Archaeological Monitoring of Utilities Installations at Mission San José y San Miguel de Aguayo, San Antonio, Bexar County, Texas

by
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Texas Antiquities Permit No. 5955

Principal Investigator

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Prepared for:
Guido Brothers Construction
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The University of Texas at San Antonio
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Technical Report, No. 36

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Abstract:

Over the course of six days in May of 2011, the Center for Archaeological Research (CAR) at The University of Texas at San Antonio (UTSA) conducted archaeological monitoring of the excavation of trenches within the church and *convento* at Mission San José y San Miguel de Aguayo. The project was conducted under the Texas Antiquities Committee Permit No. 5955. Kristi Miller Ulrich served as Project Archaeologist, and Dr. Steve A. Tomka served as Principal Investigator. The trenches were intended for the installation of new utility and gas lines, and they were approximately 12 in. (30.5 cm) in width and extended to a depth of 12 to 16 in. (30.5 to 40.64 cm) below the surface. Seven clusters of disarticulated human remains were encountered during the course of the excavations. These were collected and returned to the CAR laboratory for inventory. Given that the remains came from within the church proper and that an agreement exists between the National Park Service (NPS) and the Catholic Archdiocese for the reburial of human remains, after identification, inventory, and packaging, the remains were reinterred by Fr. Tony Posadas in one location within the church.

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The author appreciates the help of several people involved in this project. I would like to thank Ron Dorsey of Guido Brothers Construction for working with the CAR to coordinate the project and providing the manpower to excavate the trench. Special thanks goes to Susan Snow, archaeologist for the San Antonio Missions National Historical Park, for her help, constant communication, and guidance throughout the course of the project. The author would like to thank Fr. David Garcia and Fr. Tony Posadas for their help with the reburial of the human remains.

During the course of the project, Cyndi Dickey offered assistance with the monitoring while excavations were occuring in another area of the church. Thanks goes to Cynthia Munoz for her assistance in identifiying the human remains and completing the inventory. Marybeth Tomka, Lab Director at CAR, processed all the artifacts and documentation during the course of the project. Rick Young and Bruce Moses produced the figures for the report. Dr. Steve Tomka served as Principal Investigator and offered guidance during the course of the project.

Chapter 1: Introduction

The Center for Archaeological Research (CAR) at the University of Texas at San Antonio (UTSA) was contracted by Guido Brothers Construction to provide archaeological services associated with the planned improvements to be made at Mission San José y San Miguel de Aguayo (41BX3). The mission is shown on the Southton (2998-132) 7.5 Minute Series USGS Quadrangle Map (Figure 1-1).

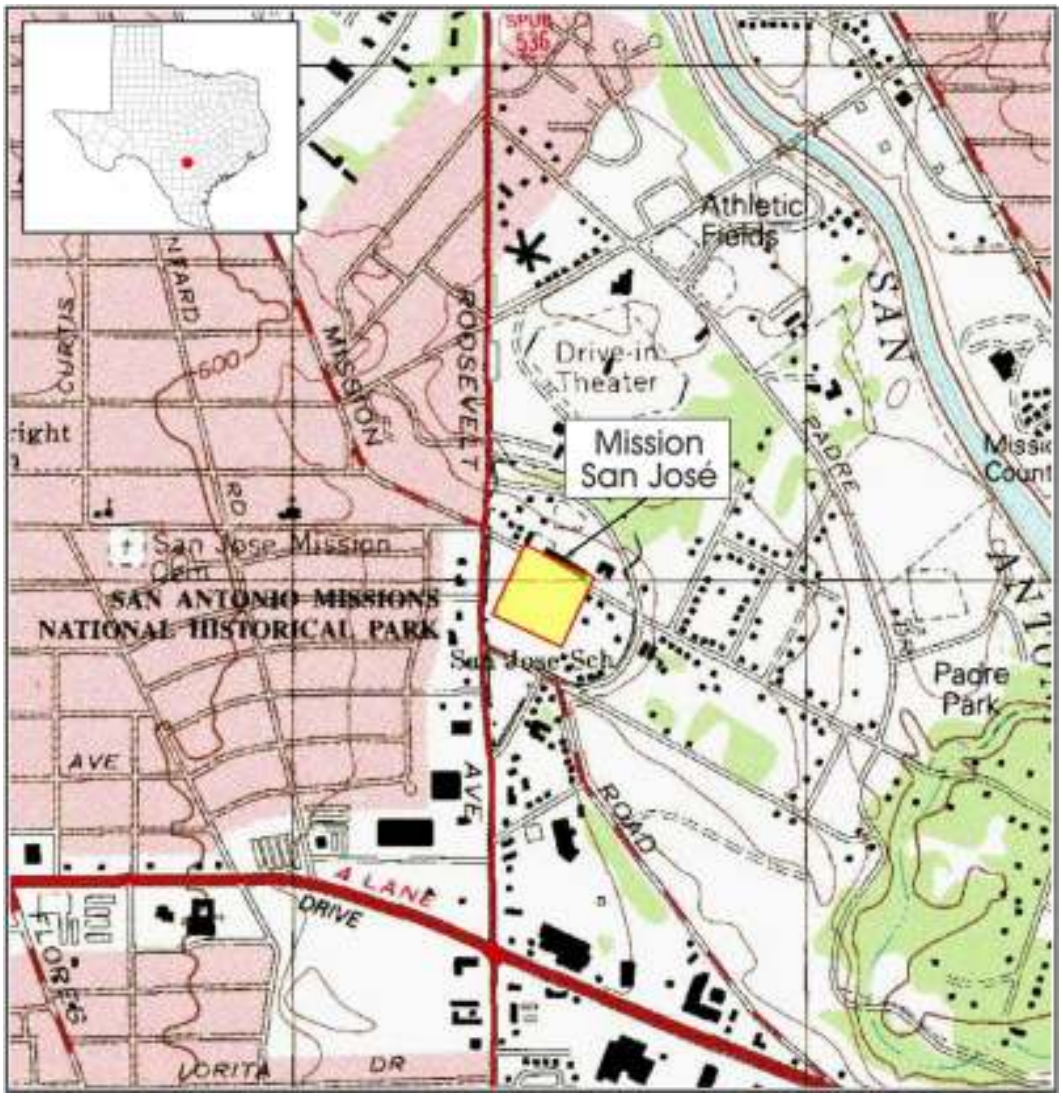

Figure 1-1. *The mission on the Southton (2998-132) 7.5 Minute Series USGS Quadrangle Map.*

The mission is located on the west bank of the San Antonio River. Modern day Roosevelt Avenue passes by the mission grounds. Mission San José is part of the San Antonio Missions National Historical Park, which is overseen by the National Parks Service.

Planned Improvements

The Area of Potential Effect (APE) consists of the Church at Mission San José y San Miguel de Aguayo and a portion of the *convento* (Figure 1-2). The planned improvements consist of the installation of a gas line (Figure 1-2), an underground electrical feeder, and four handrail footings in the vicinity of the *convento* and church at Mission San José. The trench housing the old gas line was to be excavated by the electrical contractor by hand, and the new gas line was to be installed in the same trench. The excavated trench was approximately 12 in. (30.5 cm) in width and extended to a depth of 12 to 16 in. (30.5 to 40.64 cm). The handrails were to be installed in 12 in. (30.5 cm) diameter holes that would reach to 12 in. (30.5 cm) below the surface. The existing conduit was reused to the north of the church, therefore the excavation for the installation of the additional electrical conduit was reduced to a 4 to 5 ft. (1.21 to 1.52 m) trench. At the time of the project, trenching was confined to the interior of the church and the *convento* area. The portion of the conduit proposed to be excavated to the north of the church was found to be reusable.

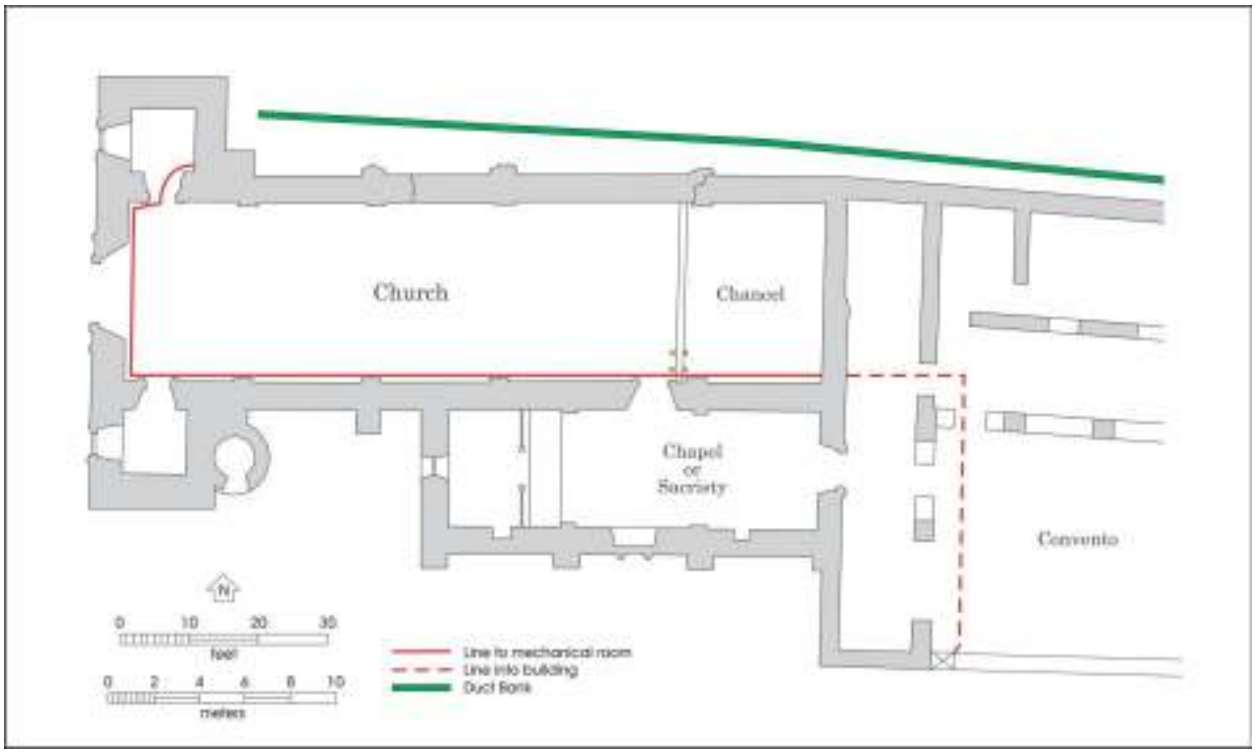

Figure 1-2. *The location of the conduits to be installed at Mission San José.*

After the trenches were excavated, the existing line was to be removed, and a new line encased in PVC was to be installed. Concrete was to be poured over the new line after installation, and the flagging stones that were removed were to be replaced.

Chapter 2: Historical Background and Previous Archaeology

Mission San José y San Miguel de Aguayo is one of five Spanish Colonial missions that are located in San Antonio, Texas. Four of the five missions are part of the San Antonio Missions National Historical Park, which is overseen by the National Park Service. Located in the heart of downtown San Antonio, the fifth mission, San Antonio de Valero, belongs to the State of Texas and is managed by the Daughters of the Republic of Texas.

Historical Background

Mission San José y San Miguel de Aguayo was founded on February 23, 1720, just barely two years after the arrival of Mission San Antonio de Valero. Mission San José was first established on the east bank of the San Antonio River. Previous research indicates that this first location may be the present-day site of Mission Concepción. During the following year, the mission was relocated to its present location on the west side of the San Antonio River (Ivey et al. 1990). Over the next 70 years, a stone granary, friary, neophyte quarters, and a church were constructed. By 1789, the entire compound was surrounded by a stone wall, complete with four bastions and six gates (Tennis 2001).

During much of its existence, Mission San José had a large Native population that resided in and around the mission. The population, though, began to decline during the later part of the eighteenth century. Secularization of the missions in San Antonio started in 1794 (Habig 1990). At that time, the Native population consisted of ninety-three individuals who received a portion of the mission lands (Tennis 2001). The mission grounds began to fall into disrepair after secularization. Small houses were built in the compound during the mid-nineteenth century. Aerial photos taken in the 1930s show that the outer walls had almost entirely collapsed and that Mission Road ran through the center of the compound (Tennis 2001).

The mission was reconstructed during the 1930s and 1940s. Harvey P. Smith conducted research and developed designs for this reconstruction. A few liberties were taken, as with the placement of the southeast gate (Hard et al. 1995). In 1941, Mission San José was designated a National Historic Site and a Texas State Historic Site. In 1978, it became part of the San Antonio Missions National Historical Park. By 1983, the National Park Service assumed an active role maintaining the mission.

Previous Archaeology

During the 1930s and 1940s restoration of the mission, excavations of the areas to be reconstructed were carried out under the direction of Harvey P. Smith. Much of the work was conducted to locate the foundations of the structures to be restored. Very little of the work was documented (Tennis 2001).

The early archaeological projects undertaken at the site were small scale salvage and monitoring activities. Mardith Schuetz (1970) conducted archaeological monitoring of the installation of a sprinkler line. During the course of the trenching for the irrigation lines, several foundations were located within the interior of the compound. The report published at a later date inventoried the the artifacts encountered and provided a brief description of the features.

Daniel Fox (1970) conducted testing and monitoring associated with the relocation of a tree and the installation of sewer and electrical lines. These investigations were conducted for the Texas Historical Survey Committee. The investigations included the excavation of three 2-x-2-m units and a 2.5-x-3-m test pit.

In 1974, the Texas Historical Commission conducted excavations at four locations at the mission to determine the effects of rising damp on the standing structures (Clark 1978). Three of the excavation units were located along the exterior of the chapel, and one was postioned adjoining the exterior of the east wall at the southeast corner of the compound. Excavations revealed that the Colonial occupation of the site was buried approximately 15 inches (38 cm) below the modern surface (Clark 1978).

Additional work was conducted in 1974, and then again in 1976, by Roberson and Medlin (1976). The investigations were conducted prior to modifications scheduled to Rooms 31, 32, and 33. Removal of the 1930s fill in the rooms revealed the Colonial surface. A series of postholes were uncovered in Room 31 indicating the location of the original *jacal* walls of the Native quarters. The 1976 investigations took place in conjunction with the installation of a new gate in the southwest corner of the compound (Roberson and Medlin 1976).

Investigations by Clark and Prewitt in 1979 were conducted prior to the installation of a French Drain system along the west wall of the granary. The work produced over 1,800 faunal remains and 1,300 artifacts. The recovery of Colonial deposits caused the path of the drain to be altered (Clark and Prewitt 1979).

The Southwest Cultural Resources Center conducted archaeological investigations prior to the proposed stabilization of the San José Arbor in 1981 (Bradford and Traylor 1981). The purpose was to locate and document the foundations to aid in stabilization. Investigations cast doubt on the placement of the walls reconstructed during the Works Project Administration (WPA) era. Additional Colonial foundations had been uncovered during the course of this project that were previously unknown.

In 1981, renovations of the church led to archaeological investigations conducted by the CAR (Nickels and Fox 1999). A wooden platform had been removed that revealed loose soil underneath. Four units were placed within the sacristy of the church to investigate. Human remains were encountered during the course of the excavation, although these were highly fragmented. Information concerning the original construction of the sacristy was collected during the investigations.

In 1984, plans for improvements to Napier Avenue prompted the need for archaeological investigations. Road grading had exposed features that consisted of a series of postholes, a portion of the *acequia*, and a human burial of indeterminate temporal affiliation. The burial was located on the west bank of the *acequia* (Henderson and Clark 1984).

The CAR conducted investigations in 1984 along the west wall of the mission prior to the installation of a proposed sewer line. During the investigations, archaeologists encountered a stone-lined well which appeared to have been constructed sometime after secularization and used until the 1940s. At some point, the well was used as a privy. The CAR recommended mitigation before the sewer line was to be installed (Hafernik and Fox 1984).

The CAR returned in 1985 to excavate a portion of the well (Fox 1987). Excavation of 26 levels revealed that the final depth of the well was 210 in. (510 cm) below the surface. Artifacts recovered from the well dated to the eighteenth, nineteenth, and twentieth centuries.

Proposed plans to construct the new visitors complex prompted archaeological investigations in 1991. The CAR was tasked with locating a portion of the *Acequia Madre* that ran between the east wall of the mission and San José Drive. In addition, a lateral branch of the *acequia* was also to be investigated. Archival research and backhoe trenching revealed both features (Fox and Cox 1991).

In 1993, the CAR was tasked with conducting a comprehensive evaluation of the Colonial-period deposits at Mission San José, as well as investigating the areas located outside the compound walls (Hard et al. 1995). A portion of the *Acequia Madre* was located approximately 18 in. (48 cm) below the current surface east of the compound. Shovel testing conducted within the compound located

concentrations of Colonial deposits in the southeast, southwest, and the west-central portion of the mission. Generally, Colonial deposits were encountered at 12 to 15 in. (30.5 to 38 cm) below the current surface within the compound. The location of the old Mission Road was also investigated during the course of this project. The trench and unit excavations found that the 1880s Mission Road consisted of a caliche and gravel road base and that there was a mix of late-nineteeth century and 1930s reconstruction artifacts scattered in the area. Below the road base, approximately 15 to 20 in. (30.5 to 38 cm) below the surface, intact Colonial deposits were encounterd consisting of faunal remains, lithic materials, and ceramics.

The CAR conducted additional investigations in 1996 at the mission. These investigations occurred prior to the installation of a storm drainage line that was to be routed through the southeast gate (Tennis 1998). Archaeological investigations exposed and documented two Colonial wall foundation sections. The foundations were associated with a block of rooms similar to the Native quarters of the south wall. The findings confirmed that the WPA-era reconstruction was erroneous in placing the gate in the area.

In 1997, the CAR archaeologists exposed foundation footings along the interior and exterior of the Native quarters. The purpose of the investigation was to document the nature and degree of the structural deterioration. Evidence from the excavation of the units also indicated that the WPA-era reconstruction had placed walls in areas that had no Colonial foundations and that, likely, had no Colonial walls (Tomka and Fox 1998).

In 1998, prior to the installation of three catchment basins, the CAR conducted investigations adjacent to the exterior of the southeast corner of the compound. Twenty-seven excavation units were placed along the south wall of the mission. Evidence collected during the excavations indicated that the location was likely a midden in use prior to the construction of the mission wall. A large quantity of faunal remains were encountered (Tomka and Fox 1999).

Additional work within the vicinity of the southeast gate was completed by the CAR in 1998. A series of excavations outside the south wall and within Room 54 were conducted. The goal of the excavations was to determine the extent of impact the proposed underpinning efforts would have at the southwest corner of the southeast gate. The investigations revealed that a large portion of the soil adjacent to the south wall had been previously disturbed by the WPA-era reconstruction. Much of the soil found within Room 54 was disturbed to a depth of 7.5 in. (19 cm) below the surface, and a Colonial living surface was located immediately below the disturbed soils within Room 54 (Tomka and Fox 1999).

In 2001, the CAR monitored the excavation of several trenches located within the footprint of the proposed administrative builiding adjoining the extant chapel at Mission San José. The investigations revealed that the construction of the building would not impact pre-1930 deposits, and only scattered twentieth-century materials were encountered (Mahoney 2001).

In 2002, the CAR monitored the removal of the old Granary Service Drive at Mission San José (Tomka 2002), while in 2006, the CAR monitored the excavation of a series of trenches along the south side of the church and past a small cemetery in front of the church's main entrance. The area along the path of the trenches appeared to have been previously disturbed (Ulrich 2007).

Chapter 3: Field and Laboratory Methods

Field Methods

A staff archaeologist of the Center for Archaeological Research was present during the excavation of all trenches, new and old, as well as the excavation of the holes needed for the handrails. The excavation of the trenches was carried out by the construction contractor. Prior to the commencement of the project, it was determined that if architectural elements, such as buried foundations were encountered, the excavations were to be halted to determine the nature of the finds and ascertain whether they are in an intact or disturbed context. If any features were exposed during the excavations, they were to be documented to the extent possible and without further impact to them. The documentation was to include photography, plain-view drawings, and measurements. In the case that the line could not be rerouted, the feature was to be removed through hand excavation. The matrix removed from the trenches was placed on the side of the trench, and the CAR staff inspected the debris in search of artifacts and human remains. No screening of the matrix was carried out in part because such could not be done inside the church and the close inspection of the dirt assured that all artifacts contained within it would be identified. Artifacts encountered during the excavations were noted in the field notes, however, only temporally diagnostic specimens were collected and brought back to the CAR laboratory for processing, analysis, and curation.

In addition, when human remains were encountered, CAR archaeologists immediately stopped work in that area and notified the Sponsor, the Texas Historical Commission, as well as the San Antonio Missions National Historical Park Archaeologist, Susan Snow. Excavations in another portion of the trench were allowed to continue under monitoring while a strategy to deal with human remains was developed in consultation with all parties.

Laboratory Methods

All diagnostic cultural materials and records obtained and generated during the project were prepared for curation in accordance with current guidelines of the CAR. The diagnostic materials collected and processed in the CAR laboratory were washed, air-dried, and stored in 4 mil zip locking archival-quality bags. 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. Acid-free labels were placed in all artifact bags. Each laser printer generated label contains provenience information and a corresponding lot number. Artifacts were separated by class and stored in acid-free boxes identified with standard tags. Field notes, forms, photographs, and drawings were placed in

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. Any soiled forms were placed in archival quality page protectors. Ink-jet produced maps and illustrations were also placed in archival-quality page protectors to prevent against accidental smearing due to moisture. All collected materials and project related documentation are permanently housed at the CAR.

Human Remains

During the course of the monitoring within the Mission San José church, disarticulated human remains were encountered. The fragments were recovered and provenience information recorded. The remains were taken to the CAR laboratory to be definitively identified and inventoried. Following the analysis, the human remains were packaged by provenience. The bones were placed in 4 mil zip locking archival-quality bags with an acid free tag that recorded the provenience information. The bags were then wrapped in geofabric and tied with flagging tape. The remains were returned to the mission church to be reinterred prior to the installation of the gas line. One location was chosen for all the remains. Archaeologists dug down approximately 12 in. (30.5 cm) below the level of impact, placed the packet in the ground, and covered it with soil. Flagging tape was placed on top of the packet to mark the location.

Chapter 4: Results of Monitoring

Over the course of six days in May of 2011, CAR archaeologists monitored the excavation of trenches for the installation of new utility lines inside the church and a portion of the *convento* at Mission San José (Figure 4-1). The newly installed lines followed the routes of previously installed gas and electrical utilities. The excavations were done by employees from Guido Brothers Construction using a shovel, trowels, and a pick. The soil was removed by hand and placed alongside the trench until removed to a dumping location. As they were being dug and the soil removed, the archaeologist inspected the trenches and soil for evidence of diagnostic materials and human remains.

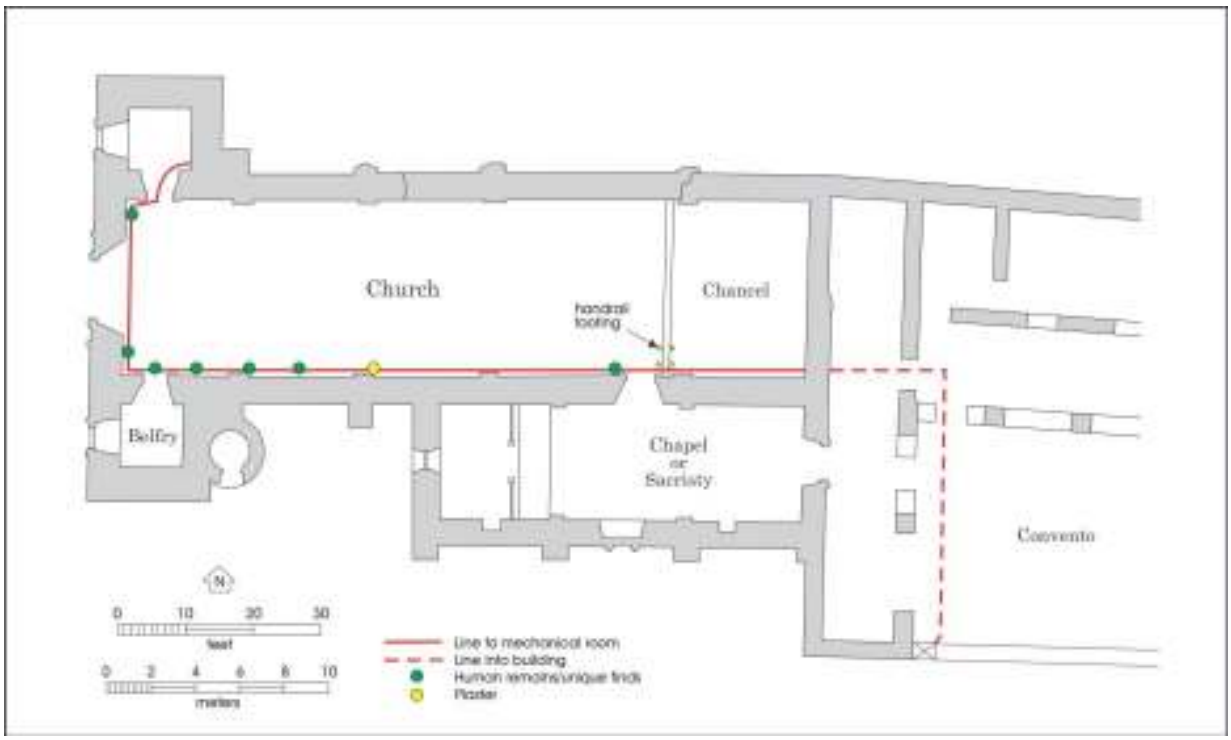

Figure 4-1. *Utility trench with the location of the human remains and unique finds.*

The trench along the interior of the church began in the north room off of the entrance of the church. As a first step, the WPA-era flagging stones and concrete base were removed from approximately ¼ of the room. Below the concrete, the matrix consisted of light–tan construction fill made up of a mix of flagging stones, tile pavers, and gravel (Figure 4-2). A sample of the brick tile was returned to the CAR laboratory for closer inspection. As the trench was expanded to the threshold of the door to the main portion of the church, modern material was encountered. One silver earring with dangling shell discs was recovered. In addition, a 1981 quarter and two corroded pennies were encountered and returned to the laboratory.

Figure 4-2. *Pavers recovered from under the threshold of the northwest room.*

Once the trench crossed the threshold, the soil within the trench changed. Excavations revealed brown clay loam rather than construction fill. At the northwestern corner of the church, fragments of bone were noted in the back dirt (Figure 4-1). Excavations were immediately halted to investigate where the bones were coming from and to determine if they were human. After closer inspection, the bones were determined to be fragments of a human skull. The remains were photographed, and all parties were notified of the find to determine the next course of action.

After consultation with Guido Brothers Construction to ascertain if the line could be rerouted, it was determined that the current path could not be altered. Susan Snow of the San Antonio Missions National Historical Park and Father David Garcia were contacted to determine the proper course of action regarding the human remains. CAR staff were advised to remove the fragments within the soil bulk. The soil bulk containng the remains were wrapped in foil and returned to the CAR laboratory. As the soil bulk was excavated, an indeterminate bone fragment was noted in the east wall of the

trench. It could not be determined whether this fragment was human or animal bone, but it was clearly not articultated with the skull fragments removed with the bulk. This unidentified bone was not to be affected by the placement of the utility lines, and therefore was left in situ.

While the soil bulk was being removed, further excavation of the utility trench was occurring. A second CAR archaeologist continued to monitor the process. As the trench neared the southwestern corner of the church and the belfry, additional human bones were encountered (Figure 4-1). These did not appear to be articulated and were collected as they were encountered. The remains included an unfused manubrium with a corpus sterni (breastbone) which was completely fused. In addition, one ulna was recovered that was missing both distal ends, three rib fragments, eleven vertebra fragments, 2 phalage that were fragmented, carpals (one scaphoid, one trapezoid), and various unidentified fragments. In the vicinity of the location that the ulna and two vertebra fragments were found, a small fragment of silver lace ribbon was recovered. These remains appeared to represent the comingled secondary context fragments of several individuals of different age.

Along the south wall of the church and east of the belfry threshold, more isolated human bone fragments were encountered (Figure 4-1). Eight phalanges were collected from the base of the arch to the middle "pillar" of the church along the south wall. In addition, one metatarsal, two vertebra fragments, and several unidentified bone fragments were recovered along this portion of the southern wall. Much of the matrix that was encountered in this portion of the trench was disturbed and contained construction fill. Rusted wire nails were frequently encountered but not collected.

Beneath the second pillar along the south wall of the church located to the east of the arch in the church, a pocket of soil had to be removed that continued under the protrusion that is visible at ground level. In this pocket, fragments of painted plaster were encountered and collected (Figure 4-1, Figure 4-3). The plaster was unique in that it was not flat as it would be if it fell off a wall. Rather, the fragments were curved (Figure 4-3). The interior of the curve was not painted. The exterior of these pieces had a reddish paint. What these fragments represented is not known, but it is possible that they could be from a vessel or a figurine. The fragments were collected and returned to the CAR laboratory.

Near the threshold of the door to the sacristy and near the altar, two human rib fragments in addition to a few unidentified human bone pieces also were collected from the construction fill. The soil was light tan caliche construction fill that had been present along most of the south wall and in the area of the altar. It appears that these human remains were disturbed during previous construction and restoration activities as they were not articulated and were in disturbed deposits.

Figure 4-3. *Plaster artifacts recovered from trench.*

Within the church, four 12 in. (30.5 cm) diameter and 12 in. (30.5 cm) deep holes were excavated near the steps to the altar for the installation of handrails. The upper 6 in. (15 cm) of the holes consisted of concrete that was laid when the church was reconstructed during the 1930s. The remaining 6 in. (15 cm) consisted of construction fill with rusted wire nails and metal fragments present in the matrix. The fill did not produce any diagnostic cultural remains.

Following the completion of the work within the church, the trench in the *convento* area was excavated to locate the previous lines. The line exited the church through the wall at the back of the altar and continued into the *convento*, making a sharp turn to connect with the utility line located to the southeast of the sacristy. The trench was excavated to a depth of approximately 3 ft. (0.9 m) below the surface adjacent to the outside wall of the church in the hope of locating the existing line. The line was discovered 5 in. (13 cm) to the north and approximately 6 in. (15 cm) below the surface. The remainder of the trench was excavated to expose the current line to the utility box. The matrix encountered was disturbed and consisted of construction fill. The excavation of this portion of the trench to 3 ft. (0.9 m) below the surface revealed a light brown clay loam beneath the construction fill. Cultural material noted in the matrix included cut animal bone, one fragment of handpainted white earthenware, lead pipe fragments, wire nails, and metal fragments. No diagnostic cultural material was encountered or collectected from this trench.

Chapter 5: Conclusion and Recommendations

Archaeological monitoring of the trenching associated with the installation of new utility lines within Mission San José Church and a portion of the *convento* was conducted over a seven day period in May of 2011. The CAR was contracted by Guido Brothers Construction. The project was conducted under the Texas Antiquities Committee Permit No. 5955. During the course of the monitoring, it became evident that much of the soil was disturbed in the area impacted by the trench excavations. Beneath the construction fill, excavations revealed dark brown clay loam that contained disarticulated secondary-context human remains in both the northwest and the southwest corners, as well as along a portion of the south wall of the church. Excavations along the interior corners of the church appeared to have encountered a consistent brown clay loam, whereas along the south wall, only pockets of the clay loam were encountered.

Excavations in the northwest corner (Figure 4-1) revealed fragments of a human skull in the path of the utility line. The fragments were removed in a soil bulk for inventory after consultation with NPS, the Archdiocese, Guido Brothers Construction, and the CAR Principal Investigator. One unidentified bone uncovered in proximity to the skull was left in situ as it was not to be affected by the pipe. It is not known whether the bone was animal or human. Following cleaning in the CAR laboratory, it was determined that the fragments represented an adult of unknown age and ethnicity. The inventory established that the soil bulk did not contain the mandible and teeth.

Further excavations along the trench produced additional disarticulated secondary-context human remains. In the southwest corner of the church, additional skeletal fragments were recovered. The fragments were disarticulated and spread throughout the length of the trench in the southwest corner. Similarly, various fragments of human remains also were recovered along the south wall of the church. They included carpals, rib fragments, and metatarsals that were disarticulated and scattered within construction fill. The remains were collected and returned to the CAR laboratory for inventory.

Once the trenching inside the church was completed, a trench was opened in the *convento* that followed the path of the old line. All matrix encountered along this route was disturbed. Immediately adjacent to the east wall of the church, a small portion was excavated below the original line. The matrix encountered here was light brown clay loam that differed from the dark brown soil encountered inside the church. The small section excavated outside the church produced cut animal bone fragments, rusted metal, and a sherd of handpainted white earthenware. None of the material was collected, and no significant cultural deposits were encountered along the remainder of the trench.

Prior to the installation of the new lines, the inventoried human remains were packaged in bags with tags that indicated their provenience. All bags were wrapped together in a sheet of geofabric, and the bundle was secured with flagging tape. The bundle was then returned to Mission San José, where Father Tony Posadas blessed them as they were reinterred approximately 12 in. (30.5 cm) below the level of impact from the new utility line. The bundle was placed in the location that the skull fragments were encountered.

Although human remains were encountered during the trenching associated with this project, none were definitively identified as representing an intact interment. Rather, they represented remains that were disturbed during prior work inside the church. Therefore, no further investigations were recommended for the installation of the utility lines. The CAR does recommend, however, that if future subfloor disturbances to the church are planned, archaeological exacavations be carried out ahead of construction activities so that human remains, when encountered, can be examined in greater detail to detemine whether they represent intact interments or disturbed remains found in secondary context.

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