The Comal Street Parking Garage:

Historical and Archival Background Research,
San Antonio, Bexar County, Texas

by
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Prepared for:
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The University of Texas at San Antonio
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Technical Report, No. 20

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Abstract:

The Center for Archaeological Research (CAR) of The University of Texas at San Antonio (UTSA) contracted with Bexar County Infrastructure Services to compile the historical background for New City Block (NCB) 192, in San Antonio, Texas. As part of the project, the CAR also was to assess the potential of the lot to retain significant historic and/or prehistoric cultural resources. NCB 192 is the site of a planned parking garage to be constructed in the near future. The project area is located in the western part of downtown San Antonio, an area not developed until the end of the nineteenth century. The first house built in the project area was constructed before 1896. The project area consisted primarily of residential rental properties in the early years of the twentieth century, and became more commercial throughout the century. Of the early structures built on NCB 192, only one house, the Galindo House, remained until recently. The Texas Historical Commission had requested that this house be moved to a new site in order to preserve it. However, given safety concerns derived from structural weaknesses, the City condemned the structure and it was razed sometime before the completion of this report. No previously documented archaeological sites are located near the project area. Given that the Galindo House no longer exists within the APE, CAR recommends no further investigations on the property.
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The authors would like to thank Bruce Moses for sharing his knowledge of the numerous early battles for Mexico’s independence from Spain that took place in San Antonio. Steve A. Tomka, the Director of CAR and the Principal Investigator for this project, provided his usual support and assistance, for which we are also grateful.
Chapter 1: Introduction

In March of 2010, the Center for Archaeological Research (CAR) of The University of Texas at San Antonio (UTSA) contracted with Bexar County Infrastructure Services to compile the historical background for New City Block (NCB) 192, in San Antonio, Texas. As part of the project, the CAR also was to assess the potential of the lot to retain significant historic and/or prehistoric cultural resources. NCB 192 is the site of a planned parking garage to be constructed in the near future (Figure 1-1). This report summarizes the results of the archival and historical research undertaken by CAR and includes an assessment of the potential of the lot to retain significant archaeological resources.

The Comal Street Parking Garage Area of Potential Effect (APE) is New City Block (NCB) 192. It is situated between Houston Street to the north and Commerce Streets to the south, and Comal and San Marcos Streets to the east and west, respectively, in downtown San Antonio (Figure 1-2).

Scope of Work

This project was undertaken to determine if any significant historic resources may be present within the APE that may have research potential and would therefore warrant listing on the National Register of Historic Places and formal designation as State Archeological Landmarks. Establishing the occupation and use history of the lot will define who lived on the lot, what buildings/structures were constructed there, and how the various sequences of construction and demolition may have impacted any features.

Specifically, CAR agreed to carry out the following tasks:

1. Perform archival research to determine the occupation history of the landlot;
2. Complete an assessment regarding the potential of the property to contain significant archaeological deposits; and
Chapter One: Introduction

Comal Street Parking Garage Background Research

3. Complete a technical report that summarizes the results of archival research as well as previous archaeological investigations that may have occurred in the vicinity of the parcel. This report was to provide an assessment regarding what historic resources, if any, may lie buried at the location and what types of archaeological investigations, if any, would be necessary prior to the planned construction activities.

In order to carry out this research, the authors made use of deed records and historical maps of the area. The resources used included site records of the Texas Historical Commission’s Texas Archeological Site Atlas (THC 2010), deed records of the Bexar County Clerk’s online database (Bexar County Deed Records 2010), two historic “Bird’s Eye” maps of San Antonio, as well as other historic maps. Various publications concerning the history of San Antonio also were consulted.

Nearby Archaeological Sites

One recorded archaeological site, the Alazán Acequia (41BX620), lies within a 500-m radius of the project area (THC 2010). The acequia ran down the western side of Frio Street and is located approximately 350 m (0.22 miles) east of the project area. Recorded archaeological sites within a 1-km-radius of the APE include seven historic sites. Most of the sites are houses built southeast of the project area, near the Alazán Acequia. The seven sites are listed in Table 1-1.

Table 1-1. Archaeological Sites Within a One-kilometer Radius

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Site Number</th>
<th>Site Description</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>41BX514</td>
<td>Unknown site, lacks description.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>41BX600</td>
<td>Industrial brick building, constructed ca. 1919.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>41BX601</td>
<td>Steves Lumber Yard, several buildings constructed between 1807 and 1913.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>41BX604</td>
<td>Ernest Steve’s House, constructed ca. mid-1800s. Structure has been relocated.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>41BX611</td>
<td>Peter Marx House, constructed ca. mid-1800s. Artifacts from mid-to late-1800s.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>41BX612</td>
<td>Callaghan/Navarro House, artifacts date structure use from mid- to late- 1800s.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>41BX613</td>
<td>Concepcion Navarro House, artifacts date structure from mid- to late-1800s.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Chapter 2: The APE during the Spanish Colonial Period

A Brief Synopsis of the Early Colonial History of San Antonio

The earliest records that describe what is now San Antonio derive from the Teran expedition, which passed through the San Antonio River Valley in 1692 (Hatcher 1932). The abundance of water, as well as the friendliness of the local native groups, made the valley a prime location for a secure way-station between the Rio Grande and the missions that had been established in East Texas. Another visit in 1709 convinced Fray Antonio de San Buenaventura y Olivares that a mission should be established there to convert the local inhabitants into Spanish-speaking Catholics (Tous 1930:9).

In May of 1718, the newly appointed Governor of Coahuila officially dedicated an area near San Pedro Springs as the new Presidio San Antonio de Bexar (Hoffman 1938:49). Nearby, Mission San Antonio de Valero, later known as the Alamo, was established by Olivares. Over the course of the next few years, both the mission and the presidio were moved to the banks of the San Antonio River (Chipman 1992:125). Families of the soldiers began to build houses around the presidio creating Villa de Bexar (Ivey 2008).

In 1731, three missions were moved from East Texas to the San Antonio River Valley (Halig 1968:161). That same year, a group of 56 Canary Islanders were brought to the San Antonio valley, where they established the new Villa of San Fernando de Bexar (de la Teja 1995:10). On the recommendation of Brigadier Pedro de Rivera (de la Teja 1995:33-34), the Viceroy, Juan de Acuña, Marqués de Casafuerte, ordered the site of the new Villa to be on high ground west of San Pedro Creek and included a detail plan for the new town (Ivey 2008). Unfortunately, this plan did not take into consideration the actual situation on the ground. According to Ivey (2008):

Although a settlement with streets and house lots already existed around the presidio, [Captain Juan Antonio Pérez de Almazán] was expected to survey an entire new town west of it, where it appeared difficult or impossible to create irrigated fields. Rather than attempt such a major step with the reluctant help of the Canary Islanders,

By moving the town site closer to the presidio, the new inhabitants could take advantage of the partially constructed San Pedro Acrequia, and could plant their first crops in fields already cleared by the earlier settlers (de la Teja 1995:34). Thus, the Villa de San Fernando was established between San Pedro Creek and the San Antonio River (Figure 2-1). The area that would become NCB 192 was situated west of the growing Colonial town.

Figure 2-1. Map showing cultivated area of what is now San Antonio after 1731, including surveyed area set-aside for the growth of the town (Hora de Población). Approximate location of project area is noted.
During the remainder of the Colonial Period, the land to the west of San Pedro Creek was left unused (Figure 2-2) although it was part of the original "harea de poblacion," land set aside for growth of the town (Ivey 2008). Instead, the town expanded to the north and south between the two streams. After Mission San Antonio was secularized in 1793, the town expanded to the east (Habig 1968:77).

On June 20, 1813 the Battle of Alazán took place. The precise location of the Battle of Alazán is not known, but is believed to have taken place on a hill west of Alazán Creek, roughly 1.5 km (0.94 miles) west of the project area (Bruce Moses, personal communication, 2010). The battle involved over 800 Anglo-American volunteers and native Mexican insurgents who attacked an encampment of Spanish royalist troops (Santos 1997). The Republican Army of the North attacked an unsuspecting Spanish camp at dawn of that morning. The Spanish camp was not guarded as well as it could have, and the camp itself was overcrowded with soldiers and their followers. The battle lasted approximately two hours. Eventually the Spaniards retreated and the Republican Army captured much in the way of supplies and horses and mules from the abandoned camp (Santo 1997).

The Project Area in Relation to the Colonial and 19th Century San Antonio Road System

By 1689, Alonso De Leon started demarcating the first route of the Camino Real (McGraw et al. 1998). Villa de Béxar became one of the major thoroughfares of the Camino Real. The Camino Real consisted of a system of routes that connected the far corners of the Texas Territory. Three routes of the Camino Real fed into and out of Villa de Béxar between the mid-1700s to the mid-1800s. One route passed through Béxar on its way to Laredo, crossing the Rio Grande, as it headed to Monterey. The San Antonio-Laredo route was a major route of commerce between Louisiana, Texas, and Mexico (McGraw et al. 1998:160). This route was used by detachments from the Presidio de Béxar to meet convoys that carried supplies from Mexico City during the early occupation of San Antonio.

Another route of the Camino Real that passed through Béxar was known as el camino de en medio, or the Lower Presidio Road. The Lower Presidio Road was the same as the Laredo route before they split south of San Antonio along the west bank of San Pedro Creek. It passed through the present day towns of Poteet and Pleasanton.

Goods moved in and out of San Antonio de Béxar through the Camino Real. Freight charges were calculated based on the degree of difficulty to move the goods. Wares that needed extra care (such as ceramic vessels, oils, and wines) were often more expensive to transport than fodder, textiles, and grain. Luxury items, such as chocolate, coffee, sugar, and certain ceramics and glass vessels, often incurred a higher freight charge. In addition, the increased threats of native attacks, poor conditions of the roads, and the distance of the journey also would be factored in to determine freight charges. Though San Antonio relied on the Camino Real for the transport of goods, the later part of the eighteenth century saw the routes being used for cattle drives as well. The cattle drive between Natchitoches to Laredo could last up to three months (McGraw et al. 1998). Stockyards were created within Villa de Béxar to accommodate the influx of the cattle during the drives.

In addition to the Camino Real being used as a means of importation and exportation of goods and during cattle drives, stagecoaches utilized the system to transport passengers and mail. Stagecoach companies had stiff competition.
Many companies were vying for mail contracts, as these were the primary source of income. To get, and keep a contract, the companies would have to be fast, have a good record of being on time, and a low incidence of native attacks. If a stagecoach company lost its mail contract, the company would soon be out of business (Thonhoff 1971). More than 50 stagecoach companies were in operation in and around San Antonio between 1847 and 1881.

The APE is located between San Pedro Creek approximately one kilometer (0.67 miles) east of the site, and Alazan Creek which lies 0.56 km (0.35 miles) to the west. The project area lies within the area originally ordered by the Viceroy to be the location of the Villa de San Fernando (Ivey 2008). There is no indication that the area was ever farmed during the Colonial period (Figure 2-2). It remained open country on which cattle, sheep and goats (ganado menor) were grazed.

The project area lies on the road that led from San Antonio to Mexico, on the west side of town. In 1837, the road was referred to as Camino de Chihuahua according to the Rullman Map of San Antonio. The road changed names as it proceeded from the western to the eastern part of town. The segment of road between San Pedro Creek and the San Antonio River was called Presidio. The Presidio passed through the heart of the town, just north of the Plaza de las Islas and Plaza de Armas. Once it crossed the San Antonio River at the great bend, the road was referred to as Alameda. Alameda was the route to the Powder House where military attachments stored gunpowder and explosives (Jennings 1998). As it left the eastern part of town, the road became the Camino de Paso Hondo. Undoubtedly, the route would have been highly traveled by individuals coming from Mexico and west Texas and traveling to San Antonio and beyond. Over the course of the history of San Antonio, this route played an important role in the development of the City.
Chapter 3: The APE during the Post-Colonial Period and 19th Century

The Post-colonial Period

In 1821, after almost ten years of effort, Mexico was finally freed from control by Spain. San Antonio remained the capital of Texas, but the historically important arrival of Anglo settlers, most of them from the United States, was largely taking place in eastern Texas. However, in 1835 the tensions between the Mexican government and the people of Texas, Tejanos and Anglos alike, had reached a tipping point. The first battles of the war to free Texas from Mexico began in San Antonio. After a series of skirmishes, San Antonio was taken by the Texas revolutionary army in the fall of 1835, forcing the Mexican Army out of the City (Barr 1990). The Battle of the Alamo took place in March 1836, when Mexican forces recaptured the town. After the Mexican army was routed at the Battle of San Jacinto, Texas became an independent republic. San Antonio was no longer the capital (Fehrenbach 2010). The City settled into a serious decline, its inhabitants harassed by Comanches and Mexico, which still claimed Texas (Fehrenbach 2010). Twice during the Republic Period, Mexico sacked the suffering town. By 1846, when Texas became part of the United States, the population of San Antonio had dropped to approximately 800 (Fehrenbach 2010).

After becoming a state, Texas became a major focus for the huge wave of immigrants leaving behind a overcrowded Europe where the disruptions caused by the beginnings of the Industrial Revolution were being felt (Biesele 1987 [1930]:6-7). San Antonio became a “serving and distribution center” (Fehrenbach 2010) for this immigration, in particular for the waves of German immigrants. By 1860, the town had grown by an order of magnitude, and had more than 8,000 inhabitants. During this period of massive growth, most of the land that still belonged to the City was partitioned and sold (Cox 2000:13). Figure 3-1 is a map of the City lots drawn by Jave Gentilz from notes written by Francis Giraud in 1852.

During the Civil War, San Antonio prospered, as it once again acted as a way-station, this time between the cotton merchants of the southeast and Mexico, which remained officially neutral during the war. This commerce became more and more important to the Confederacy as the Union blockade of southern ports became more effective (Kerby 1972).

After the Civil War, San Antonio acted as the southern hub of the cattle trails that moved beef grown in Texas up to the railheads of Kansas and Missouri and as a mercantile and distribution center for South Texas (Fehrenbach 2010).

In 1874, the City Council of San Antonio ordered construction of the Alazán acequia, making irrigation of fields west of San Pedro Creek possible for the first time (City Council Minutes (CCM), Book D:118; City Ordinance JD 372). The Alazán acequia was begun at the confluence of Olmos Creek and the San Antonio River, passing just above the head springs of San Pedro Creek. The acequia then turned south and curved to the east in order to continue south along the west side of Frio Street (Cox 2000:15). Intended primarily as a flood control project area is noted.

Figure 3-1. Map of San Antonio city lots by Jave Gentilz, based on notes by Francis Giraud in 1852. Project area is noted.
Chapter Three: The APE during the Post-Colonial Period & 19th Century Comal Street Parking Garage Background Research

measure and only secondarily as a source of irrigation water for the west side of the City, the ditch was never a success (Cox 2000:15). Methods used to construct it did not follow the old Spanish techniques (Cox 2005). Within a very short time after it was complete, in 1875, it became necessary to redesign it (Cox 2000:15). None of the attempts to improve the situation worked, and in 1895, the city council ordered the acequia filled (CCM, Book L: May 27, 1895). The filled Alazán acequia runs approximately 348 m (0.22 miles) east of the project area.

The first railroad to reach San Antonio, the Galveston, Harrisburg and San Antonio line, arrived in 1877. The International–Great Northern arrived in 1881 (Fehrenbach 2010). The latter had its round house directly across Comal Street from the project area, and its passenger station two blocks north (Figure 3-2). The railroads brought new growth to the City, which had a population of 20,055 in 1880 (Fehrenbach 2010). The rail line of the San Antonio and Aransas Railroad went up the middle of Comal Street (Figure 3-2). However, the project area itself was still uninhabited in 1886.

The Project Area in the 19th Century

Throughout most of the nineteenth century the project area remained undeveloped (Figure 3-2). In 1869, Charles W. Devine sold several large lots, among them, what would be NCB 192. He had purchased the lot from the City of San Antonio and later conveyed it to H.B. Adams and E.A.D. Wickes, who were major land speculators of the period (BCDR U2:591). Adams and Wickes sold Lots 19 and 20 to Roland Goering in 1885 (BCDR 34:512). Goering presumably built the house that is shown on the 1896 Sanborn Insurance map, the first time NCB 192 was included in these maps (though note that the map incorrectly labels the block NCB 195 and misspells Comal Street) (Figure 3-3).

The Goering house may not have been the only house in NCB 192 at the time, but only the eastern portion of the block is shown. Adams and Wickes had sold Lots 11-13 to Frank Rieden in 1886 (BCDR 33:529) and it is possible the house on Lots 11 and 12 had been built by this time as well. Lots 11 and 12 were sold to John Rieden in 1893 (BCDR 128:506).

Both Adams and Wickes died before the turn of the century and their estates were subsequently distributed. Lots 3-6 became the property of Hattie Legler (BCDR 159:311), while Lots 7-10 became the property of Wickes' widow (BCDR 116:465).
Figure 3-3. 1896 Sanborn Insurance Map, showing the eastern edge of the project area. Note that Comal Street is misspelled and the NW 192 is mislabeled.
Chapter 4: The APE during the 20th Century

In 1900, with a population of 53,321, San Antonio was the largest city in Texas. By 1920, the population had grown to 161,379. It is not surprising that NCB 192 finally began to be inhabited. By 1904, there were eight dwellings on the block including a little store (listed as vacant on the 1904 Sanborn map) on the corner of Commerce Street and San Marcos Street (Figure 4-1).

The Sanborn map of 1911 shows (Figure 4-2) that on all lots, except Lots 7-10, at least one house has been built near the street. Behind eight of these dwellings are small buildings that have been given addresses. For instance, Lots 17 and 18 have a house built near Commerce Street with the address 1711 Commerce. Behind it are two small structures labeled 1711 1/2 and 1711 1/3. The addresses indicate that these tiny structures, some of which were no more than 10 feet square, were being used as dwellings, presumably by very low-income renters. The little store on Lot 11 is listed as a market (Figure 4-2).

The next available Sanborn Map dates to 1950 (Figure 4-3). This map shows that in the preceding forty years, NCB 192 experienced a mix of commercial and residential use. The following discussion is based on the Sanborn maps.
Chapter Four: The APE during the 20th Century

Comal Street Parking Garage Background Research

Figure 4-2. 1911 Sanborn Map, showing project area with numerous small structures.

Figure 4-3. The project area in 1930 according to Sanborn Insurance maps.
Bexar County Tax Records (BCTR), and Bexar County deed records (BCDR).

Deed records for Lots 1 and 2 after the land was sold to Adams and Wickes in 1869 have not been located. The house on Lot 1 was built sometime before 1904 and remained a domicile until after the 1950s. A store facing San Marcos Street had been added to the southern half of the lot by 1950 (Figure 4-3). The house on Lot 2, also built before 1904, remained into the 1950s, though an addition was completed in 1918 according to Bexar County Appraisal District Tax Records (BCADTR). The lot still had a structure with a separate address in its southern half (Figure 4-3).

Prior to the inception of this background review project, only the Galindo House located on Lots 3 and 4, still remained from the earliest days of the development of the block. The house was originally built around 1905 (BCADTR) when the lots were owned by John Legler (BCDR 218:69). As it is identical to the house next door on Lots 5 and 6 (Figure 4-2), also owned by Legler, it is likely that he built the houses specifically as rental property. He sold the house to Frankie Elise Riedell and Clara Riedell in 1909 (BCADTR). The Galindo family first acquired the house in 1944 from Jennette Sorrel (BCDR 2109:589).

John Legler apparently continued to own the house on Lots 5 and 6 until his death, when his heirs sold it to Manuel and Jovita Garza in 1944 (BCDR 2059:586), who in turn sold it to Alamo Aircraft Supply in 1957 (BCDR 4503:476). Recently, an effort was made to move the house rather than demolish it, but a buyer could not be found and the structure was condemned and subsequently demolished. On April 9, 2010, a CAR archaeologist visited the project location and documented that the structure was no longer present (Figure 4-4).

Lots 7-10 passed through a number of hands (see Appendix) until they became the property of Leon Wulfe (BCDR 1521:260). Leon Wulfe was one of the owners of Alamo Aircraft Supply, which purchased Lots 7-10 from him in 1957 (BCDR 3967:536) as well as most of the remainder of the eastern half of the block (see below). It should be noted that the 1950 Sanborn map labels the structure on Lots 7-10 "Scrap Iron and Junk" (Figure 4-3).

Lots 11 and 12 were sold by Frank Rieden to John Rieden in 1893 (BCDR 128:506). The property remained in the family until 1944 when it was sold to John Esquivel (BCDR 2055:431). Esquivel sold the northern 69 feet of the lots to Féliz and Ignacio Martinez the same year (BCDR 7774:1159). Shortly thereafter, the jumble of outbuildings and small rental properties that were on this portion of the lot were demolished and a radiator repair shop was built in their place (Figures 4-2 and 4-3). Prior to 1950, the little store that stood on the corner of Commerce and San Marcos also was torn down (see Figures 4-1, 4-2, and 4-3).

Lot 13 and the western half of Lot 14 were sold to George Formann in 1936 (BCDR 1523:450) but little is known about the property before that time. Roland Goering had purchased the eastern half of Lot 14 and Lots 15-18. This group of lots was inherited by his daughter Bertha at the time of the death of her mother, Anna, in 1915 (BCDR: 645:514). The northern half of all of these lots eventually was sold to Alamo Aircraft Supply (see Appendix A).

Figure 4-4. Photograph taken on April 9, 2010 showing project area (facing east) and vicinity of where the Galindo House once stood.
Chapter 5: Summary and Recommendations

In March of 2010, the Center for Archaeological Research (CAR) of The University of Texas at San Antonio (UTSA) contracted with Bexar County Infrastructure Services to compile the historical background for New City Block (NCB) 192 and assess the potential of the tract to retain significant historic and/or prehistoric cultural resources. NCB 192 is the site of a planned parking garage to be constructed in the near future.

No previously documented archaeological sites are near the project area. The nearest is the Alazán Acequia, a nineteenth century addition to the elaborate irrigation system begun by the Spanish. Although the exact location of the Battle of Alazán Creek is not known, it was known to be on the west side of the creek and away from the project area. The potential for prehistoric archaeological sites within the project area is considered minimal, as the area is not close to any water course.

The results of the historic and archival research indicate that, had the new town for the Canary Islanders been placed where the Spanish authorities originally intended in 1731, the project area would have been near the center of the new town that became San Antonio. As it was, the new town was placed on the eastern side of San Pedro Creek and the property that would become NCB 192 (see Figure 2-1), was not developed until the very last part of the nineteenth century. The property has a lengthy deed roll that chronicles the changing of hands as far back as 1869 (though, records suggest that Devine was accumulating the property during the early 1860s). Evidence of the first structure appears on the 1885 Sanborn Fire Insurance Map. The land use was residential in the beginning, with most of the structures apparently used as rental property. By the 1950s, however, most of the structures on NCB 192 had become commercial, and this trend continued into the latter part of the twentieth century.

The preceding background research indicates that NCB 192 began to be occupied in the late 19th century. The initial occupation was residential (primary residence and rental property) but over time, commercial use of the lots also was experienced. These shifts in residence patterns and early commercial use of land represent a significant period in the economic history of San Antonio. However, as a result of this rather intensive use of NCB 192, it is expected that the lots of NCB 192 have seen significant disturbances and few intact deposits may remain that could help document these significant trends in the economic history of the City. Therefore, CAR does not recommend archaeological investigations prior to the inception of construction due to the lack of potential for the lot to produce cultural deposits related to the Colonial Period and the degree of impact late 19th and early 20th century use of the lots likely has had on deposits that may inform archaeologists of the early economic history of San Antonio.
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Hoffman, F.L.

Ivey, J.E.

Jennings, F.W.
Kerby, R.L.

McGrath, A.J., J.W. Clark, and E.A. Robbins (editors)

Santos, R.

Texas Historical Commission

Thonhoff, R.H.

Tous, G.

Warren, H.G.
Appendix A:
The NCB 192 Abstract
Table A-1. Abstract for the New County Block 192.

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<td>P. Canto and H. Rodriguez</td>
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