

# 1999 Reburial at Mission San Juan Capistrano, San Antonio, Texas



Steve A. Tomka and José E. Zapata

Center for Archaeological Research  
The University of Texas at San Antonio  
Archaeological Survey Report, No. 311  
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Principal Investigator

Texas Antiquities Permit No. 2285

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## Abstract

On November 15, 1999, the Center for Archaeological Research (CAR), The University of Texas at San Antonio, returned 122 curation boxes containing human remains of between 103 and 125 individuals to Monsignor Balthazar Janacek, Archdiocese Director, Old Spanish Missions. These remains had been obtained during two previous Witte Memorial Museum excavations at Mission San Juan Capistrano. Subsequently, CAR returned the majority of the burial goods associated with these human remains to Monsignor Janacek. CAR then entered into an agreement with the Archdiocese of San Antonio to locate and monitor the excavation of the two reburial areas that were to coincide with two previously excavated areas. The location and monitoring of the reburial areas began on November 22, 1999. The reburial of the human remains and associated artifacts occurred on November 27, 1999. Present at the reburial ceremony were representatives of the Archdiocese of San Antonio, the National Park Service, the American Indians of Texas at the Spanish Colonial Missions, a member of CAR, and members of the press and public.

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## Acknowledgments

We greatly appreciate the assistance of Dr. Robert J. Hard, former Director of the Center for Archaeological Research, and Monsignor Balthazar Janacek, Archdiocese Director, Old Spanish Missions, in facilitating the exchange of human remains and associated burial goods from Mission San Juan Capistrano. The assistance of Mr. Raymond Hernandez, representative of the American Indians of Texas at the Spanish Colonial Missions, and Mr. Mark Denton of the Texas Historical Commission, in selecting an appropriate location for reburial is also greatly appreciated. We also appreciate the hard but careful work of the National Parks Service employees who re-excavated the reburial locations. Finally, this report could not have been produced without the hard work of Bruce Moses, who produced the illustrations, and Maryanne King and Johanna Hunziker, who edited and formatted the report.

## Introduction

During the summer of 1967, and in September and October of 1969, the Witte Memorial Museum, under the direction of Mardith K. Schuetz, conducted two archaeological excavations at Mission San Juan Capistrano (Schuetz 1968, 1974). The 1967 excavations centered on a number of rooms along the north-west wall and along the southwest corner of the mission, the Old Church (unfinished church), and Room 17, the finished church (Schuetz 1968:Figure 1). In 1969 excavation efforts focused on the finished church (Room 17; Schuetz 1974:Figure 8).

In addition to the recovery of colonial artifacts, one goal of these excavations was the recovery of “Coahuiltecan Indian” burials (Schuetz 1968:201). According to published reports, the 1967 excavations uncovered a total of 53 individuals, not including “approximately 10 infants from two mixed burials and two boxes of fragmentary miscellaneous materials” (1968:116). The 1969 work uncovered 92 individuals, “including the mixed skeletal material and that recovered from recognizable graves” (Schuetz 1974:31).

Since their excavation, the human remains recovered during these two excavations have been curated at the Center for Archaeological Research (CAR), The University of Texas at San Antonio (UTSA). A number of studies have been conducted on this skeletal population in the intervening years, including Baker (in press), Cargill 1997, Francis 1999, Humphreys 1971, and Miller 1989, 1994.

## Return of Human Remains and Associated Artifacts

In recent years, due in part to increased sensitivity by archaeologists, new federal legislation (Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act; NAGPRA), and the current political climate, the reburial of human remains uncovered during archaeological excavations has become a common practice. In this spirit, and at the request of the American Indians of Texas at the Spanish Colonial Missions, on November 15, 1999, Dr. Robert J. Hard, former Director of CAR, formally returned 122 curation boxes containing the remains of

between 103 and 125 individuals from the two Witte Memorial Museum excavations (Schuetz 1968, 1974) to Monsignor Balthazar Janacek, Archdiocese Director, Old Spanish Missions (see Appendix A). CAR then entered into an agreement with the Archdiocese of San Antonio to locate and monitor the excavation of the two reburial areas that were to coincide with two areas excavated by Schuetz in 1967 (1968:Figure 24). These excavations were carried out under Texas Antiquities Permit No. 2285.

Prior to the beginning of the work on November 22, 1999, Anne Fox of CAR formally returned the majority of the burial goods associated with the human remains originally excavated by Schuetz (1968; Appendix B) to Monsignor Janacek. Nine artifacts that had been previously sent to Texas A&M University for casting were not among these artifacts (Appendix C). These specimens were returned to Monsignor Janacek on August 8, 2001 by Steve A. Tomka.

## Accounting for Discrepancies in the Number of Individuals

Due to the discrepancy in the number of individuals reported by Schuetz (1968, 1974) and the counts identified by CAR, a brief discussion of the methodological issues related to the determination of minimum numbers of individuals (MNI) from skeletal remains is presented below. The discussion demonstrates the difficulty in determining the number of individuals from complex burial contexts such as those that characterize the Mission San Juan Capistrano remains.

Typically, anthropologists determine how many individuals are recovered from a site by sorting the recovered bones by differences in size, stage of development, shape, color, degree of preservation, and burial provenience. The minimum number of individuals (MNI) represented by the remains is determined by counting the maximum number of left and right elements (excluding ribs) that are present for each paired bone. For example, if an excavation produces five left tibiae, three right tibiae, and two left femora, the MNI would be five. The left tibiae are the most represented element of a given side. As straightforward as this may seem, it is complicated by two factors: commingling (mixing) and fragmentation.

For example, if the above five left tibiae were complete: shape, size and stage of development would allow demographic differences to be determined (i.e., two adult males, a young female and two young teenagers). If however, the remains were recovered in close proximity to each other and were commingled and fragmented during excavation or by a historic period intrusion, the MNI could change. For example, if in the previous example the larger “adult male” elements were represented by an upper 1/3, and a section of mid-shaft; and the smaller elements were represented by lower 1/3, middle 1/3, and upper 1/3, given lack of differences in color, the MNI could be three, since the only differences between the elements would be size and stage of development.

Another inventory technique is to count each bone individually or in groups by recovery context (e.g., burial pit, casket), without attempting to determine the MNI. This technique is used when burials are highly mixed and fragmented, and individuals cannot be sorted out. It cannot be emphasized enough that both of these techniques are based on somewhat subjective criteria, and two anthropologists can reach different conclusions examining the same series of remains.

Any attempt to determine the MNI in the field while the remains are being excavated would present discrepancies in future inventories. Several factors complicate MNI counts in the field. For example, any burial pit may have numerous individuals present, and settling from soil movement, ground water, or historic intrusion may cause the remains to become disassociated and mixed, in which case only a trained osteologist observing the remains *in situ*, should sort out individuals. In addition, elements that are buried in soil cannot be sorted by color differences and fragments may not be readily observed. Remains that are so disintegrated they are visible in a pit only as a shadow (stained soil), present yet another problem. The archaeologist may count this individual in the field, but following recovery, there may be nothing for the osteologist to inventory in the lab.

Inventory and analysis of the San Juan collection was carried out by a team of anthropologists from the Smithsonian Institution and a graduate student from The University of Texas at San Antonio, employed at

the Center for Archaeological Research. The analysis was conducted at CAR facilities. During the analysis, each team member worked with a single burial curation box at a time and used a combination of both inventory techniques. Using the skeletal elements from a specific curation box, discrete individuals were assembled to as near complete as possible. Elements that did not match the complete individual(s) within a burial were set aside. Whenever possible, these unmatched elements were assigned to another individual, if based on the provenience, the burials were contiguous and it could be assumed that commingling took place during a historic period intrusion into the grave. If the elements could not be assigned to an individual, they were inventoried and set aside as an incomplete individual. Unassigned elements were inventoried on a bone-by-bone basis and returned to their original box. In this analysis, these elements were not counted in the MNI, that is, the MNI reflects only individuals that had nearly complete sets of skeletal elements. Individual skeletal elements that could not be combined with others into more complete groupings representing the remains of a human remained unassigned and uncounted.

As previously mentioned, determining the number of discrete individuals present in a collection is not simply a matter of assembling complete bones from isolated burials. Numerous mitigating circumstances preclude this. These inventory techniques are used so that demography and health may be accurately assessed to further our understanding of historic populations.

## Excavation of the Reburial Pits

On Monday, November 22, 1999, Mark Denton of the Texas Historical Commission and Steve Tomka, Anne Fox, and José Zapata of CAR, met with representatives of the Archdiocese of San Antonio, the National Park Service, and the American Indians of Texas at the Spanish Colonial Missions, to locate the reburial areas. Present and representing the Archdiocese of San Antonio and the American Indians of Texas at the Spanish Colonial Missions, were Monsignor Balthazar Janacek and Raymond Hernandez, respectively. The staff of the National Park Service provided the labor and equipment for this project.

The Old Church (Room 26), located at the southeast end of the mission compound, was designated as the place of reburial (Figure 1). Two locations, one at the western end and one in the center of the structure, were chosen for re-excitation. With the exception of

two-foot-wide “benches” along the eastern and southern margins of the two locations, Schuetz had previously excavated both areas to a depth of 7.8 feet (2.4 m) below grade (1968:Figure 24).

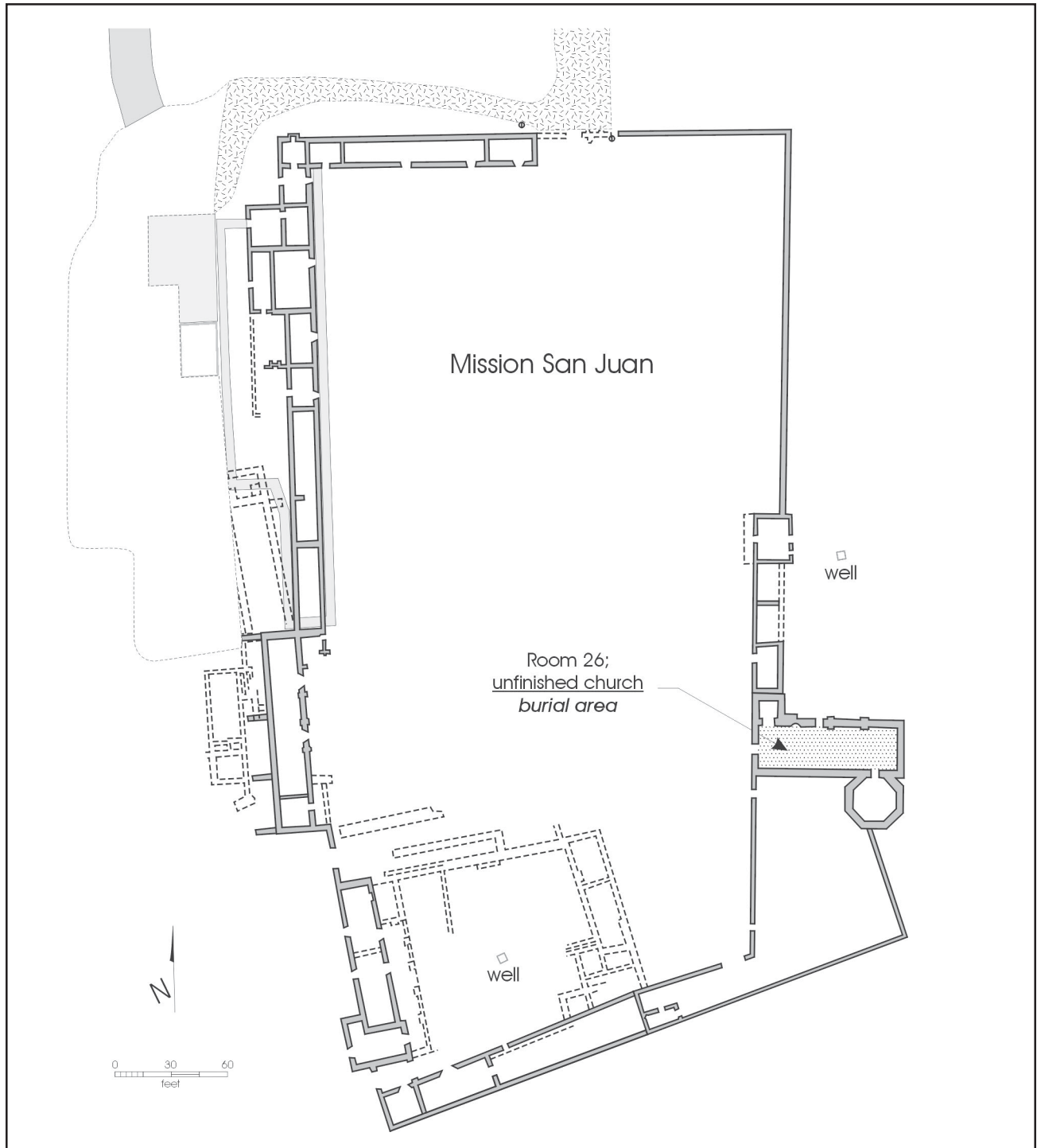


Figure 1. Plan view of Mission San Juan Capistrano and the location of the Old Church (unfinished church; Room 26).

Utilizing the Schuetz report (1968:Figure 24), CAR personnel proceeded to relocate the previously excavated areas. In the process, it was discovered that the graphic scale showing the extent of Schuetz's excavations in Room 26 (Schuetz 1968:Figure 24) was flawed. However, utilizing extant architectural features (two buttresses in the north wall of the church), and aided by Anne Fox, who participated in the 1967 excavations, two areas (Area 1 and Area 2; Figure 2) were outlined for re-excavation. Area 1 is located in the vicinity of the doorway and measures 13 x 13 feet. Its northwest corner was left unexcavated to allow easy traffic through adjacent doorways. Area 2, located near the center of the church, measures 10 x 13 feet.

To minimize the disturbance to previously unexcavated materials four-foot-wide bunks were left unexcavated along the west and south sides of Area 1 and along the south side of Area 2. In addition, the reburial areas were positioned one foot south of the north wall of the church. This ensured that the structural integrity of the north wall would not be compromised. Finally, it was decided that the two areas would only be excavated to a depth of four feet below existing grade.

Excavation commenced at Area 2, which was excavated to about three feet below grade by the end of the day. Mark Denton, Anne Fox, and José Zapata remained on-site and monitored the work-in-progress. Excavation of Areas 1 and 2 continued on Tuesday, November 23, as did the monitoring activities of Denton, Fox, and Zapata. All of Area 2 was hand-excavated, while most of Area 1 was machine-excavated. By the end of the day, both areas had been excavated to four feet below existing grade (Figure 3).

The backdirt was not screened and was either piled near both excavated areas or relocated within 50 feet to the west and south of the work area. Two small clusters of isolated human bone fragments were located within a 5 x 5-foot area at the southwest corner of Area 2. The first group was located about 24 inches below surface and the second group was found about 32 inches below surface. Similar clusters of bone fragments were also located in Area 1, between 36 inches and 48 inches below surface. These small pockets of human remains were located within the northwest

quadrant of Area 1. In both areas, the bones were returned to their approximate provenience, and these areas were then left undisturbed.

The reburial of the human remains and associated artifacts occurred on November 27, 1999. Present at the reburial ceremony were representatives of the Archdiocese of San Antonio, the National Park Service, the American Indians of Texas at the Spanish Colonial Missions, a member of CAR, and members of the press and public.

Following the reburial ceremony, the burial areas were capped with tabular limestone. This strategy allows for ease of access to these areas, if this were to be necessary in the future.

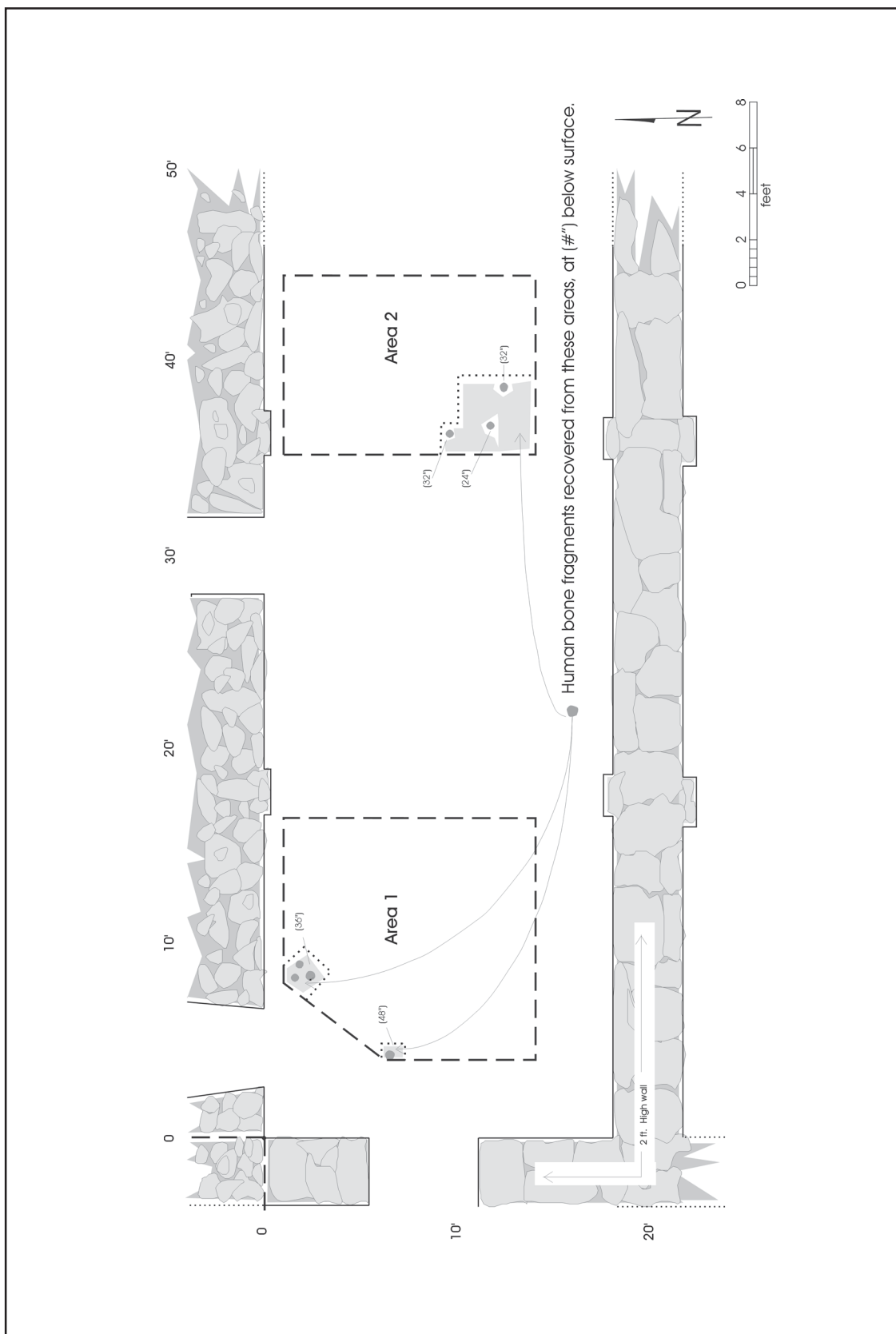


Figure 2. The two reburial areas in Room 26—the unfinished church—at Mission San Juan Capistrano.



Figure 3. *Excavation of reburial areas in progress.*

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# Appendix A

Inventory of human remains returned by CAR to Monsignor Balthazar Janacek,  
Archdiocese Director, Old Spanish Missions

Table A-1. Inventory of Human Remains Returned by CAR

Mission San Juan	1967-1969	41BX5
Row# XVI	Shelf # A15-F24	
Project Box #	Burial No.	
1	17BA/41BX5-17-1700	
2	17B, 17BF, 17BG	
3	17B1/41BX5-17-102,103,104	
4	17B2/ 41BX5-17-200 (Cranium Box 31)	
5	17B3A	
6	17B4/ 41BX5-17-400	
7	17B4A/41BX5-17-401 (Cranium Box 32)	
8	17B4B/41BX5-17-402	
9	17 B6, 17B6A, 17B6A	
10	17B6, 17B6B/41BX5-17-602 (Cranium Box 33)	
11	17B617B6C/41BX5-17-603 (Cranium Box 11)	
12	17B7/ 41BX5-17-701/41BX5-17-702	
13	17 B8A/41BX5-17-8A01, 8A02, 8A03	
14	17 B8C/ 17BX5-17-803 (Cranium Box 35)	
15	17 B10A/ 41BX5-17-10A01, 10A02 (Cranium Box 15)	
16	17 B10B/ 41BX5-17-10B01	
17	17 B12B/ 41BX5-17-1201, 17-12C01, 12C02 (Crania boxes 39, 40)	
18	17B13/ 41BX5-17-1300	
19	17 B16/ 41BX5-17-1600 (Cranium Box 45)	
20	17 B17/41BX5-17-1701, 1702 (Crania Boxes 46, 47)	
21	17 B19B/ 41BX5-17-1901, 1902	
22	Pre-adult burials 17B4, 17B6a, 17B8b, 17B11, 17B14, 17B15a, 17B17, 17B19a	
23	Pre-adult burials 17B3a, 17B7, 17B9 B10a-B10c, 17B18, 17B16, 17B15, 17B12a, 17B20, 17B21	
24	17B disturbed	
25	17B disturbed	
26	17B disturbed	
27	17BB/ 41BX5-17-BB (Isolated)	
28	17BD (Isolated)	
29	17BE/ 41BX5-17-BE (Isolated)	
30	17B1B/ 41BX5-17-101 (Isolated)	
31	17 B2A/ 41BX5-17-200 (Post-Cranium Box 4)	
32	17 B1A/ 41BX5-17-401 (Post-Cranium Box 7)	
33	17B6B/ 41BX5-17-602 (Post-Cranium Box 10)	
34	17BC/41BX5-17-603 (Post-Cranium Box 11)	
35	17B8C/41BX5-17-803 (Post-Cranium Box 14)	
36	17B10A/ 41BX5-17-1001(Post-Cranium Box 15)	
37	17 B10A/ 41BX5-17-10A02 (Post-Cranium Box 15)	
38	1710B/41BX5-17-10B02 (Isolated)	
39	17B12C(1)/41BX5-17-12C01 (Post-Cranium Box 17)	

Table A-1. continued...

Project Box #	Burial No.
40	17 B12C(2)/41BX5-17-12C02 (Post-Cranium Box 17)
41	17 B12C (2)/41BX5-17-1701 (Isolated)
42	17 B12B/41BX5-17-1202 (Isolated)
43	17B13 (Isolated)
44	17B14B (Isolated)
45	17B16B/41BX5-17-1600 (Post-Cranium Box 19)
46	17B17(1)/41BX5-17-1701 (Post-Cranium Box 20)
47	17B17(2)/41BX5-17-1702 (Post Cranium Box 20)
48	17B17(3) /41BX5-17-1703 (Isolated)
49	41BX5-19-A1 (Isolated)
50	41BX5-19-19C3 (Isolated)
51	41BX5-19-19B2 (Post-Cranium Box 52)
52	41BX5-19-19B2 (Cranium Box 51)
53	26B1/41BX5-26-1
54	26B3,26B2
55	26B4/41BX5-26-401
56	26B4/41BX5-26-402 (Cranium Box 101)
57	26B4/41BX5-26-403 (Cranium Box 102)
58	26B4/41BX5-26-404 (Cranium Box 104)
59	26B4/41BX5-26-405 (Cranium Box 105)
60	26B5
61	26B7/41BX5-26-705, 26-700 (Cranium Box 106)
62	26B7A/41BX5-26-701
63	26B7C/41BX5-26-703
64	26B7D/41BX5-26-704
65	26B7ABC2/41BX5-26-706
66	26B8B/41BX5-26-802 (Cranium Box 110)
67	26B8C/41BX5-26-803 (Cranium Box 103)
68	26B9/41BX5-26-900
69	26B10/41BX5-26-100 (Cranium Box 109)
70	B11A,26/41BX5-26-11A
71	26B11B/41BX5-26-11B (Cranium Box 112)
72	2B11C/41BX5-26-11C
73	26B11D/41BX5-26-11D
74	26B11E
75	26B11F, B11G, B11H (Cranium Box 114)
76	26B12A/41BX5-26-1201
77	26B12B, B12C/41BX5-26-1202,1203
78	26B13A, 11H/41BX5-26-1301
79	26B13C/41BX5-26-1301
80	2613B, 2613/41BX5-26-1302
81	26B16A/41BX5-26-16C02,C04,a02
82	2616B/41BX5-26-16B

Table A-1. continued...

Project Box #	Burial No.
83	26B16C/41BX5-26-16A01+unsorted
84	26B16misc./41BX5-26-C03.C01 (Cranium Box 116)
85	26B17B/41BX5-26-1701
86	26B17C.26B17A-D/41BX5-26-1702+unsorted
87	26b17A/41BX5-26-1703
88	26B18A/41BX5-26-18A
89	26B18B (Cranium Box 120)
90	26B18C
91	26B18D,B18D1, BI8DII/41BX5-26-18D1,8D02
92	26B NW CORNER
93	26B NW CORNER
94	26B SW CORNER (UNSORTED)
95	41BX5-24-17A,B,C,D (UNSORTED)
96	41BX5-24-CRANIAL
97	41BX5-24-CRANIAL
98	41BX5-24-7B
99	41BX5-24-8A
100	41BX5-24-11E
101	4BII 41BX5-26-402 (Post-Cranium Box 56)
102	41BX5-26-403 (Post-Cranium Box 57)
103	4E V 41BX5-26-803 (Post-Cranium Box 67)
104	4CIII 41BX5-26-404 (Post-Cranium Box 58)
105	4 AI/41BX5-26-405 (Post-Cranium Box 59)
106	7A/41BX5-26-700 (Post-Cranium Box 61)
107	7B/41BX5-26-702 (Isolated)
108	8A-I/41BX5-26-800 (Isolated)
109	8B/41BX5-26-801 (Post-Cranium Box 69)
110	26 8B/41BX5-26-802 (Post-Cranium Box 66)
111	26b UNIDENT/41BX5-26-001 (Isolated)
112	26B11B (Post-Cranium Box 71)
113	26B11G/41BX5-26-1107 (Isolated)
114	11H/41BX5-26-11H (Post-Cranium Box 75)
115	26B16A (Isolated)
116	26B16C/41BX5-26-C01 (Post-Cranium Box 84)
117	26B16C IV (Isolated)
118	26B16F/41BX5-26-16F (Isolated)
119	41BX5-26-1605 (Isolated)
120	18B (Post-Cranium Box 89)
121	31B DISTURBED, 23B (UNSORTED)
122	23B (UNSORTED)

# Appendix B

Burial-associated items returned by CAR to Monsignor Balthazar Janacek,  
Archdiocese Director, Old Spanish Missions

Table B-1. Burial-Associated Items Returned by CAR

Burial No.	Room No.	Description
no burial indicated	17	Human vertebra with copper projectile point embedded.
1	17	1 sherd Goliad ware.
2A	17	4 brass buttons, fragmentary, w/cloth fragments, 3 sherds Goliad ware.
2B	17	1 bone button, 5 holes, 16 mm diam., 1 copper button, 19 mm diam., drilled shank.
2C	17	Frgs. painted wood, oxidized copper.
3A	17	1 sherd Goliad ware, 2 Blue on White majolica.
3B	17	Numerous frgs. small gauge wire, 1 4-hole bone button.
4B	17	7 Goliad sherds, 1 San Elizario majolica frags., small brass pin, 1 hook and eye fastening.
6A	17	8 Goliad sherds, 1 majolica.
6B	17	1 Goliad sherd, 4 5-hole bone buttons, 3 are 15 mm in diam., and one is 11 mm. in diam., 3 white porcelain buttons 7 mm in diam.
6C	17	1 frag. olive green glass.
7	17	1 sherd Goliad ware.
9	17	1 large frag. wood 100 mm x 45 mm.
10A	17	5 sherds Goliad ware, 1 sherd San Elizario majolica, 1 bone button in fragments.
10B	17	1 sherd Goliad ware.
11B	17	1 sherd Goliad ware, 1 sherd Blue on White majolica, 1 frag. clear glass, frags. of wire.
12B	17	1 frag. Goliad ware, 1 frag. Valero ware, 2 frags. Blue on White majolica
13	17	6 white porcelain buttons, 1 iron buckle for overalls strap.
14B	17	2 sherds Goliad ware, 1 sherd of shell-edged whiteware.
15A	17	1 shell button 7 mm diam., 1 dark green glass button 7 mm in diam.
15B	17	1 shell button 8 mm diam., 1 porcelain button 9 mm diam.
16B	17	3 4-hole bone buttons 14 mm diam., numerous frags., gesso.
17	17	1 sherd Goliad ware, 2 unglazed sandy paste sherds, 3 sherds Blue on White majolica.
18	17	1 sherd Goliad ware, numerous brass pins, 5 hook and eye fasteners, frags. of fabric, frags. of fine gauge wire.
19A	17	Frgs. of gesso and copper.
19B	17	Human mandible with black marks- buried in San Juan chapel many years ago, large frag. copper 80 mm x 40 mm, 2 sherds Goliad ware, 2 sherds Blue on White majolica.
20	17	Bag of coffin wood fragments.
--	17	1 bag coffin wood fragments, 1 large bag of coffin nails from all burials.
12B	26	Rosary made up of 61 wooden beads strung on twisted copper wire-beads vary from 3 mm to 6 mm in diameter. Also included is a flat coil of single wire 8 mm in diam.

# Appendix C

Additional burial-associated items returned by CAR to  
Monsignor Balthazar Janacek, Archdiocese Director, Old Spanish Missions

Table C-1. Burial-Associated Items Sent for Casting

<b>Burial No.</b>	<b>Room No.</b>	<b>Item Description</b>	<b>NPS Accession and Catalogue Number</b>
18B	26	Black mineral necklace	Acc. 6, Cat 2812
11C	26	Crucifix	Acc. 6, Cat 2813
16A	26	Cross with blue inlaid beads	Acc. 6, Cat 2814
8C	26	Spanish coin	Acc. 6, Cat 2815
8C	26	Spanish coin	Acc. 6, Cat 2816
A	17	Metal arrow point	Acc. 6, Cat 2817
11H	26	Bone pin	CAR Collections
11B	26	Religious medal	CAR Collections
11E	26	Copper crucifix	CAR Collections

These items were sent to Texas A&M University for casting prior to being returned to Monsignor Balthazar Janacek.