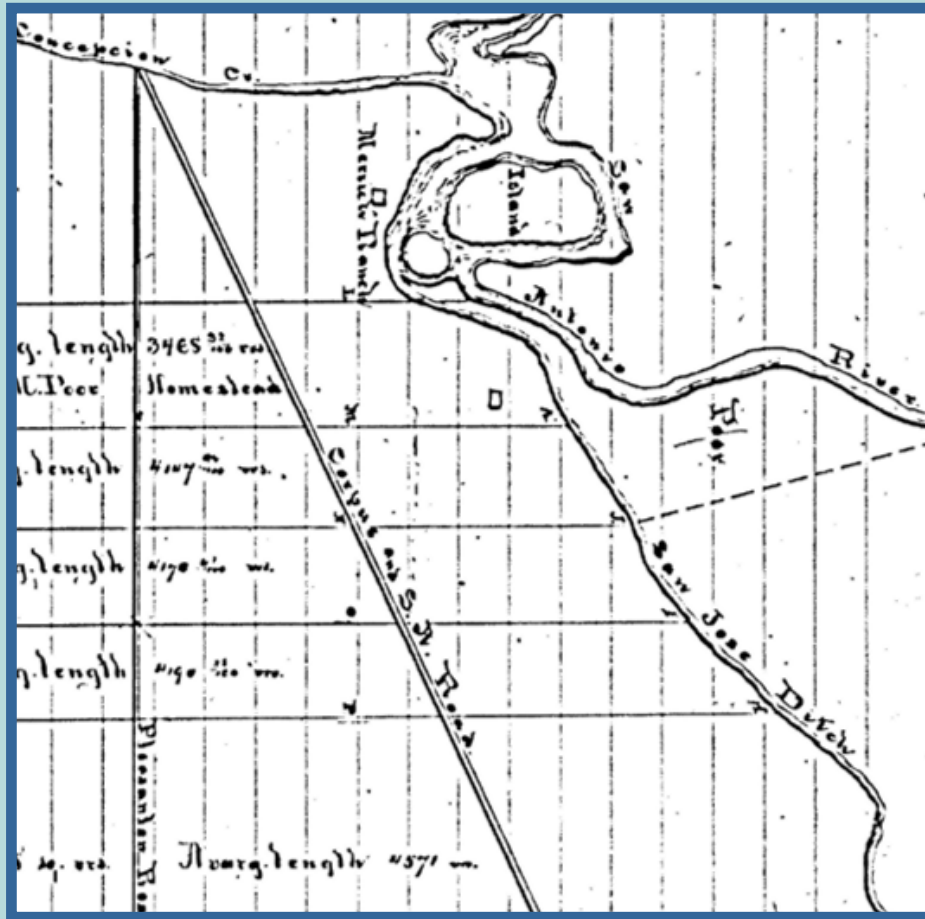


# Archaeological Backhoe Trench Excavations on the West Bank of the San Antonio River, San Antonio, Bexar County, Texas

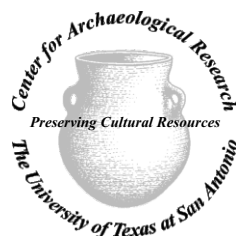
by  
Clinton M. M. McKenzie



**REDACTED**

Principal Investigator  
Raymond P. Mauldin

*Prepared for:*  
City of San Antonio  
1901 S. Alamo  
San Antonio, Texas 78204



*Prepared by:*  
Center for Archaeological Research  
The University of Texas at San Antonio  
One UTSA Circle  
San Antonio, Texas 78249-1644  
Technical Report, No. 93

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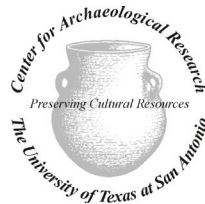


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## **Abstract:**

On June 22, 2021, the Center for Archaeological Research (CAR) at The University of Texas at San Antonio (UTSA) conducted survey level mechanical trenching at 230 to 250 Thelka Street in the historic Beanville neighborhood in San Antonio, Bexar County, Texas. The property is located on the T2 terrace of the west bank of the San Antonio River south of the confluence of Concepcion Creek. It covers an area of less than 1 acre. The monitoring was performed in response to a request from the City of San Antonio's Office of Historic Preservation (COSA-OHP) for archaeological investigations in advance of approving a re-plat of the subject property. The investigation was warranted due to the high potential for historic and prehistoric archaeological deposits. The project falls under the COSA's Historic Preservation and Design Section of the Unified Development Code (Article 6 35-630 to 35-634). Raymond Mauldin served as Principal Investigator on the project and Clinton McKenzie served as Project Archaeologist.

Excavations at the location consisted of the intrusion of two backhoe trenches perpendicular to the San Antonio River, one on the lower terrace of the site and the second on the upper terrace. No cultural features or artifacts were encountered in the lower backhoe trench and only a thin drape of mid-twentieth century trash was encountered in the upper backhoe trench. CAR recommends that no additional work is necessary at the location. All records generated during this project were curated at the CAR in accordance with Council of Texas Archeologists (CTA) guidelines.

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## **Acknowledgements:**

The University of Texas at San Antonio Center for Archaeological Research (UTSA-CAR) is grateful to both Matthew Elverson and Dr. Shawn Marceaux of the City of San Antonio Office of Historic Preservation (COSA-OHP) for their support and assistance. Thanks is also given to David Calame of Calame Construction for the backhoe work. Thanks to Dr. Marceaux for comments on the draft, and to Peggy Wall for report editing and production.

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## **Chapter 1: Introduction**

On June 22, 2021, in response to a request from the City of San Antonio (COSA), UTSA-CAR conducted archaeological survey level mechanical trenching of an undeveloped 0.91 acre property on the south side of Thelka Street where it terminates on the west bank of the San Antonio River, in Bexar County, San Antonio, Texas. The project involved monitoring the excavation of two backhoe trenches.

The trenches were 3 meters in length, 1.80 to 2.10 meters in depth, and 0.60 meters in width. These were excavated using a backhoe with a flat welded plate covering the teeth to scrape rather than rip through the soil column. No human remains or significant cultural features or artifacts were found during survey level mechanical trenching. All records generated during this project were curated at the CAR in accordance with Texas Historical Commission (THC) guidelines in accession file number 2422. As no cultural features or artifacts were recovered, this report follows the format suggested by the Short Report Content Guidelines of the Council of Texas Archeologists (CTA 2020). The report consists of four chapters. Chapter 1 provides an introduction

and description of the project area. Chapter 2 provides a brief land-use and ownership history of the site, discusses previous archaeology near the project area, and outlines the field and laboratory methods used during the project. The results of the archaeological survey level mechanical trenching is summarized in Chapter 3 and Chapter 4 presents UTSA-CAR's summary and recommendations.

### **Project Area**

The Project Area is located on private property in the historic Beanville neighborhood in downtown San Antonio. The site is bordered by Thelka Street on the north and on the south by the rear lot lines of four lots that front on Lorraine Street. A single lot owned by the San Antonio Water System abuts on the west, and the eastern border is the San Antonio River Authority hike and bike trail improvements along the west bank of the San Antonio River (Figure 1-1). Two backhoe trenches were excavated with backhoe trench 1 (BHT 1) placed on the lower terrace and backhoe trench 2 (BHT 2) on the higher or upper terrace (Figure 1-2).

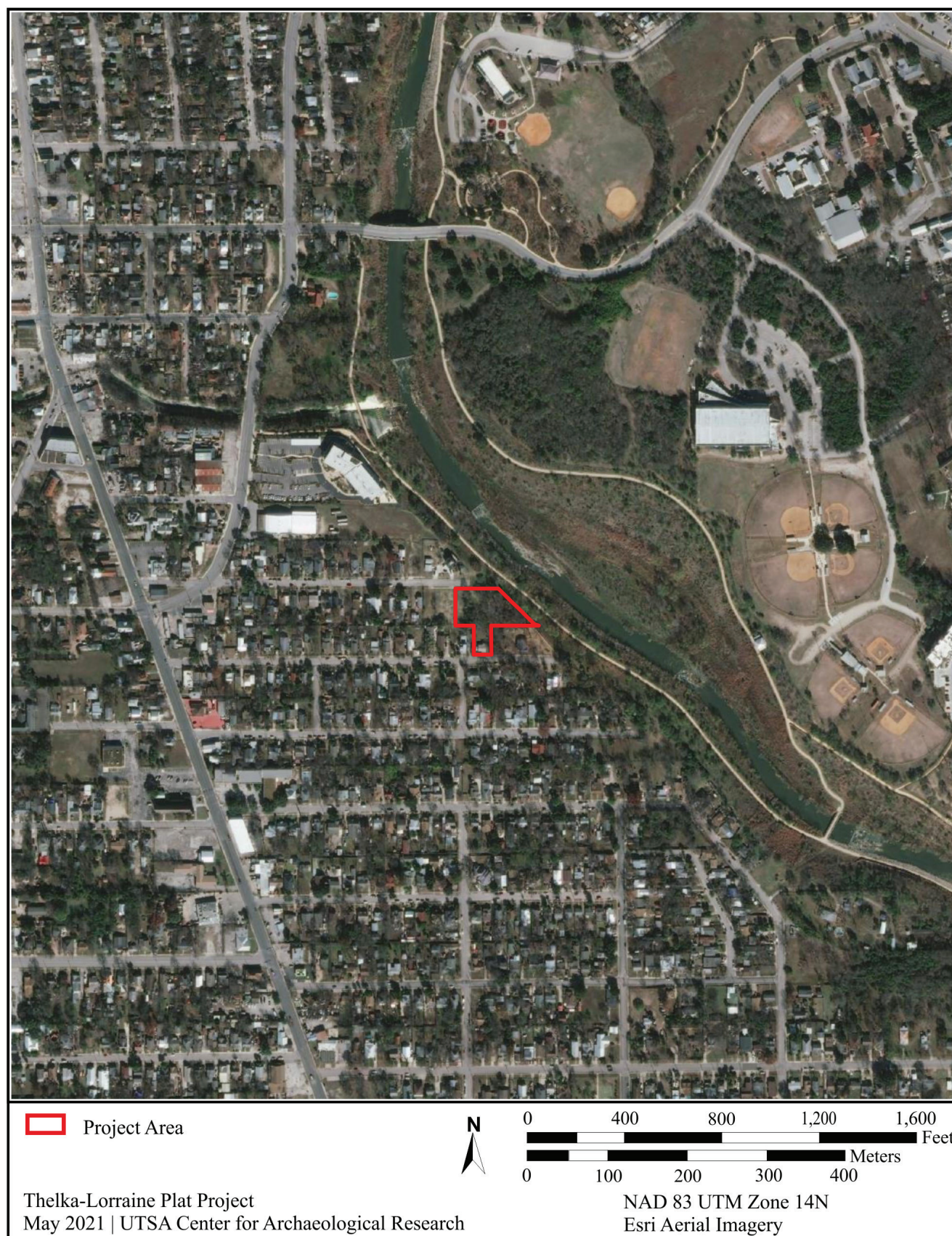


Figure 1-1. Thelka-Lorraine Plat Project Area.



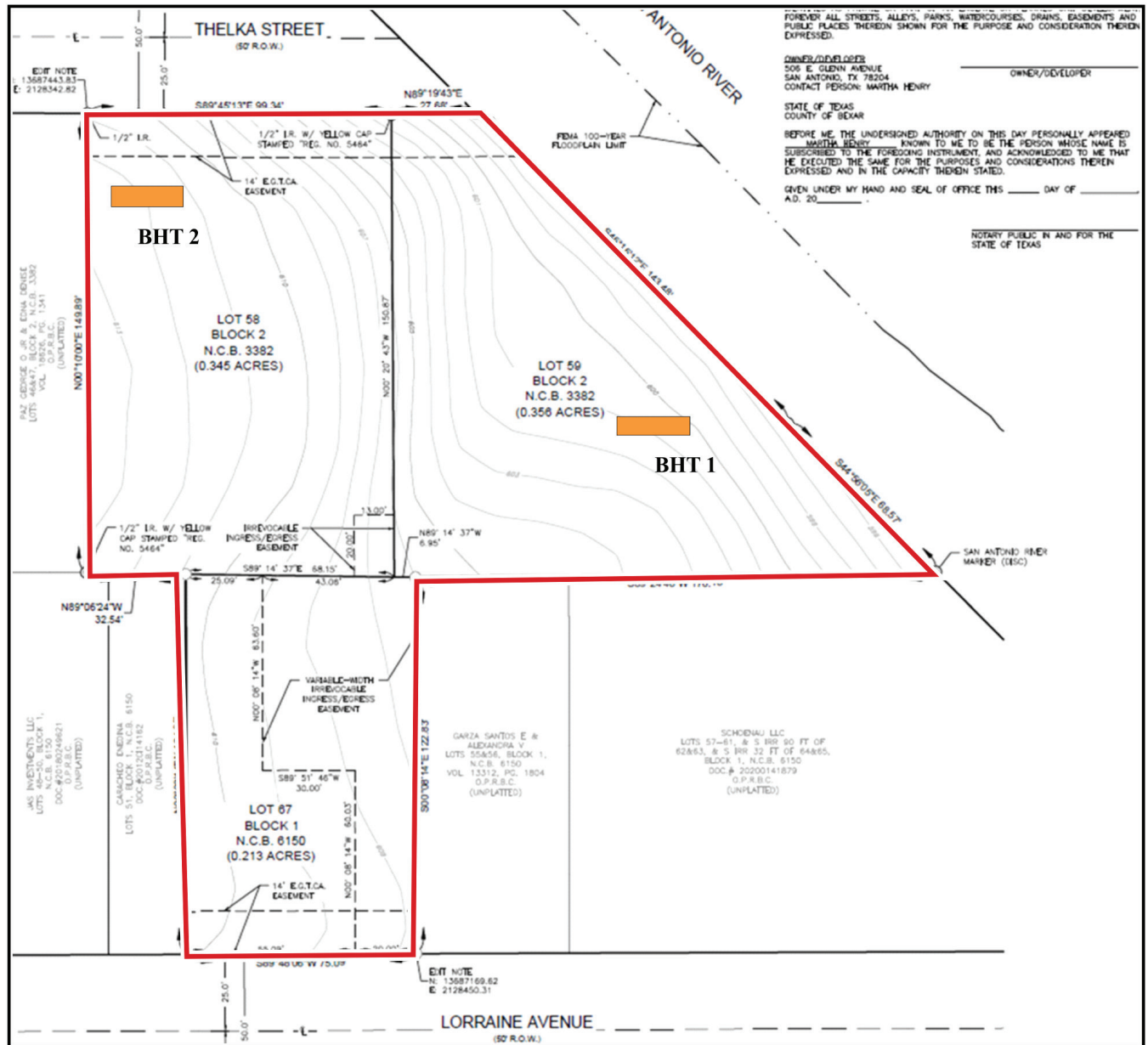


Figure 1-2. Locations of Backhoe Trenches (in orange) with the project area (in red).

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## Chapter 2: Project Setting and Methods

Given the limited scope of this project, this report does not include an environmental section or culture history. This chapter presents a land-use and ownership history of the subject property and a discussion of previous archaeological investigations. It concludes with field, laboratory, and curation methods.

### History of the Project Area

#### The Project Area in the Colonial to Early Statehood Period 1794 to 1851

The land use and assembly for the west side of the San Antonio River below the Arroyo de Concepcion begins in the late Spanish Colonial period. Figure 2-1 shows the large triangular tract of land awarded to Padre Gavino Valdez on April 10, 1794 (Nava to Valdez 1794). This map is the Gustave Freisleben copy of the François Giraud plat.

Prior to 1794 the lands west of the river were considered *tierras realengas* (Royal Lands) at the disposal of the Vice Royalty of New Spain on behalf of the Spanish Crown. The sinuous line that forms the eastern border of this tract follows the alignment of the Arroyo de Concepcion to its confluence with the San Antonio River then down the river to the Presa de San Jose and south along the route of the Acequia Madre de San Jose. The subject property abuts this eastern boundary 250 meters south of the outfall for Concepcion Creek.

The Padre Gavino Valdez tract became the property of the Republic of Texas and was broken up and granted, along with numerous other parcels throughout Bexar County, as bounty grants for service during the Texas War of Independence. These “surveys” were numbered and carry the name of the original grantee and the subject property was a part of the Gabriel Martinez Survey No. 28 (Bounty Grant to Gabriel Martinez by the Republic of Texas, October 11,

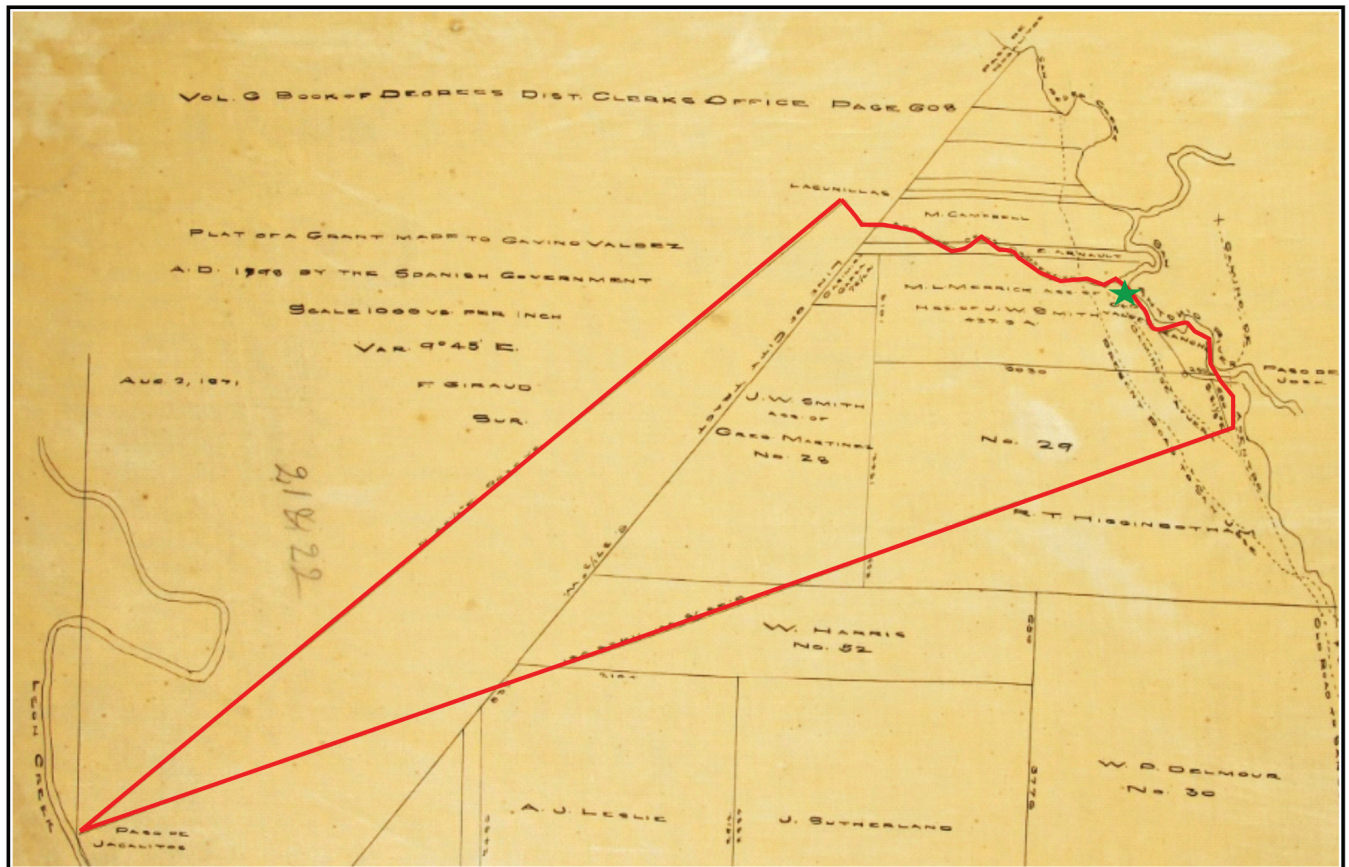


Figure 2-1. Gustave Freisleben copy of the François Giraud Map Showing the Original Claimants of the Irrigable Lands comprised in the Labores of Mission Concepcion, San Jose, San Juan and La Espada June 16, 1874. The Padre Gavino Valdez tract is outlined in red and the location of the subject property is denoted as a green star.



1838, BCDR 1:123 and 134). Figure 2-2 outlines a portion of the Gabriel Martinez Survey in red with the subject property noted with a green star. Martinez assigned his survey to John W. Smith who in turn subdivided and sold various tracts to others (September 17, 1847, Assignment of Survey 28 from G. Martinez to J. W. Smith, BCDR F2:365-366). The Thelka-Lorraine streets were a part of a 437.3 acre parcel owned by the Merrick Family who had purchased the tract from John W. Smith's widow and her new husband J. B. Lee (June 26, 1851, sale from J. B. and M. J. Lee to Morgan L. Merrick, BCDR 1:10-11).

### The Merrick Ranch

The Merrick Family operated a ranch on the large tract and the Merrick Ranch house is shown on an 1888 plat by M. W. Merrick (Figure 2-3). The subject property was a part of the Merrick Ranch and it appears that it was very close to the location of the ranch house itself as it is clearly shown on the 1888 plat (BCDR 59:390-392). In addition to the Merrick Ranch House, the 1888 plat also documents the location of the Presa de San Jose which was a diversion dam that directed water into the San Jose acequia system which was utilized to irrigate the mission farmlands. Another matter that the plat addresses is that it demonstrates the degree to which channelization of the San Antonio River in the mid-twentieth century dramatically altered the landscape environment of the area. The meanders of the river and both the large and small island shown on the map are gone, along with the remains of the Presa de San Jose. The slight promontory formed on the south bank of Concepcion Creek was also truncated as a result of the river's channelization.

The lots that fronts on Thelka Street were a portion of the M. L. Merrick Ranch that was inherited by his daughter Drusilla Merrick, while those fronting on Lorraine were inherited by her brother M. W. Merrick after their father's death in 1876 (February 21, 1877 partition of property between Drusilla and M. W. Merrick, BCDR 7:125-128). The lots on both street share a common ownership history until the time of the 1877 partition between the Merrick heirs.

The 1888 M. W. Merrick Plat represents the change in land use from rural ranch/suburban farm to the creation of residential suburbs with commercial corridors. The subsequent land use histories of both streets follow nearly identical patterns, with the large blocks of the former Merrick Ranch being sold off to land speculators beginning in the 1890s. These speculators in turn subdivided and platted the property into residential lots. The Thelka Street lots were plated into large residential lots in 1910 and then subsequently replatted into smaller lots 1919 (Ed Dreiss

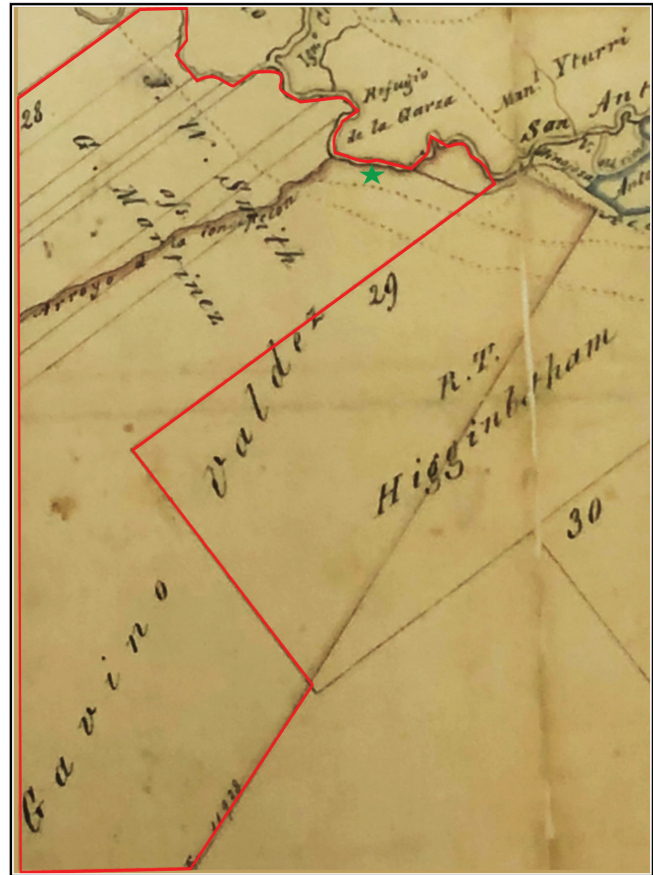


Figure 2-2. Close up view of general project area on the 1874 François Giraud Map.

Subdivision Plat of Thekla Street, New City Blocks 3381 & 3382, November 23, 1910 and November 26, 1919, BCDR 105:335-337 and 362:252-253). It should be noted that the original name of Thelka Street was Thekla as shown on the plat and it is not known how or why the street name was changed to Thelka. The Lorraine Street lots were platted in 1919 (Lorraine Place Subdivision, April 24, 1919, BCDR 368:240-241). Over the course of the next fifteen to twenty years the majority of the lots on both streets were sold for residential development.

### NCB 3382 Lots 48 through 51

The Thelka lots were sold in parcels with NCB 3382 lots 48 through 51 and 52 through 57 remaining together throughout the ownership period from circa 1920 to the present. The 48 to 51 lots were held by the same extended family – originally the Juarez family and then by their daughter Carmen Rocha and finally to Carmen Rocha's children who sold the lots to the current owners (E. S. and J. Juarez to Carmen Rocha, March 4, 1971, BCDR 6890:2096-2098; Carmen Rocha to S. F. Rocha et al., October 5, 2008, BCDR 13728:820-821; and L. Rocha et al. to P. Panter and S. Hollon, July 9, 2020, BCDR 20200150214 and 20200150243).

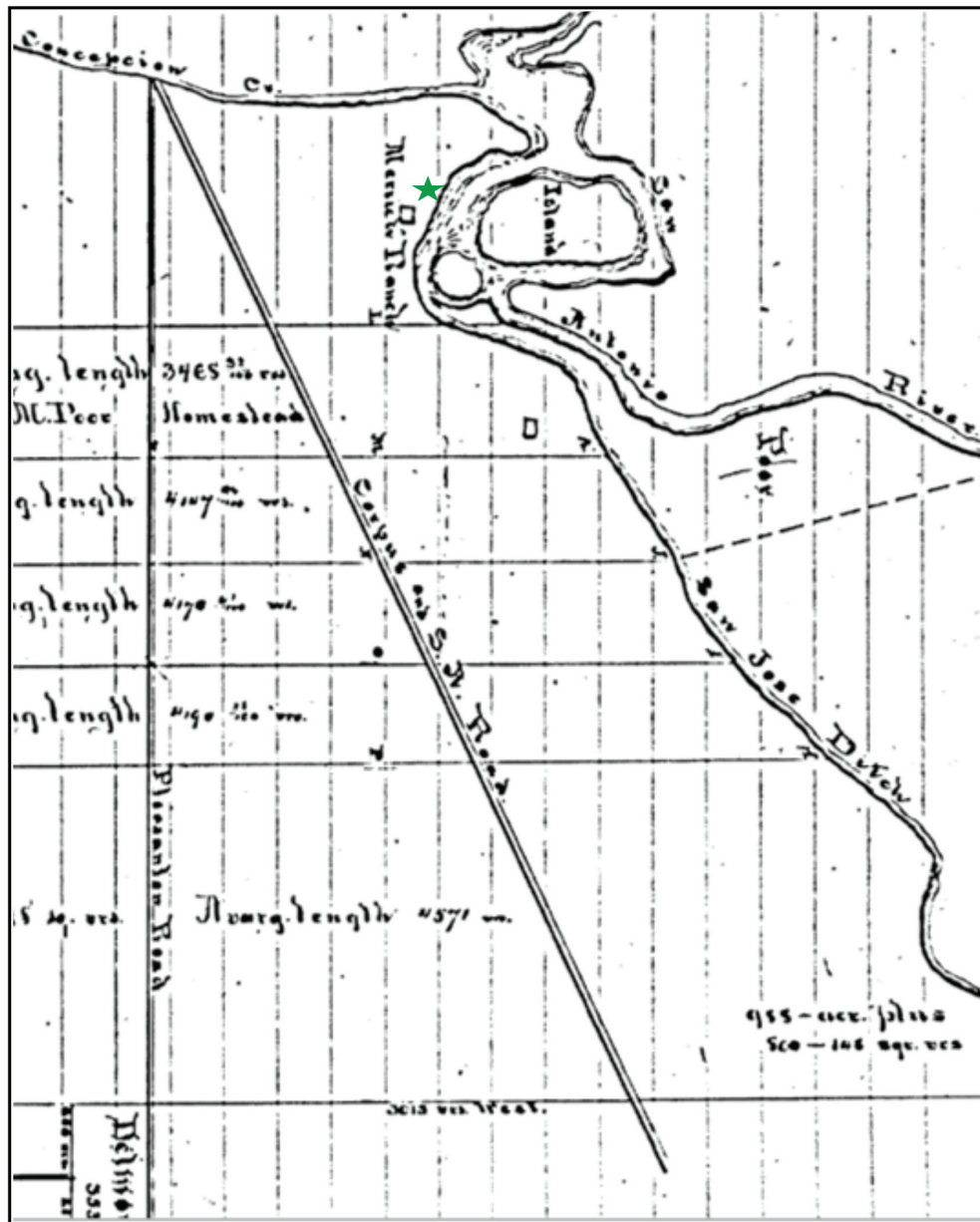


Figure 2-3. Close up of the 1888 M. W. Merrick Plat. Project area denoted by a green star.

#### NCB 3382 Lots 52 to 57

These lots also remained in the same extended family, originally the Rodriguez family but subsequently the Gutierrez, Saenz, Huizar, and Carrion families who were all related through marriage (H. D. Taylor to Cirilia de Rodriguez, September 25, 1930, BCDR 1199:564; Antonia Rodriguez Gutierrez to Estefania Rodriguez Saenz, November 19, 1953, BCDR 3419:1-2; Pablo Huizar Saenz to S. S. and Marcela Huizar, April 17, 1983; BCDR 2818:590-591; and A. P. and M. Huizar to S. Huizar Carrion and M. Carrion, March 28, 2006, BCDR 12019:146-149). S. H. & M. Carrion sold the lots to the current owner (S. H. & M. Carrion to M. E. Henry, June 2, 2006, BCDR 12158:2162-2164).

#### NCB 6150 Lots 52 to 54

Unlike the Thelka lots, the Lorraine lots were collectively developed as a residential property with a house contracted and constructed in 1953 (Martin V. Gamez mechanic's lien to Arnold Rubenstein, October 1, 1953, BCDR ML 390:456-457). The Gamez and Rocha families owned the property from 1932 until 1974 when it was acquired by Matias W. Garcia for failure to pay a roofing contract debt (Wm. Eifler to Maria R. Rocha, July 11, 1932, BCDR 1322:150-151; R. Rocha Gamez to Martin Valero Gamez, January 16, 1945, BCDR 2103:326-327; J. Campos, Trustee for Gamez et al. to Matias W. Garcia, September 3, 1974, BCDR 7673:714-717).

Between 1974 and the present, NCB 6150 lots 52, 53 and 54 together with the 1953 house were controlled by the extended Espronceda family (M. W. Garcia to A. & A. Espronceda, January 16, 1976, BCDR 621139; A. Espronceda to L. E. Barbosa, February 18, 1993, BCDR 2400646; L. E. Barbosa to V. Barbosa Silva, April 7, 2004, BCDR 200401889450. The Espronceda families' ownership ceased when the property was sold in 2019 (R. & M. Espronceda to Double LL Ascend, LLC, April 22, 2019, BCDR 20190071515). Double LL Ascend LLC sold the property to the current owner (Double LL Ascend LLC to M. E. Henry, October 23, 2020, BCDR 20200255469).

## Channelization of the San Antonio River

San Antonio has suffered from devastating flood throughout the historic period, with major catastrophic floods and corresponding loss of life and property in 1809, 1865, and 1921 to name perhaps the most devastating occurrences. The first modern effort to address flooding by improvements to the river channel itself correspond with the 1921 flood which resulted in 49 deaths and some \$8 million dollars in property damage to the city (United States Army Corps of Engineers [USACE] 1972:5). The City and the USACE built the Olmos Dam in the Olmos Basin to impound and control the release flood waters thereby sparing the urban core severe flooding. At the same time, the river was channelized along its northern segment by cutting across meanders – with the most dramatic efforts being the

cut-off channel that bypassed the iconic horseshoe bend of San Antonio and now famous RiverWalk. All of these improvements were put into effect by 1928 (Fisher 1996:181-182).

The area of the subject property became the focus of further channelization improvements in the 1950s when the United States Army Corps of Engineers and the San Antonio River Authority (SARA) aggressively acquired property along the river corridor through purchase, quitclaim, or eminent domain proceedings. Lots 53, 54, 55, 56 and 57 of NCB 3382 were all affected by this process, with each losing a portion of land (Figure 2-4). These lots were acquired by SARA through eminent domain proceedings (Eminent Domain proceedings against Estefania Saenz by the SARA, July 13, 1956, BCDR 3915:100-101).

## Previous Archaeological Investigations

A review of the THC Texas Archeological Sites Atlas identified two sites with a 300 m (ca. 985 foot) radius around the Project Area (Figure 2-5). These are 41BX238 and 41BX 1627. The first site was recorded atop the T2 terrace on the east bank of the San Antonio River in 1974 but notes on the site-form indicate it was composed of modern trash with the presence of lithic material. No subsurface work was performed at that time and the recordation notes that the potential of a buried historic or prehistoric Native American component was the

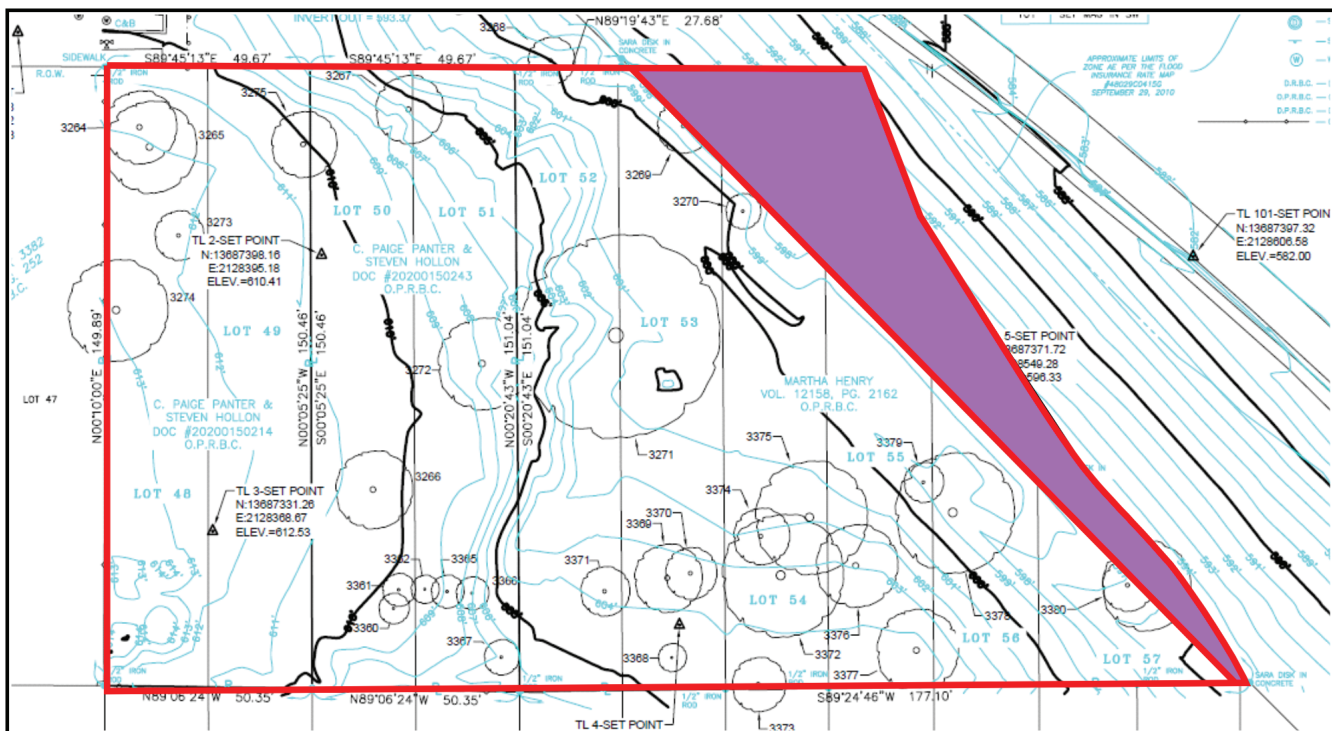


Figure 2-4. Land lost from NCB 3382 Lots 53 to 57 due to San Antonio River Channelization. Base map is the current re-plat and the area in purple corresponds with the land acquired by eminent domain in the 1950s. Note: NCB 6150 Lots 52 to 54 not shown in Figure 2-4.



Redacted Image

*Figure 2-5. Previously recorded archaeological sites within 300 meters of the project area.*

justification for site designation (Scurlock et al. 1976). The second trinomial is located on top of the T2 terrace on the west bank of the San Antonio River two blocks to the south and one block to the east of the subject property. This site was recorded in 2006 and was described as an historic period occupation that exhibited potentially mid-to-late nineteenth century trash deposits (Peters et al., 2006).

### **Field, Laboratory, and Curation Methods**

The CAR conducted archaeological survey level mechanical trenching on June 22, 2021, by observing

the excavation of two backhoe trenches. CAR staff completed a log of activities supported by photographs and a photographic log. All field notes, forms, and photographs were placed in labeled archival folders. Digital photographs were printed on acid-free paper. All records generated during the project were prepared in compliance with federal regulations 36 CFR Part 79 and THC requirements for State Held-in-Trust collections. No artifacts were recovered during this project. All project related materials, including the final report, are permanently stored at the CAR curation facility in accession file number 2422.

## Chapter 3: Results of Field Investigations

CAR staff initially conducted a pedestrian survey of the property using CTA standard 5 meter transect lines which returned no results for prehistoric cultural materials. Historic cultural materials were present in low abundance but all items encountered were late nineteenth through twentieth century in age and lacked any attributes that might warrant collection. CAR staff then worked with the backhoe operator to monitor the excavation of two backhoe trenches (refer Figure 1-2) and trench spoil. Each of the backhoe trenched were photographically profiled. Neither trench exhibited any archaeology of significance. No human remains, cultural features, or artifacts warranting collection were found during survey level mechanical trenching.

### Backhoe Trench 1 (BHT 1)

This trench was intentionally placed on the lower terrace, perpendicular to the San Antonio River. Immediately upon opening the trench with the backhoe it became clear that there is only 10 cm or less cap of dark brown (Munsell value

10YR 4/2) humic soil present atop an organically depleted yellowish-brown (Munsell 2.5 6/6) clay body that extended to a depth of 1.80 meters (Figure 3-1). No cultural materials were present in either of the strata. It is clear from this excavation that the circa 1956 channelization stripped away the original A Horizon if not significant portions of the B and lower horizons.

### Backhoe Trench 2 (BHT 2)

This trench was intentionally placed on the upper terrace perpendicular to the San Antonio River (Figure 3-2). Like BHT 1, there is a thin cap of dark brown (Munsell value 10YR 4/2) humic soil present as stratum 1. However, unlike the profile of BHT 1, there is a further cap of pale yellowish-white (Munsell 2.5Y 8/4) depleted and leached carbonate rich soil 40 to 50 centimeters in thickness that overlie the original buried A Horizon. This cap undoubtedly represents spoil removed from the lower terrace during channelization and deposited up-slope, forming this thick draping lens. The



*Figure 3-1. Backhoe Trench 1 with a view to the east (left) and a view of the north profile (right).*





Figure 3-2. Backhoe Trench 2 on the lower terrace of the project area with a view to the east (left), and a view of the west wall profile (right).

buried A Horizon itself is a thin brown soil mixed with cultural materials that date from the 1930s through the 1950s. Immediately beneath this thin stratum are a series of buried paleosols extending a further 60 centimeters below the modern surface. These strata progressively lighten in color with depth and have corresponding increases in carbonates and carbonate nodules. The same pale yellowish-white carbonate rich soils that form the 40-50 centimeter stratum 2 cap is present, albeit intact

and undisturbed. This stratum extends from 1.40 meters to beyond 2.10 meters, the finish depth of BHT 2. No cultural materials, aside from the thin lens draping the buried A Horizon, were present in the lower strata. As the BHT 2 profiles demonstrate, the upper terrace was also affected by the circa 1956 channelization work by SARA, with the original carbonate rich paleosols from the lower terrace dumped on and capping the buried A Horizon on the upper terrace.

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

Current property owners, responsive to a request from COSA-OHP, retained the CAR to conduct a pedestrian survey and perform archaeological survey level mechanical trenching of the excavation of two backhoe trenches on the subject property. These activities were performed on June 22, 2021 and resulted in negative finds for impacts to subsurface archaeological deposits. Trench excavations document that the lower terrace of the property has been significantly modified by past San Antonio River Authority Channelization activities. Prior impacts have removed the totality of the original A and B Horizons and the trench profile exhibited only a sterile red-brown clay to a depth of 1.8 meters. A thin veneer of humic soil atop this stratum represents accumulation of new topsoil through decomposition or colluvial action from up-slope. No features or artifacts were

noted. Likewise, the upper terrace is also disturbed from channelization work having a drape of sterile leached carbonate rich soils, likely spoil from similar deposits on the lower terrace, approximately 40 to 50 centimeters in depth draped over the upper terrace. This drape lies atop a buried A Horizon that has a veneer of 1930s-1950s trash atop a series of buried alluvial paleosols. These quickly fade in color (with increasing carbonates) until it transitions to a dry caliche and carbonate rich stratum at 1.40 to 2.10 meters. Aside from the inconsequential mid-twentieth century artifacts on the surface of the buried A Horizon, no other artifacts were noted and no artifacts were collected. As both the pedestrian survey and trench excavations returned negative results, CAR recommends no further archaeological investigations of any future work on the subject property.

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## References Cited:

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Year	Mon./Day	Grantor	Grantee	Instrument	Reference
1794	Apr 10	Pedro de Nava, Comdt. Gnl.	Padre Gavino Valdez	G	B2:95-101
1824		Padre Gavino Valdez	Mexican Republic	A	Unknown
1836	Apr 21	Mexican Republic	Texas Republic	F	Independence
1838	Oct 11	Republic of Texas	Gabriel Martinez	BG	1:123 and 134
1847	Sep 17	Gabriel Martinez	J. W. Smith	AS	F2:265
1851	Jun 26	J. B. Lee & M. J. Lee	M. L. Merrick	D	1:10-11
1876	May 31	Drucilla Merrick	A. J. Murray	D	5:88-89
1877	Apr 16	A. J. Murray	W. V. Hefley	D	8:377-378
1880	Oct 19	W. V. Hefley	Alex Maltsberger	D	16:378-379
1884	Mar 3	Alex Maltsberger	F. C. Hitchens	D	3:175-176
1884	Mar 7	F. C. Hitchens	O. A. & E. Balcom	D	33:219-220
1890	Feb 26	O. A. & E. Balcom	C. H. Dean et al.	WDVL	72:242-243
1890	Jun 20	C. H. Dean, Et al.	Ed Dreiss	WDVL	76:546-547
1890	Aug 5	Lena M. Iversen, Gaurdian	T. Gray & G. White	D	71:324
1890	Aug 18	M. W. Merrick	Lina M. Iversen	D	65:414-416
1891	Mar 31	Thom. Gray	Geo. White	D	97:590-591
1910	Nov 23	Public	Ed Dreiss	P	105:335
1916	Nov 26	J. M. Holman	Ed Dreiss	QCD	493:465
1919	Apr 24	Public	Anna Blanche White	P	368:240
1919	Jun 7	Public	Ed Dreiss	RP	362:252
1930	Sep 25	H. D. Taylor	Cirilia S. De Rodriguez	WD	1199:564
1932	Jul 11	Wm. Eifler	Maria R. Rocha	WD	1322:150-151
1945	Jan 16	R. Rocha Gamez	Martin Valero Gamez	WD	2103:326-327
1953	Oct 1	Martin Valero Gamez	A Rubenstein	ML	390:456-457
1953	Nov 19	Gutierrez, Antonia	Saenz, Estefana R.	WD	3419:1-2
1956	Jul 13	Saenz, Estefana R.	SA River Authority	ED	3915:100-101
1971	Mar 4	E. S. & J. Juarez	Carmen Rocha	WD	6890:2096-98
1974	Sep 3	J. Campos, Trustee	Matias W. Garcia, Jr.	TD	7673:714-717
1976	Jan 15	Matias W. Garcia, Jr.	A. & A. Espronceda	WD	621139
1983	Apr 17	Saenz, Pablo H. S.	S. & Marcela Huizar	WDI	2818:590-591
1993	Feb 18	Alicia B. Espronceda	Laurentina E. Barbosa	GWD	2400646
2004	Apr 7	Laurentina E. Barbosa	Vicente Barbosa Silva	GWD	20040188945
2006	Mar 28	A. P. & M. Huizar	S. H. & M. Carrion	WD	12019:146-149
2006	Jun 2	Huizar & Carrion	M. Henry	GWD	12158:2162-64
2006	Sep 9	Vicente Barbosa Silva	R & M Espronceda	WDVL	12372:287-288
2008	Oct 5	Rocha, Carmen	S. F. Rocha, et al.	WD	13728:820-821
2019	Apr 22	R & M Espronceda	Double L Ascend LLC	STD	20190071515
2020	Jul 9	L. Rocha et al.	Panter & Hollon	GWD	20200150214
2020	Jul 9	L. Rocha et al.	Panter & Hollon	GWD	20200150243
2020	Oct 23	Double L Ascend LLC	M. Henry	SWDVL	20200255469

A	Assumption	G	Grant	R-P	Re-Plat
AS	Assignment	GWD	General Warranty Deed	STD	Substitute Trustee Deed
BG	Bounty Grant	ML	Mechanic's Lien	SWDVL	Special Warranty Deed Vendors Lien
D	Deed	P	Plat	WDI	Warranty Deed of Interest
E	Eminent Domain	QCD	Quit Claim Deed	WDVL	Warranty Deed with Vendors Lien
F	Forfeit				

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