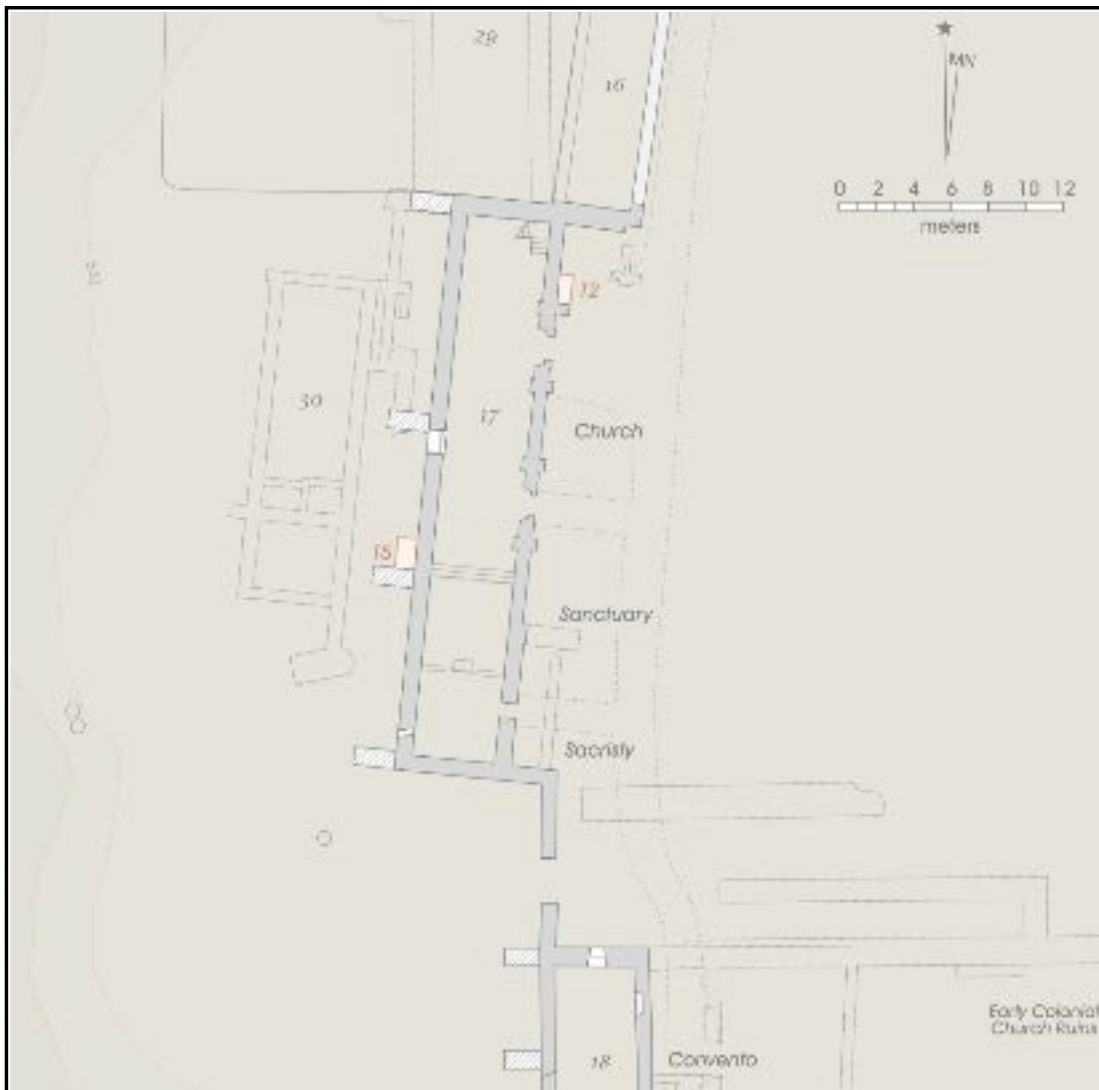


**Archaeological Investigations of Room 17,  
the Church at Mission San Juan Capistrano (41BX5),  
San Antonio, Bexar County, Texas**



*by*

Jennifer L. Thompson

Texas Antiquities Permit No. 5880

Principal Investigator  
Steve A. Tomka

*Prepared for:*  
Ford, Powell & Carson  
Architects & Planners, Inc.  
1138 East Commerce Street  
San Antonio, Texas 78205



*Prepared by:*  
Center for Archaeological Research  
The University of Texas at San Antonio  
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San Antonio, Texas 78249-1644  
Technical Report, No. 28

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## **Abstract:**

In February and March 2011, the Center for Archaeological Research at the University of Texas at San Antonio (CAR-UTSA) re-excavated trenches first excavated by Mardith Schuetz in 1968 at two locales outside Room 17, the mission church, at *Mission San Juan Capistrano* in the San Antonio Missions National Historic Park (SAMNHP). Schuetz's Trench 2 was located at the corner of a buttress and the east wall on the north side of the north door of the church. Trench 5 was behind the church, approximately 15.6 feet south of the west wall window at the corner of the wall and a buttress. The excavation occurred to assess the condition of the foundation ahead of restoration efforts to be conducted by Ford, Powell, and Carson, Architects and Planners, Inc. The 1968 excavations were also conducted to expose the foundation. At that time, the matrix was backfilled without being screened. Therefore, the current excavations through the disturbed deposits did not proceed in controlled levels. However, all excavated deposits were screened for temporally diagnostic artifacts, which were collected and taken for curation at CAR-UTSA.

Disarticulated human remains were recovered from the matrix screened from Trench 2. These were in a disturbed context that had been excavated in 1968. As per discussion with Susan Snow of the SAMNHP, the remains will be reinterred in the approximate location where they were found. No intact burial pit was present. The remains will be housed temporarily at CAR-UTSA until re-interred.

The work was conducted under Texas Antiquities Permit No. 5880. Steve A. Tomka served as Principal Investigator and Jennifer L. Thompson served as the Project Archaeologist.

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## **Acknowledgements:**

The author would like to thank the field crew, Jason Pérez, Stephanie Luke Villareal, and Nathan DiVito, for their work in completing the excavations on time. Cindy Munoz examined the skeletal remains and confirmed that they are human. Bruce Moses and Rick Young drafted the figures used in this report. Steve Tomka served as Principal Investigator and provided guidance throughout the project. Susan Snow of the NPS coordinated access and provided caution cones at the excavation trenches. CAR also appreciates her guidance and availability to answer questions throughout the duration of the project.



## Introduction

Ford, Powell, and Carson Architects and Planners, Inc. contracted CAR-UTSA to reopen two trenches excavated in 1968 by Mardith Schuetz outside the church (Room 17) at *Mission San Juan de Capistrano* in San Antonio, Texas. Mission San Juan is a State Archaeological Landmark (SAL) and is listed on the National Register of Historic Places (NRHP). It is one of the four Spanish colonial missions in San Antonio that are part of the San Antonio Mission National Historic Park (SAMNHP) overseen by the National Park Service (NPS). The purpose of the archaeological excavation was to expose and document the condition of the walls, foundations and footings prior to restoration of the church by Ford, Powell, and Carson.

## Historical Background

*Mission San Juan de Capistrano* is located approximately 2.5 miles to the south of Mission San José (Figure 1).



Figure 1. Project area located on the Southtown 7.5 minute series USGS quadrangle map.

The mission was originally founded in east Texas as *Mission San José de los Nazonis* in 1716. It was abandoned in 1729 due to unrest and difficulties with the natives of the area. The mission was relocated to San Antonio and renamed as *Mission San Juan de Capistrano* in 1731. Mission San Juan persisted at this location through the remainder of the 18<sup>th</sup> century (Córdova et al. 2005). Secularization of the mission began in 1794, although it was not fully secularized until 1823. The resident *padre* of *Mission San Francisco de la Espada* attended to the needs of the native families of San Juan during this period. In 1824, the remaining properties of Mission San Juan, along with all the furnishings were handed over to San Fernando. A few years later, all the properties, except the church, were sold at public auction.

During the remainder of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, San Juan fell into disrepair. The roof of the church was torn off during the hurricane of 1886. The church was not repaired until 1907. In 1915, diocesan clergy began to care for the church, while additional renovations were being conducted. Shortly after, the Archdiocese of San Antonio began to buy back the individually owned parcels of land within the mission compound. By 1933, the Archdiocese had successfully regained ownership of the entire compound (Tennis et al. 2001).

During the 1930s, the Works Progress Administration (WPA) conducted extensive excavations to expose the mission's foundations. This led to reconstruction efforts in the 1950s and 1960s.

### **Previous Archaeology**

Many excavations have occurred at Mission San Juan over the years. The first archaeological excavations were conducted in 1933 by Harvey P. Smith, Sr., for the Civil Works Administration and Texas Relief Commission, both federally funded organizations that were started during the Great Depression in the 1930s. During the late 1930s, additional excavations were conducted that were funded by the Works Progress Administration and the Archdiocese of San Antonio. The work during these years focused on locating wall foundations for the reconstruction of the mission.

The next group of investigations was conducted by Mardith K. Schuetz of the Witte Museum. Her excavations began in January of 1967, with additional seasons in 1968, 1969, and 1971. The focus of these investigations was to determine the building sequence and to gather artifacts relating to the Native American inhabitants of the mission. The area around Room 17, the present-day chapel, was excavated during the first season. The results of the findings were reported in 1968. In 1968, additional excavations were conducted in front of Room 17, near the pilasters. The 1969 season consisted of excavations of Room 17 prior to its restoration; Room 17 was also examined in 1971, as part of a large push to entirely excavate the buried portion of the convent.

Information concerning the later archaeological investigations conducted at Mission San Juan can be referenced in: Cargill and Robinson (2000), Córdova et al. (2005), Cox (1999), Escobedo (1985), Fox (1993 and 1999), Fox and Cox (2000), Gross (1998), Schuetz (1968, 1969, and 1974), Scurlock (1976), Tennis et al. (2001), Thompson (2006) and Turner (1988).

## **Field and Laboratory Methods**

In consultation with the National Park Service and the Texas Historical Commission, CAR re-excavated trenches first excavated by Mardith Schuetz in 1968 at two locales outside Room 17. Schuetz's Trench 2 was located at the corner of a buttress and the east wall, located on the north side of the north door of the church (Schuetz 1968a:144). Trench 5 was located behind the church, approximately 15.6 feet south of the west wall window, also at the corner of the wall and a buttress (Schuetz 1968a:145). The 1968 excavations were conducted to expose the foundation. As a consequence, CAR's excavations ended when the bottom of the original trench was reached. The trench bottom was hit deeper below the surface due to the current ground surface being higher than it was when first excavated by Schuetz. Trench 5 was not fully reopened because of a stone drainage feature that sits over the southern portion of Schuetz's Trench 5.

The soil removed from the trenches represents a mixed context because Schuetz had backfilled these trenches with un-screened matrix removed from the trench. Therefore, excavation of the trenches via levels was not necessary. Rather, all matrix removed from these trenches was screened through ¼ inch wire mesh. All temporally diagnostic material was collected and returned to the CAR laboratory for processing and curation. This methodology was developed in consultation with Susan Snow of the SAMNHP. Profile and plan view drawings and photographs were taken of the trenches and the foundation. CAR backfilled the trenches after representatives from Ford, Powell, and Carson made their observations of the condition of the foundation.

All records obtained and generated during the project were prepared in accordance with federal regulation 36 CFR Part 79, and the Texas Historical Commission (THC) requirements for State Held-in-Trust collections. Artifacts processed in the CAR laboratory were washed, air-dried, and stored in 4 mil zip locking archival-quality bags. Acid-free tags were placed in all artifact bags. Each laser printer generated tag contains provenience information and a corresponding lot number. When necessary, artifacts were separated by class and stored in acid-free boxes identified with standard tags. After analysis, information concerning the artifacts collected over the course of the project was entered into the ANCS+ cataloguing system used by the National Park Service.

Field notes, forms, photographs, and drawings were placed into labeled archival folders. Digital photographs were printed on acid-free paper, labeled with archivally appropriate materials, and placed in archival-quality sleeves. All field forms were completed with pencil. Soiled forms were placed in archival quality page protectors. Ink-jet produced maps, (illustrations, etc.,) were also placed in archival quality page protectors to provide against accidental smearing due to moisture. All artifacts recovered during the project, along with all project related documentation, will be permanently stored at the CAR's curation facility.

Human remains were recovered from Trench 2. After identification, Susan Snow of SAMNHP and Mark Denton of the THC were contacted. Remains are currently housed at CAR with plans to reburial them in the approximate locations where they were discovered.

## **Results**

### **Foundation at Room 17**

Trench 2 (Figure 2) was located near the buttress on the north side of the north door of the chapel. According to Schuetz, the trench was 5.2 feet (1.58 m) long, and 2.5 feet (.76 m) wide.

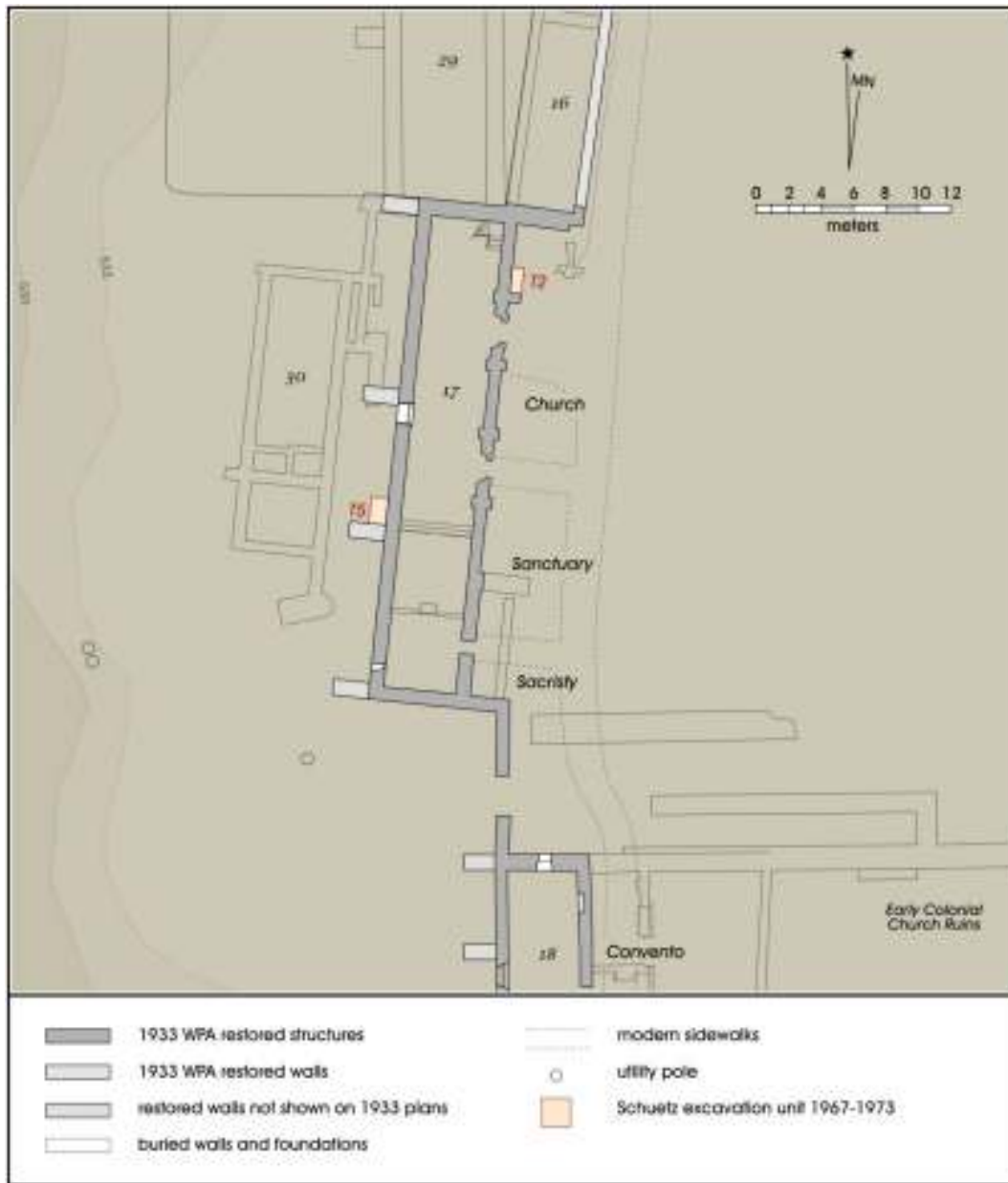


Figure 2. Location of Trenches 2 and 5 at Mission San Juan Capistrano.

Schuetz reported the base of the wall was located at 2.8 feet (.85 m) beneath the surface, and the base of the buttress was located at 3.5 feet (1.07 m) below the surface. The terminal depth of the current excavations found the base of the wall foundation to be at 4.49 feet (1.37 m) below surface in Trench 2 (Figures 3 and 4). Approximately 1.0 foot (30 cm) of topsoil covered the plaster on the wall. Below this level, foundation stones were not plastered. This is the depth where Schuetz's excavations may have begun.



Figure 3. West wall of Trench 2 showing the wall and foundations exposed in the current re-opening of the trench.

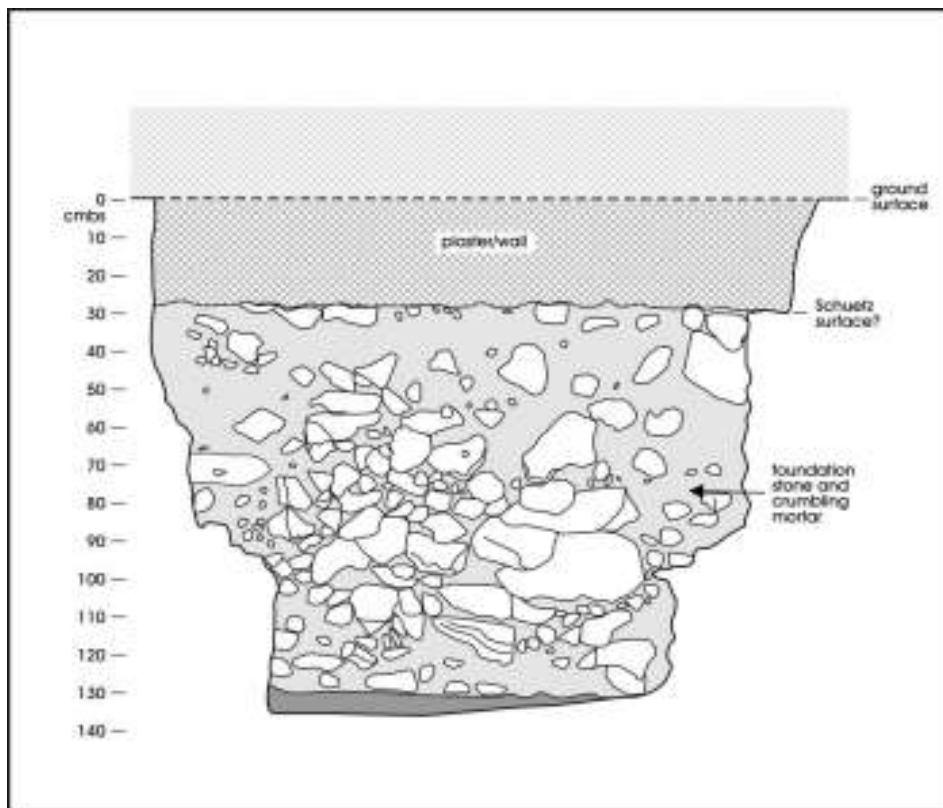


Figure 4. Profile of the foundation exposed in the west wall of Trench 2.



The bottom of the east church wall was found at 4.27 feet (1.30 mbs) in the west wall of the trench, coinciding with the bottom of the original archaeological excavations. The foundation exposed in Trench 2 was a continuation of the wall. There were no supporting stones stacked out from the wall as there had been in the back of the church (Trench 5).

The foundation of the stone and mortar buttress was found at 4.27 feet (1.30 mbs), but the concrete buttress support extended to 4.43 feet (1.35 mbs) (Figures 5 and 6).



Figure 5. Overview of the south wall of Trench 2 showing the wall of the buttress and foundation.



Figure 6. Detail of the south wall of Trench 2 showing the foundation.

Cracks are present down the wall and into the foundation where the mortar is easily displaced (Figure 7). Aside from the artifacts described below, there were several sandstone (n=42) and limestone (n=27) rocks and pieces of mortar within the excavated fill that could have been displaced during the original excavations. The rock was inventoried then left onsite for reuse by NPS.

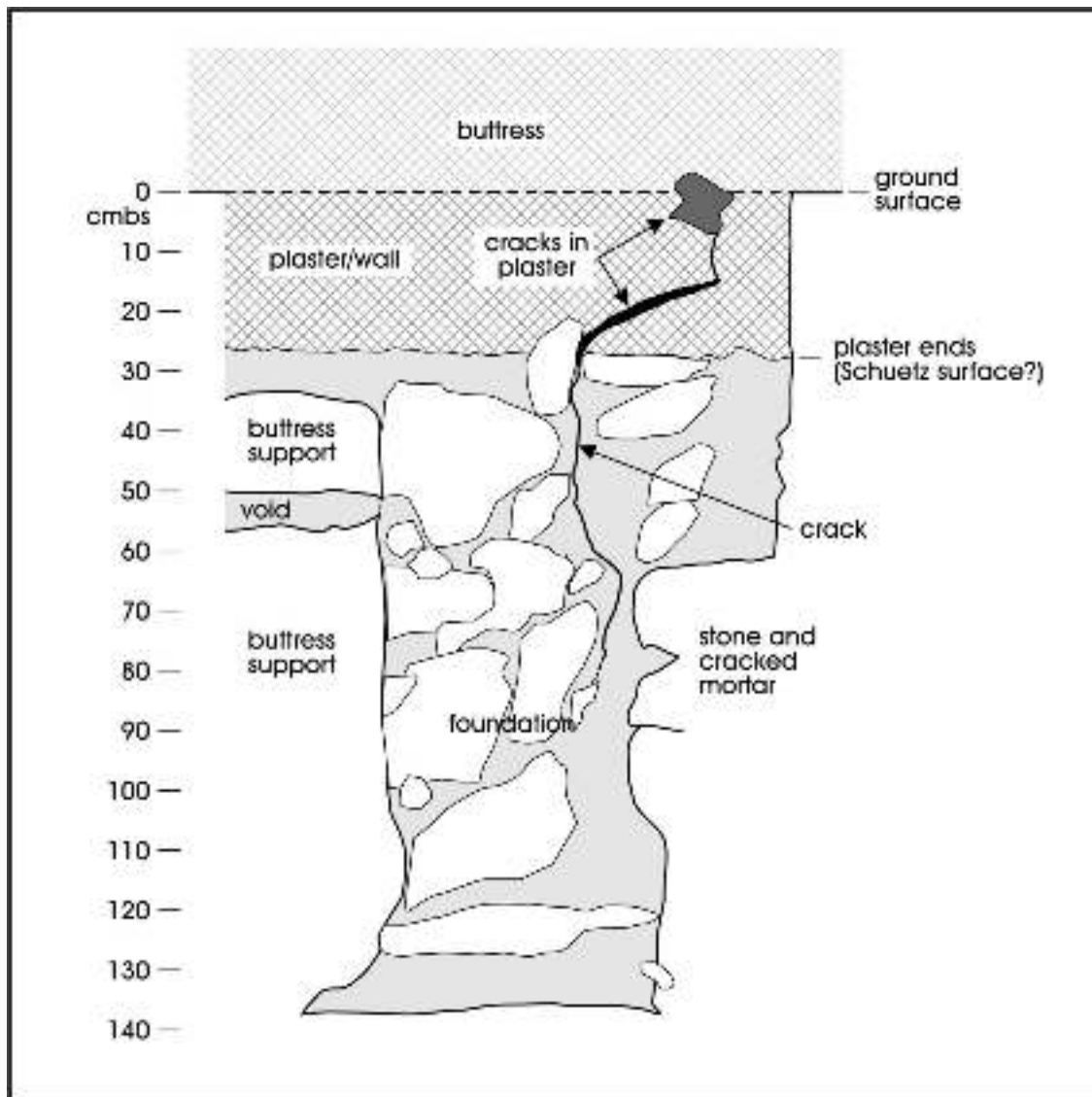


Figure 7. Profile of the south wall of Trench 2.

Trench 5 (see Figure 2) was located approximately 15.6 feet (4.75 m) south of the west wall window (Figure 8). Schuetz's trench was approximately 6.4 feet (1.9 m) long and 2.75 feet (.84 m) wide. Her excavation extended to approximately 4.2 feet (1.28 m) below the surface when sterile clay was encountered. CAR was unable to reopen the entire trench because a drainage feature was built on the southern end (Figures 8-9). The dimensions CAR was able to reopen were 4.4-x-2.46 feet (1.3-x-.75 m).





*Figure 8. Western wall of church showing the location of Trench 5 and the stone drainage feature obstructing the southern part of Trench 5.*

The excavations in Trench 5 of the west wall revealed a stone foundation built out from the wall (at .45-.55 m) down to approximately 2.26 feet (.80 mbs) (Figure 9). These stones were left in situ while the western portion of the unit was excavated to the bottom of the trench (Figure 10). The profile revealed poured concrete below the stone (at .87-1.3 mbs) as described by Schuetz (1968a:145) which is present to the base of the excavation at approximately 4.27 feet (1.30 mbs) (Figures 10-11). An electrical cable also crosses through the trench.

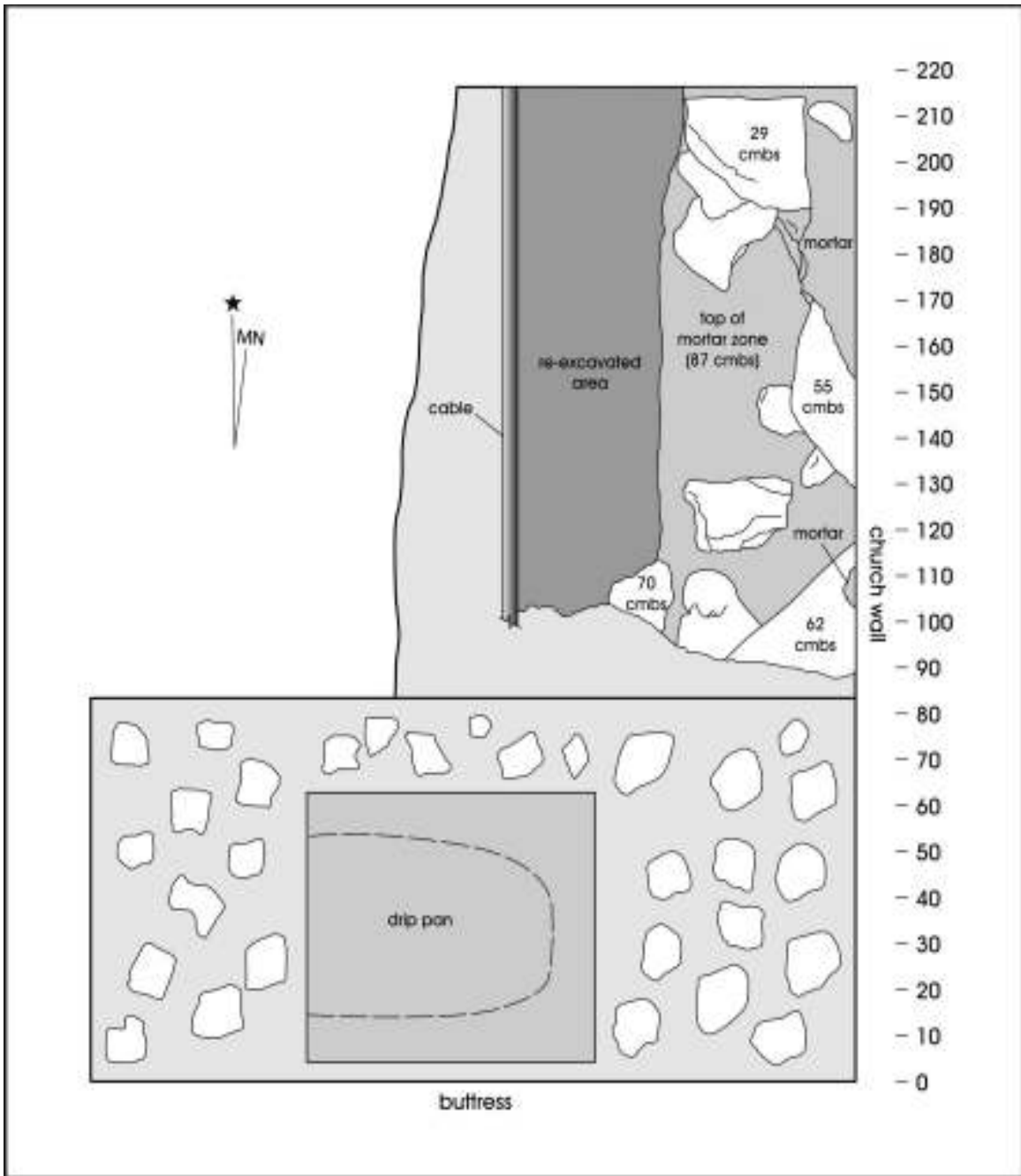


Figure 9. Plan view of Trench 5 showing area excavated by Schuetz, drainage feature, and area excavated by CAR.

Limestone (n=7) and sandstone (n=22) were found in the fill of the trench. As with Trench 2, the rock was left on site for reuse by NPS.



Figure 10. Trench 5 view of foundation and electrical cable (lower left corner).

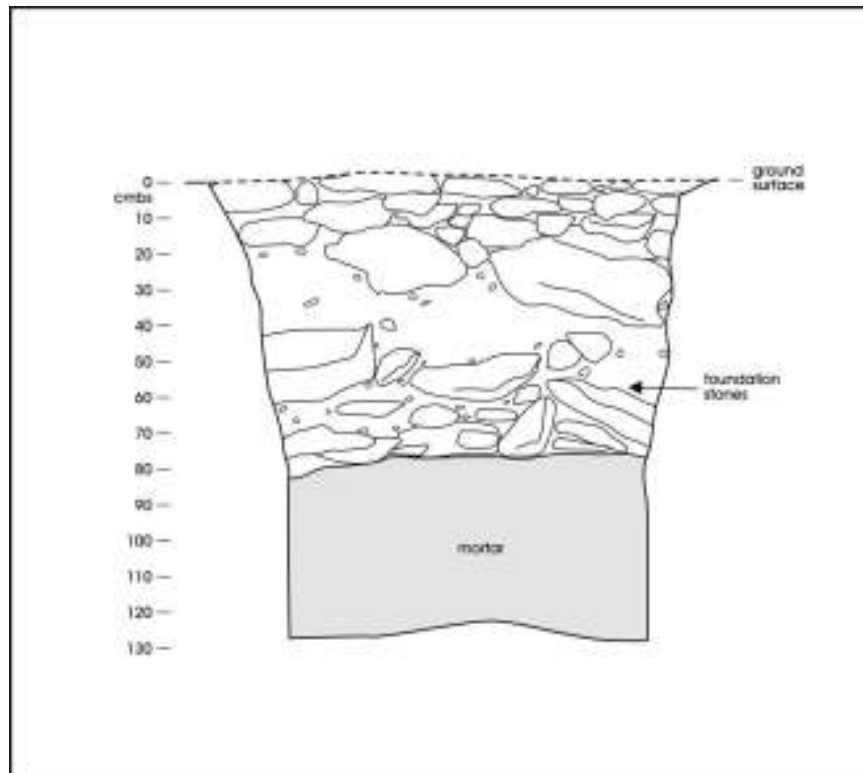


Figure 11. Profile drawing of Trench 5 foundation.

## Artifacts Recovered

The artifact collection (n=197) from the re-excavated trenches contained artifacts typical of artifact types found at the San Antonio missions (Table 1). Trench 2 contained over three times as many artifacts as Trench 5. Construction materials (cut and wire nails, brick, and plaster) and household items (earthenwares and bottle glass) were the most common items (Table 2). Other collected artifacts included metal objects and personal items (jewelry and buttons). Faunal remains were observed but not collected unless thought to be human.

Table 1. Artifacts Recovered from Schuetz Trench 2

<b>Trench</b>	<b>Class</b>	<b>Description</b>	<b>Count</b>
2	asbestos tile		1
2	Bakelite	butter	1
2	bone	mammal	3
2	bottle glass	olive	2
2	bottle glass	clear w/painted label	12
2	button	4 hole shell	1
2	brick	Colonial yellow brick	1
2	earthenware	unknown	1
2	eggshell		6
2	ferrous ring		1
2	ferrous strap		1
2	glass fragments	thin, painted	28
2	glass fragments	flat	6
2	glass fragments	brown	1
2	glass fragments	chimney	8
2	glass fragments	dark olive	1
2	glass fragments	brown	8
2	glass fragments	milk	1
2	jewelry	jewel inset	1
2	nails	wire	3
2	nails	cut	47
2	plaster	painted	6
2	stoneware	Rockingham	1
2	unknown		2
2	white earthenware	green painted	1
2	white earthenware	feather edge	1
2	white earthenware	annular ware, rims	4
2	white earthenware	sponge-spatter	1
2	white earthenware	hand painted (2 vessels)	4

Table 2. Artifacts Recovered from Schuetz Trench 5

<b>Trench</b>	<b>Class</b>	<b>Description</b>	<b>Count</b>
5	bone	medium-sized mammal	8
5	brick	red	1
5	ceramic	colonial unglazed	2
5	glass fragments	olive green	2
5	glass fragments	flat glass	1
5	glass fragments	clear bottle	1
5	glass fragments	aqua	1
5	Goliad ceramic		6
5	lead glazed	colonial	3
5	nails	cut	1
5	painted plaster		12
5	earthenware	Pueblo Blue on White II	4
5	white earthenware	sponge-spatter	1

### **Human Remains**

Disarticulated human remains were recovered from the matrix screened from Trench 2. The skeletal elements recovered comprised four teeth, three ribs, and three phalanges. The human remains were in disturbed context that had been excavated in 1968. As per discussion with Susan Snow of the SAMNHP, the remains will be reinterred in the approximate location where they were found. No intact burial pit was present.

### **Recommendations**

The purpose of these excavations was to expose the foundations at two previously excavated trench locations in order to inform Ford, Powell, and Carson on the state of the foundation of Room 14 at *Mission San Juan Capistrano*, and to recover temporally diagnostic artifacts. The trenches were backfilled after this occurred. The CAR concludes that no further work is necessary.



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