

**Archaeological Survey for the Proposed St. Peter-St.  
Joseph Children's Emergency Shelter  
San Antonio, Bexar County, Texas**

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## **Abstract**

On March, 17, 2008, the Center for Archaeological Research at The University of Texas at San Antonio conducted an archaeological survey of 1.4 acres on the grounds of St. Peter- St. Joseph Children's Home campus located in San Antonio, Bexar County, Texas. The archaeological work was completed for Chesney Morales Architects, who planned the construction of an emergency shelter on the property. The Children's Home is located adjacent to the old channel of the San Antonio River and across from Mission Concepción. Due to the high likelihood that other prehistoric and historic sites may also be found in the vicinity, it was recommended that an archaeological survey be conducted prior to construction in accordance with the San Antonio Unified Development Code, Chapter 13, under the Historic Preservation and Design Section—Article 6. There are no federal or state permits, or funds associated with this project. The project occurs on private property, and therefore, a Texas Antiquities Permit was not required.

CAR excavated three shovel tests, and four backhoe trenches within the footprint of the proposed construction. All shovel tests, and backhoe trenches were negative for cultural materials. In addition, the area was tested with a metal detector due to the proximity of the location of the Battle of Concepción. This survey revealed no artifacts of the battle. No features were identified during the survey and no new sites were recorded. Therefore, since the planned construction will impact no cultural deposits or historic properties, no further archaeological work is recommended on this property. CAR recommends that the proposed development proceed as planned.

No artifacts were recovered during this work. All project-associated documentation is curated at the Center for Archaeological Research according to Texas Historical Commission guidelines.

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# Chapter 1: Introduction

On March 17, 2008, the Center for Archaeological Research (CAR) of the University of Texas at San Antonio (UTSA) conducted an archaeological survey of 1.4 acres of land associated with the planned construction of children’s emergency shelter on the campus of the St Peter- St. Joseph Children’s Home (St PJ’s). The campus is located in the City of San Antonio, Bexar, County, Texas. The work was completed for Chesney Morales Architects, who have designed and will oversee the construction of this three-building facility. The location of the Area of Potential Effect (APE), also referred to as the project area, is shown on the San Antonio East 7.5 minute series USGS topographic quadrangle (Figure 1-1). Multiple prehistoric and historic archaeological sites have been recorded in the near vicinity. Because of the archaeological significance of this area, the San Antonio Historic Preservation Division (SAHPD) required an archaeological investigation prior to construction in accordance with the San Antonio Unified Development Code, Chapter 13, under the Historic Preservation and Design Section– Article 6. Therefore, Chesney Morales Architects contracted with CAR to conduct an intensive pedestrian archaeological survey of the proposed footprint of the facility. The CAR

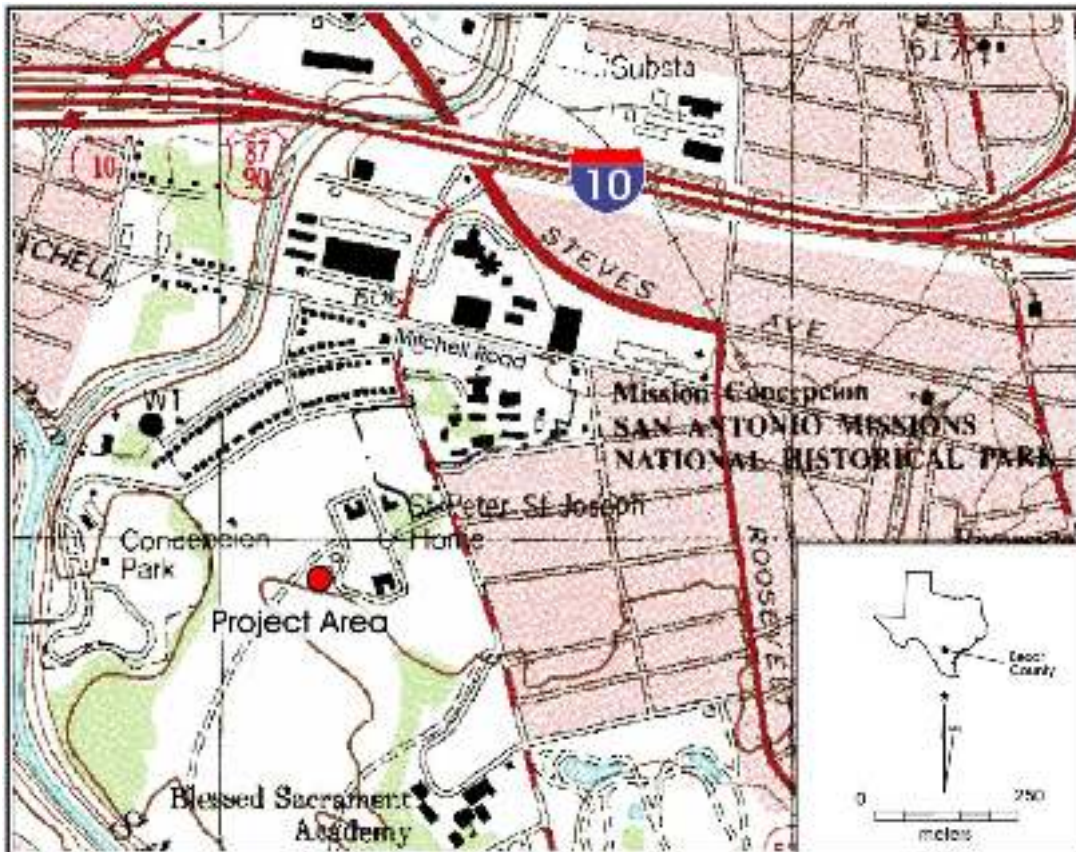


Figure 1-1. Project area on the San Antonio East, 7.5 Minute Series, USGS quadrangle map

performed the necessary tasks to meet the code requirements. The project does not require a Texas Antiquities Committee Permit because no federal or state owned land or funds will be used on the project, and no other state permits will be required to complete the planned development. CAR conducted fieldwork that included a pedestrian survey using shovel testing, backhoe trenching, and a metal detector sweep. The level of archaeological effort has met and exceeded the minimum standards set forth by the Texas Historical Commission for a project of this size.

This report is organized into five chapters. Chapter 1 provides a brief overview of the project area and summarizes the archaeological knowledge about the region. Chapter 2 discusses the fieldwork and laboratory methodology employed during the project. The results of the archaeological survey are presented in detail in Chapter 3. Chapter 4 summarizes the work and provides recommendations for the future St. Peter- St. Joseph Children's Home Emergency Shelter project.

## **Project Area Setting and Environment**

The project area lies within the watershed of the San Antonio River with the APE situated on a former terrace of the San Antonio River. Between 1950-1970, the river was channelized to prevent flooding, thus altering the historic course of the river (Mahoney 2004; Meissner 2007). This resulted in the present channel being located approximately 250 m to the west of the former meander (Mahoney 2004:3). Figure 1-2 shows the project location in relation to the former channel of the San Antonio River. The majority of the land surrounding the project area is now dedicated to light industrial and residential use. Prior to the twentieth century, the land served primarily as agricultural fields associated first with Mission Concepción, and later, farms surrounding the mission.

Within the project area, the soil is described as belonging to the Venus soil series (Taylor et al. 1991). The surface soil is clay loam, VcB, approximately 7 to 20 inches in thickness (Taylor et al. 1991:6). The subsurface soil is also a clay loam, friable to firm with a substratum that consists of older alluvium (Taylor et al. 1991:6). Taylor et al. (1991) states these soils are well-suited to small grain crops, such as corn, sorghum, and grains (Taylor et al. 1991:7). Historic use of the land surrounding the project area has been associated with agriculture.



Figure 1-2. Project area showing its spatial relationship to pre-channelized San Antonio River. The location of the battle of Concepcion is also shown (Meissner 2007).

Climate of the region is classified as humid subtropical with hot, humid summers and mild, dry winters (Taylor et al. 1991). Average annual rainfall varies between 750 to 1,150 mm with the majority of the precipitation falling in spring and early fall (Taylor et al. 1991). Average annual temperature ranges between 17 to 21°C (Taylor et al. 1991).

## Culture History

Bexar County has a rich prehistoric and historic past with the archaeological record illustrative of the many cultures that have occupied this region through time. The following section outlines a brief cultural chronology of the region to provide context for the archaeological work.

### Prehistoric Periods

The project area lies within a region that commonly uses the chronologies of South and Central Texas to describe the prehistoric context (Collins 1995; Hester 1995). It begins approximately 9000 B.C. and ends around A.D. 1700. There are three commonly accepted periods that describe changes in the technological and material culture among hunter-gatherers. These periods are the



Paleoindian (ca. 10,000 B.C. to 7000 B.C.), the Archaic (ca. 7000 B.C. to A.D. 800), and the Late Prehistoric (ca. A.D. 800 – 1700).

Material culture from the Paleoindian period consists of among other Clovis and Folsom fluted projectile points used to hunt megafauna, such as mammoth and bison (*Bison antiquus*). The Richard Beene site (41BX831) is an example of a site with a Paleoindian occupation located in the near vicinity. Along the Salado Creek watershed, a significant Paleoindian site (41BX229) is located at St. Mary's Hall's School. It contained projectile point types that are distinctive of a later Paleoindian period and mark a transition to the Archaic Period (Hester 1978).

In general, the Archaic Period is well represented in Bexar County. This period encompasses the longest span of time from 6000 BC- AD 700, and is generally divided into three sub-periods, the Early, Middle and Late Archaic. It is characterized by adaptations to changing environment, resources, increase in population density, and a broader array of material culture (Prewitt 1995). Intensification of subsistence resources is a hallmark of this period that included the use of features such as hearths, ovens, and burned rock middens (Collins 1995).

The Late Prehistoric period (AD700 – AD1700) is distinguished by material culture that includes ceramics and the bow and arrow (Collins 1995). Changing environment caused by climate shifts marks a change in the availability of resources. Late Prehistoric material culture such as projectile points and ceramics are commonly found on the surface and/ or shallowly buried.

## **Historic Period**

While the Spanish visited the San Antonio region, it was not until the early 1700s that Europeans began to actively settle the surrounding region of what would become San Antonio de Béxar (Bannon 1974). The City of San Antonio begins with the establishment of San Antonio de Béxar Presidio in 1718 and San Fernando de Béxar Church in 1731 (Handbook of Texas Online 2007). The European expansion coincided with the southward migration of the Comanche and Apache which displaced many of the area's indigenous groups (Campbell 1979; Newcomb 1961). Five missions were built between 1718 and 1731 and Native American groups moved to the protective environment of these various missions. This process of missionization significantly altered the hunter-gatherer way of life and the material culture of many of these groups (Campbell 1979; Newcomb 1961). By 1773, the population of Europeans, *mestizos* and converted Native Americans was estimated at 2,060 (Handbook of Texas Online 2008). San Antonio, because of its political, economic, and logistical significance, was the site of conflict first between Mexico and

Spain, followed by Mexico and Texans/Tejanos and finally, Mexico and the United States during the first half of the nineteenth century.

Specific to the project, this property lies within the former boundary of Mission Concepción, no known structures associated with the mission were built in the APE. The most significant historical event that occurred near the project area was the Battle of Concepción fought in 1835. Meissner et al. (2007) suggests that the battle was fought north of the APE (see Figure 1-2).

### **Previous Surveys and Archaeological Sites**

Formal archaeological investigations of the area have been many, although most of these investigations have naturally focused on Mission Concepción and its immediate vicinity (see Cox 2003; Ivey and Fox 1999; Miller and Meissner 2001 for information concerning some of this work). In 2007, CAR investigated the site of the future Juvenile Detention Center, immediately north of Mission Concepción, to locate any remnants of the battle of Concepción (Meissner 2007). No remnants of the engagement were found during this investigation. Specific to the project area, CAR conducted, in 2003, a pedestrian survey of a portion of the St. Peter- St. Joseph property (Mahoney 2003). During that survey, one archaeological site, 41BX1570, was discovered and recorded. It is situated on a terrace in a meander of the pre-channelized San Antonio River. Artifacts found include burned limestone, burned chert, lithic tools and debitage.

## **Chapter 2: Archaeological Field and Laboratory Methods**

Based on the area impacted by construction (equal or less than 2 acre), three shovel tests were required to fulfill the THC minimum survey standards. Three shovel tests and four backhoe trenches were excavated across the footprint of the planned construction. In addition, Cathy McCool, a member of the Southern Texas Archaeological Association (STAA), conducted a metal detection sweep of the APE.

Shovel tests measured 30 cm in diameter and were excavated to a depth of 60 cm below surface (cmbs) in 10-cm increments. All soil from each level was screened through ¼ inch hardware cloth. If artifacts were found, they were to be recorded with appropriate provenience for laboratory processing, analysis, and curation. A shovel test form was completed for every excavated shovel test. Data collected from each shovel test included the final excavation depth, a tally of all materials recovered from each 10-cm level, and a brief soil description (texture, consistence, color, inclusions). The location of every shovel test was recorded with Trimble GeoXT GPS units. Shovel test locations were also sketched onto aerial photographs as a backup to GPS provenience information.

Given the possibility of deeply buried cultural deposits, CAR mechanically excavated four trenches approximately 5 meters long and 1.5 meters deep. Both walls of each trench were scraped with shovel and trowel to determine if cultural materials were present, as well as to note any changes in sediments or the presence of buried soils. Photographs were taken of each wall of these trenches and a representative 1 m section was profiled for each trench. Soil samples were taken from each stratigraphic level for further analysis and description at the CAR laboratory. All trench locations were recorded with a GPS unit and drawn onto an aerial of the project area.

Due to the proximity of the Battle of Concepción, the APE was swept with a metal detector to record the location of any historic artifacts associated with the battle. The metal detector (Whites XLT, Spectrum Series) was able to distinguish types of metal and relative depth when encountered. When the detector found an object that contained iron, brass or lead that location was marked with a pin flag and later examined.

For the purposes of this survey, an archaeological site would contain a certain number of cultural materials or features that were at least 50 years old within a given area. The definition of a site

used for this project is as follows: (1) five or more surface artifacts within a 15-meter radius, (2) a single cultural features such as a hearth, observed on the surface or within a shovel test, (3) a positive shovel test containing at least three artifacts within a single 10-cm level, (4) a positive shovel test containing at least five total artifacts or (5) two positive shovel tests located within 30 meters of each other.

No artifacts were recovered and no new sites were recorded as a result of this work. All records generated during the project were prepared in accordance with federal regulation 36 CFR part 79. All field notes, forms, drawings, and digital photographs were printed on acid-free paper, labeled with archival appropriate materials, and placed in archival-quality sleeves. All records are housed at CAR.

## Chapter 3: Results

Four backhoe trenches and three shovel tests were excavated within the proposed area of construction. Figure 3-1 shows the locations of the backhoe trenches, shovel tests, and area swept by the metal detector.



Figure 3-1. Map showing the APE (yellow line) with locations of shovel test, backhoe trenches and area swept by metal detector.

The results of the shovel tests (ST) showed soils that were relatively deep and similar in composition. Soil consisted of extremely firm, dark brown clay loam to a depth of 60 cmbs. ST1 contained modern (not collected) artifacts (i.e., brick fragments, glass, and aluminum) in the first two levels (0-20 cmbs). No prehistoric or historic cultural materials were found in any of the three shovel tests.

Four mechanically excavated trenches (BHT) were placed in the footprint of the construction zone and perpendicular to the San Antonio River (see Figure 3-1). No prehistoric or historic cultural materials were found in the backdirt or the walls of any of the backhoe trenches. All backhoe trenches while similar in soil composition and stratigraphy were unique in the relative thickness of depositional zones due to their respective locations. The findings from this excavation concur with Mahoney (2004) who found that the area was once adjacent to a meander of the San Antonio River. For purposes of discussion, the excavation of these trenches will be discussed within the context of this finding. See Figure 3-2 for 1 m profile sections of each backhoe trench. To a depth 40 to 60 cmbs, the soil was a firm clay loam containing snail fragments consistent with the Venus soil series. The following zone was also a clay loam, firm to extremely in hardness with calcium carbonates filaments and nodules. The final zone was an alluvial derived sediment friable sandy loam with pebbles. In BHT4, the level between 120 to 150 cmbs was composed of cobbles and gravels suggestive of a high energy deposit. The soils found in these lower zones reflect the alluvial soil formation processes of this soil type, as referenced in Taylor et al. (1991) for this area. In BHT2, the zone from the surface to 40 cmbs was a friable clay loam that was different from the other three trenches. At 40 cmbs, the zones became similar to the stratigraphy found in the other trenches.

A metal detector sweep of the project area was conducted by Cathy McCool of the STAA. As we noted in Chapter 1, the Battle of Concepción took place in the near vicinity. Based on a map in Andrew J. Houston's book, *Texas Independence* (1938), Meissner et al. suggest that the main action took place on a parcel currently owned by the City of San Antonio and located between I-10 and Mitchell Road (Meissner et al.2007: Figure 2-2; also, see Barr 1990:23). Assuming this reconstruction is correct, the main action of the battle took place some 600 m to the north of the project area. During the sweep, Ms. McCool found numerous metal objects including aluminum cans and pull tabs, as well as other modern metal objects, such as a nails and hinges. It should be noted that the APE was littered with glass, concrete, brick and wire from previous construction activities. However, the survey did not find any historic artifacts that suggest the battle took place on the APE.

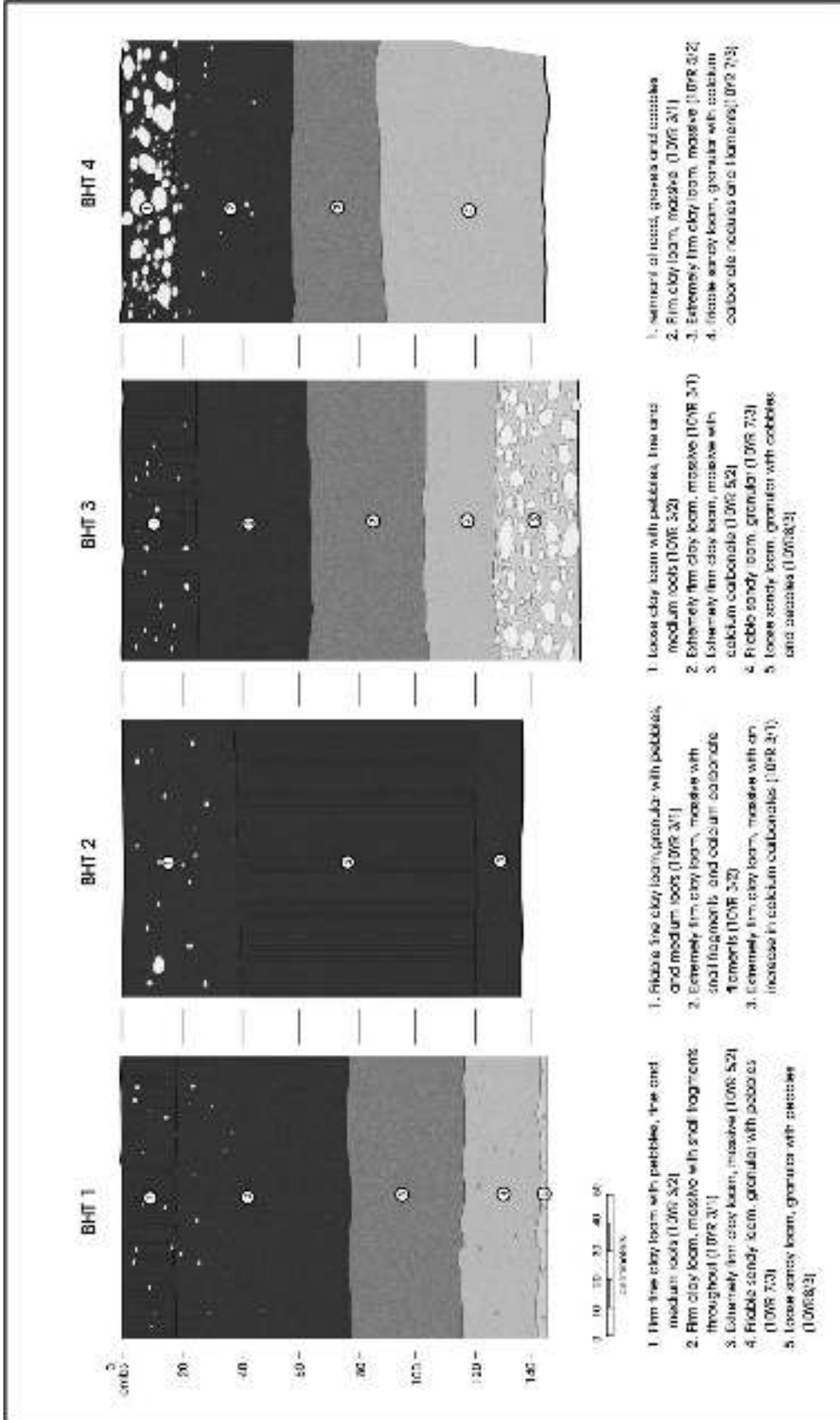


Figure 4-6. One meter profiles (north wall) of Backhoe Trenches 1-4.

## **Chapter 4: Summary and Recommendations**

The Center for Archaeological Research at The University of Texas at San Antonio conducted an archaeological survey of less than one acre on the grounds of St Peter- St. Joseph Children's Home located in San Antonio, Bexar County, Texas, on March 17, 2008. The archaeological work was completed for Chesney Morales Architects, who designed and will oversee the construction of a children's emergency shelter on the property. The SAHPD, in accordance with the City's Unified Development Code, requires archaeological investigations prior to construction. There are no federal or state permits, properties, or funds associated with this project, therefore, a Texas Antiquities Permit was not required.

CAR excavated three shovel tests and four backhoe trenches within the APE and visually inspected the surface of the project area. In addition, Cathy McCool, of the STAA investigated the project area with a metal detector. The shovel tests, and backhoe trenches were negative for historic or prehistoric cultural materials. The metal detector sweep of the survey produced no artifacts associated with the Battle of Concepción. No features were identified during the survey and no new sites were recorded. As no cultural deposits were identified within the project area, CAR recommends that the proposed development project be allowed to proceed as planned. All project-associated documentation is curated at the Center for Archaeological Research according to the guidelines of the Texas Historical Commission.



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