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Archival Investigation of the Pyron Homestead (41BX278), New City Block 7657, San Antonio, Texas

I. Wayne Cox

Center for Archaeological Research

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**ARCHIVAL INVESTIGATION OF THE PYRON HOMESTEAD
(41 BX 278), NEW CITY BLOCK 7657,
SAN ANTONIO, TEXAS**

I. Wayne Cox

**Center for Archaeological Research
The University of Texas at San Antonio
Archaeological Survey Report No. 210**

1992

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ABSTRACT

The Center for Archaeological Research, The University of Texas at San Antonio, conducted an archival investigation on a portion of New City Block 7657 in southeast San Antonio for the Texas Trust Savings Bank of Marble Falls, Texas. The property contained the site of the historic Pyron House and thought to possibly also contain the buried remains of the San José acequia. The study revealed that the homestead was probably constructed in 1849, and although recently destroyed, the foundation remains in the ground. The research further revealed that the acequia did not pass through the property under study, but instead is located further to the west on the other side of Mission Road.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT i
LIST OF FIGURES ii
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS iii
INTRODUCTION 1
PREVIOUS ARCHAEOLOGICAL RESEARCH 1
HISTORICAL BACKGROUND 1
CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS 5
REFERENCES CITED 6

LIST OF FIGURES

1. Location of the Pyron Homestead and the San José Acequia 2
2. Charles Lynn Pyron 4

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INTRODUCTION

In 1991, the Center for Archaeological Research (CAR), The University of Texas at San Antonio (UTSA), entered into a contract with the Texas Trust Savings Bank of Marble Falls, Texas, to conduct an archival research study on 8.659 acres of unimproved land out of New City Block (NCB) 7657 in southeast San Antonio. The property is located to the south of Mission San José at the northeast corner of the intersection of Mission Road and Southeast Military Drive (Fig. 1). The property is within the Mission Parkway Historic/Archeological District. The project was conducted under the general supervision of Jack D. Eaton, CAR Acting Director and all research was accomplished by Research Associate, I. Wayne Cox. All files and drawing are curated at the CAR-UTSA.

PREVIOUS ARCHAEOLOGICAL RESEARCH

There have been several archival and archaeological investigations directed toward Mission San José y San Miguel de Aguayo, 41 BX 3, and its acequia system, 41 BX 267 (Fox 1970, Schuetz 1970, Clark 1978, Henderson and Clark 1984). The establishment of the Mission Parkway prompted a thorough archival investigation and survey of the area by the Texas Historical Commission (Scurlock, Benavides, Isham and Clark 1976). At the time of that survey, the Pyron House was still standing and was assigned a Texas State Trimomial site designation, 41 BX 279 (*ibid* 107-112). Since that report the structure has been demolished. Other investigations have examined the route of the San José acequia and the *labores* of the mission (Cox 1988, 1989, Fox and Cox 1990, 1991).

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Mission San José y San Miguel de Aguayo was established on March 13, 1720 by Captain Juan Valdéz, accompanied by Father Margil and an official party, on the eastern bank of the San Antonio River “a little more than three leagues” from Mission San Antonio de Valero, measured along its meanders (Valdéz 1720). In approximately 1729, the mission was relocated to its third, and present, site and the course of the acequia, or irrigation system, was established (Habig 1968:88, Cox 1988:1). The farmlands, or *labores*, of the mission were thus established between the San Antonio River, on the east, and the acequia on the west. The acequia originated at a dam on the river a short distance below the mouth of San Pedro Creek, approximately two miles above the present mission, followed the contours of the terrain along Mission Road and returned to the river just above the dam for the Espada Acequia. In 1777, the farm land was described in a portion of an inspection report (Morfi 1777:211):

The farm occupies an area of about a league 2 1/2 miles square (4428.4 acres) and is all fenced, the fence being in good condition. For its benefit, water is taken from the San Antonio River and distributed by means of a beautiful irrigation ditch to all parts of the field where corn, beans, lentils, cotton, sugar cane, watermelons, melons, and sweet potatoes are raised.

Upon secularization of the missions in 1793, the lands were divided into *suertes* and distributed to the mission Indians and other citizens of the Villa de Béjar. Final distribution of the lands was ordered by the National Congress of the Mexican Republic on September 15, 1823 (León 1823:124). Among the twenty-five grantees receiving lands, four *suertes* were awarded to Juan Veramendi (Almazraz 1989:41).

Juan Martin del Carmen Veramendi, the second son of Fernando and Maria Josefa Granado de Veramendi, was born in San Fernando de Bexar, now San Antonio, on December 17, 1778. He married Josefa Ruiz de Navarro; they became the parents of at least nine children (Chabot 1937:243-44, San Fernando Baptismal Records, San Fernando Marriage Records). He served as *alcalde* of Bexar in 1824 and 1825, and in 1830 was elected vice-governor of Coahuila and Texas (Webb 1952 Vol II:837). Their eldest daughter, Maria Ursula Frutuosa (born October 6, 1811) married James Bowie, of Alamo fame, April 25, 1831 (San Fernando Baptismal Records, Marriage Records JPL). Bowie and Veramendi formed a partnership to establish cotton mills in Saltillo, with Veramendi overseeing the Coahuila operation. Upon the death of José Maria Letona, in 1832, Veramendi assumed the office of governor. In September of 1833, while in Monclova, Juan, Josefa,

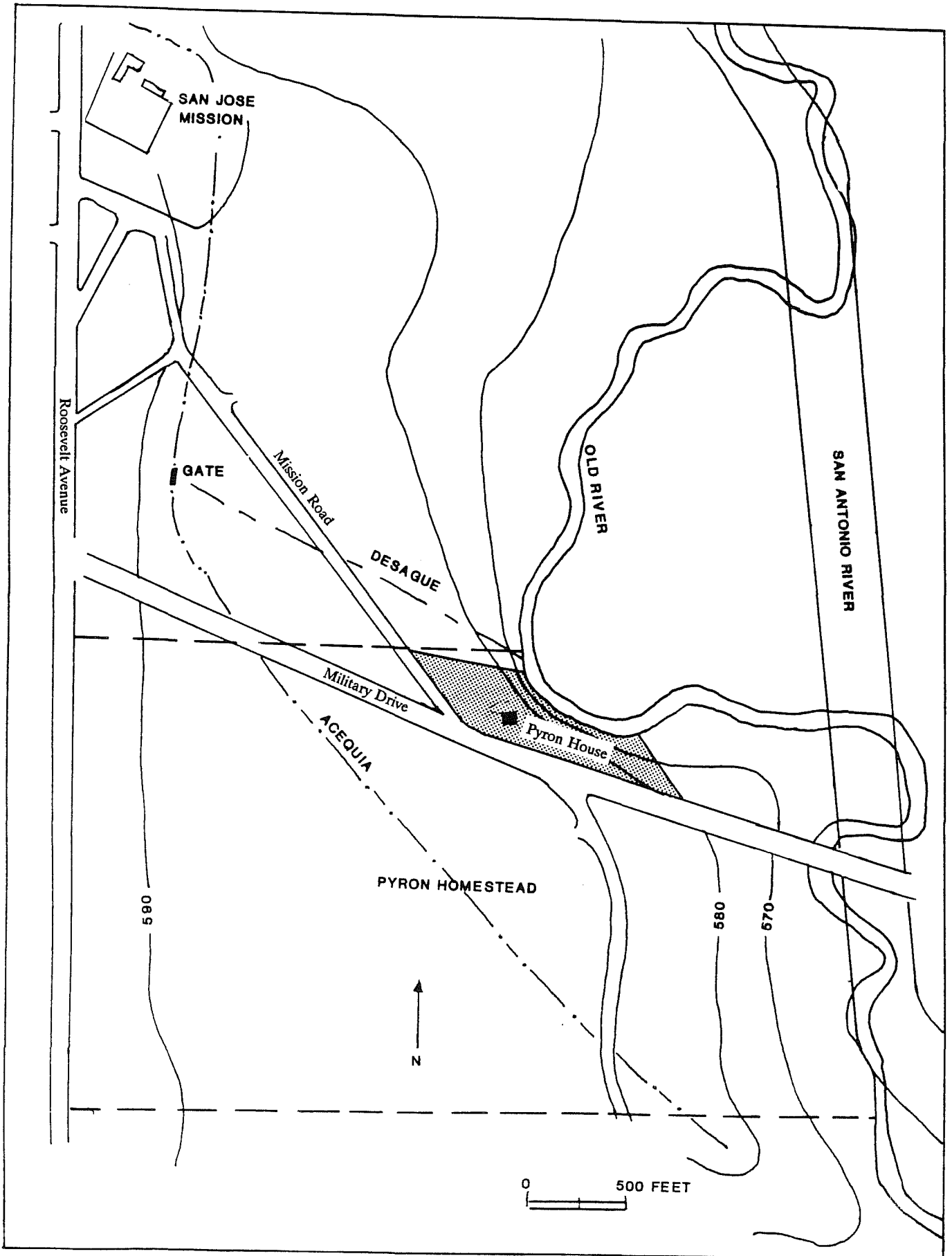


Figure 1. Location of the Pyron Homestead and the San Jose Acequia.

and Ursula, contracted cholera during an epidemic in that city. They died within three days of each other (Spanish Archives, Burial Records). Since Veramendi died intestate, his estate, with a value of 33,005 pesos, 2 reals, and 7 granos, was probated by the court of Acale Manuel Ximenez. His property passed to his children, with Luciano Navarro appointed guardian for the minor children (Spanish Archives, Wills 117c). A daughter, Maria Josefa de la Concepción Gregoria, married Rafael Garza on December 1, 1838, and after her death he married her younger sister, Maria Antonia, on October 11, 1846 (Marriage Records JPL, Chabot 1937:224, Spanish Archives, Marriage Records:450). The mission properties were acquired jointly, by a son, José Marco Veramendi, and Maria Antonia Veramendi e Garza and her husband, Rafael C. In 1848, five *suertes* of the mission lands were purchased by William Oury and Charles Pyron (BCDR G1:374). William Sanders Oury was born in Abingdon, Virginia, on August 13, 1817, and arrived in Texas in 1833. He served with the Texas Army in San Antonio and was dispatched from the Alamo with a message to Sam Houston in February of 1836. He was captured during the ill-fated Mier Expedition and participated in the attempted escape near Saltillo in 1843. Oury served in the Texas Rangers under John Coffee Hays and the Texas Mounted Rangers and the Texas Mounted Volunteers during the Mexican War (*San Antonio Express* 1930;Webb 1952 Vol.II:320). He returned to San Antonio following the war and entered into partnership with Charles Pyron.

Charles Lynn Pyron (Fig. 2) was born in Marion County, Alabama, in approximately 1819, and was educated in the normal schools of the state. He is reputed to have served in the Mexican War under Generals Scott and Taylor (Kilstofte 1948:1). It is possible that he became acquainted with Oury during that period. At any rate, by 1848, he was residing in Port Lavaca, Texas, where he met his future wife, Octavia Caroline Smith, formerly of South Carolina. In August of that year, he and Oury purchased the Veramendi lands, about two hundred acres, for \$1100 (BCDR G1:374). He probably contracted for construction of the house at that time, for after the purchase of the ranch, he returned to Port Lavaca and married Octavia on November 15, 1849 (Branda 1976 Vol. III:763). In 1849, William Oury married Inez Garcia, and on April 9, 1850, granted a power of attorney to Pyron to act as his agent for their real estate and joint stock holdings and departed for California (BCDR K2:631, Webb Vol II:320). Pyron also purchased 553 1/2 acres to the west of the acequia from the Manuel Leal grant of a league and labor acquired by William P. Delmour in November of 1853 (BCDR P1:201). He apparently began an expansion of his holding in both land and stock during this period and by 1859 was forced to declare bankruptcy, which plagued his estate for a number of years (BCDR H2:652, S1:580, 16:297).

With the onset of the Civil War, Pyron raised a company of troops into state service in April of 1861, which was mustered into the Confederate Army on May 23, 1861, as Company B, 2nd Texas Mounted Rifles. He served as a Major and battalion commander under General Henry Sibley in the New Mexico campaign. His advance precipitated the battle of Valverde on February 21, 1862, and his unit played a prominent role in the battle of Glorieta Pass on March 28. After the defeat of the Confederate forces in New Mexico, he was elected colonel of the 2nd Texas Cavalry and participated in the Teche campaign, and was wounded at Lafourche Crossing on June 21, 1863. He returned to San Antonio, and on April 16 assumed command of the post, and in June was placed in charge of the Western Sub-District of Texas. After the war, he returned to San Antonio and died of a lingering case of consumption (tuberculosis) on August 24, 1869 (Branda 1976 Vol. III:763; Davis and Grobe 1929: 1906: San Antonio Herald 1869:3).

Upon Charles Pyron's death the estate passed to his widow, Octavia Caroline, and their children, Clara Albertine, Charles Jackson, Ellen, and Madison L., ranging in age from 18 to 10 (Davis and Grobe 1929: 1906, USDI-OC 1860). The family continued to hold the homestead property for the next two generations. In 1881, a final lawsuit resulting from the bankruptcy was settled awarding a portion of the original ranch, to the north of the homestead property, to Samuel G. French (Bexar County Archives, Pyron Folder # 456).

The San José acequia, which flowed through the middle of the homestead tract was still operating and, in 1886, a suit was brought by Charles Dignowity against Octavia Pyron to allow a survey along the route to allow the cleaning and dredging of the ditch to a width of nine feet (BCDR 53:32). In 1894, the acequia was reopened under the Texas Water Act of 1889, at that time described as "four feet deep and 12 feet wide and the carrying capacity thereof shall be 100 cubic feet per second" (Water Board Records Vol.1 August 10, 1894:4).



Col Charles Pyron

Figure 2. Charles Lynn Pyron

The family moved into San Antonio in 1905, but continued to hold the homestead (Kilstofte 1948:2). Madison L. Pyron became a dentist and moved his residence and practice to Boerne after 1904. Charles Pyron continued to farm the homestead and Octavia resided at 1021 South Alamo and retained ownership of 139 acres of the property. In 1911, the heirs granted the county right-of-way on the property to pave the "new" Mission Road (*BCDR* 362:599). On Christmas day of 1913, Charles Pyron died after a lengthy illness and his share passed to his widow, Ellen (*San Antonio Express* 1913). On June the 2nd, 1914, Octavia Pyron died at her home on Alamo Street, survived by Madison, Clara, daughter-in-law Ellen, and two grandchildren (*San Antonio Express* 1914).

In 1942 a hurricane severely damaged the house and it was repaired and rented as a residence. In 1964, the structure was occupied as the B and C Auto Parts, then known as 1435 Southeast Military Drive, and served as the residence for the manager, Anthony Pawlik, and his wife Patsy (*Polk* 1964). The business occupied the building until 1974 when it became vacant and remained so until its destruction (*Polk* 1974). Ellen Pyron died in May of 1965, and was entered with her family in the Confederate Cemetery in San Antonio (*San Antonio Light* 1965).

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

In attempting to reconstruct the history of the site several considerations were addressed, primary among these were the probability of any structural remains that might be encountered during future development of the site, and the location of the buried remains of the San José acequia. The archives failed to reveal any evidence of construction during the mission period or immediately after the secularization. While it is possible that structures existed during the Veramendi ownership, this is highly unlikely due to the very limited use of the land during this period.

The first structure on the site was undoubtedly the Pyron House. Since he and Oury purchased the property in August of 1848, and Pyron returned to San Antonio with his bride after November of 1849, it is most likely that the home was constructed during that period. The structure is clearly indicated on several maps in its known location dating until after 1973 (*USGS* 1967). The *San Antonio City Directories* indicated that the structure, although vacant, was still standing in 1990 (*Polk* 1984-1990). Although the structure has been destroyed the foundation remains intact at, or just below, ground level.

The second consideration, the location of the San José acequia, was resolved by a plat submitted as evidence to the Bexar County District Court in September of 1881 (*Bexar County Archives*, Pyron Folder #456). By replotting the metes and bounds calls from that survey on to the modern street pattern, the acequia can clearly be established as being located to the west of the property under consideration (*Fig. 1*).

Therefore, it appears that the primary consideration regarding the future development rest with the buried remains of the Pyron House. If further disturbance of the site is anticipated the exposed remains of the structure should be recorded and limited sub-surface excavations should be considered. Due to standard site utilization of the period, further support structures, for example a detached kitchen facility, may well be encountered. The Pyron House was important both as a representative structure of the period and in connection with a historical individual of Texas history. It is regrettable that the structure was destroyed prior to proper investigation, yet enough remains to indicate that future work could contribute valuable information of the occupation period of the site.

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