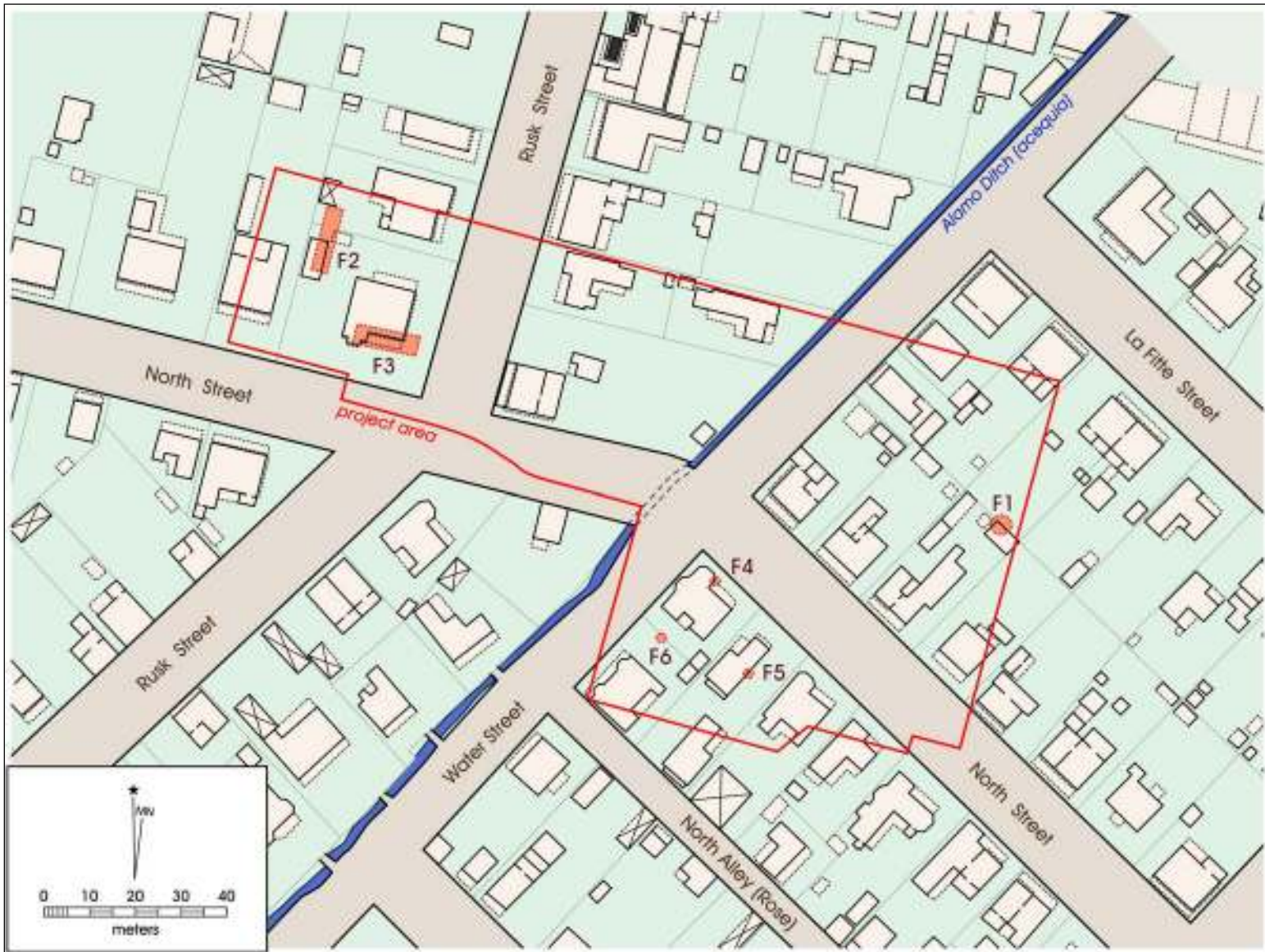


Figure 4-2. Map of feature locations overlaying the 1912 Sanborn map (ProQuest Information and Learning Company 2001b).



Figure 4-3. *Photograph of Feature 1, extent of feature marked by pink flagging tape, facing north.*



Figure 4-4. *Examples of ceramics observed in Feature 1.*



Figure 4-5. *Artifacts from Feature 1.*



Figure 4-6. *Photograph of Feature 2, facing west.*

in the backdirt, as well as an aqua glass bottle manufactured by ABC Co. It is possible the bottle held mineral water. The presence of the bricks indicates that the foundation was constructed between 1920 and the mid-1960s. The area was cleared in 1967 to make way for the construction associated with the 1968 HemisFair.

Feature 3

Feature 3 was a red brick foundation set on top of a reinforced concrete base (Figure 4-8). The foundation was located in the southwest portion of the hotel footprint. The length of the foundation could not be ascertained due to the large trackhoe having removed a large portion of it before it could be closely examined. Next to the foundation was a concentration of bricks, none of which were mortared together. The bricks in the foundation and pile had “ALAMO” stamped on one side. The Alamo Brick Company was founded by J. S. Magnus in 1880 as Bem Bricks, but the name was changed to Alamo Brick Company in 1920 (Cook 1998; Steinbomer 1983). Therefore, the structure could have been built between 1920 and the mid-1960s. No other cultural material was noted in the surrounding area.

Feature 4

Feature 4 was an unidentified structure, possibly a foundation, located to the east of the Lila Cockrell Theater. The possible foundation was partially impacted by a previously installed cement pier that supported the parking garage (Figure 4-9). The foundation was constructed of yellow brick that exhibited no diagnostic marks. It is possible that it is a portion of a structure that appears on the 1912 Sanborn map (Figure 4-2), which was constructed after the San Antonio Planning Mill Co. was removed from the area. There was no associated cultural material encountered during the removal of the structure.

Feature 5

Feature 5 was a portion of a foundation composed of yellow and salmon colored bricks (Figure 4-10). The foundation was located to the east of the Lila Cockrell Theater, southeast of Feature 4. The foundation appears to have been disturbed previously, with loose fragments of mortared brick near the remaining part of the intact foundation. A pocket of flat glass fragments was located in the vicinity of the foundation.



Figure 4-7. Photograph of the reinforced cement base of Feature 2.



Figure 4-8. *Photograph of Feature 3, facing south.*



Figure 4-9. *Photograph of Feature 4, facing south.*

It is possible that this foundation is related to the structure in Block 688 Lot 304 of the 1912 Sanborn map (Figure 4-2).

Feature 6

by Pollyanna Held

Prior to September 2005, trenching was conducted along the project area to locate any remaining portions of the Spanish Colonial acequia. One of these trenches located in projected path of the acequia, located just southwest of Feature 4, exposed an intact, hand-laid brick cistern (Figure 4-11) that was nestled between the wastewater drain and parking garage foundation. The well extended to a depth of about 15 ft. and the bricks date between 1896 and 1905. Since the cistern dates to a late-nineteenth/early twentieth century occupation, no additional time was spent recording and documenting the well other than photographing and measuring the structure.

Summary and Conclusion

Over four and a half months, CAR monitored the construction activities at the location of the future site of the Hyatt Convention Center Hotel. The monitoring was conducted for Raba-Kistner Consultants, Inc. as requested by the San Antonio Historic Preservation Office. The purpose for the monitoring of the area was to identify and record cultural deposits within the project area. Guidelines provided by the SAHPO specified that any post-1850s structure or deposit encountered would be recorded and removed. Any deposits that pre-date 1850 would require that the activities be suspended within the immediate area to allow for controlled excavation. Due to the previous construction in the area, the project area was predisposed to disturbance, though it was believed possible that some intact cultural features would be encountered beneath the site of the parking garage. Part of the Acequia Madre is thought to have crossed through the project area, following the path of what once was Water Street. Though the area was mainly open cropland during the colonial period, portions were inhabited during the early 1800s.

During the monitoring of the massive excavation of soil at the location of the new Hyatt Convention Center Hotel, six features were encountered. All six features were recorded to the extent possible under the circumstances. At times when the smaller excavating machines were utilized, feature

characteristics were recorded in much detail. When the large removal of soil was undertaken, observing the soil was more difficult due to the use of much larger machines, the immediate hauling of soil, and the inability to be very close to the activity. Cultural features were recorded and their temporal affiliations were quickly assessed in the field. The six features encountered did not predate 1890; therefore, no controlled archaeological testing or excavations were conducted. Instead, the features and affiliated artifacts were examined in field, information recorded, photographed, and location recorded, when able, with the use of a Trimble Geo Explorer II GPS unit. Four out of the six features were remnants of house or cistern foundations, and one was a late-nineteenth to early twentieth century trash scatter. Each feature was recorded in reference to the hotel footprint, and placed on a map of the project area.

Four of the six features were removed as a result of the mass excavation within the hotel footprint. One was located outside the footprint, but trenching indicated that the feature did not extend much further past where it was initially observed.

Much of the trenching encountered previously disturbed soils. It appears that the construction of the parking garage that previously stood on the site resulted in massive impacts in the project area. Only fragments of foundations remained, with evidence that other portions were removed, or drilled through (as in the case of Feature 4). No evidence of prehistoric occupation was noted within the project area.



Figure 4-10. *Photograph of Feature 5, facing northeast.*



Figure 4-11. *Photograph of Feature 6, facing north.*

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