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Archaeological Investigation to Locate the Northwest Corner of Mission Concepcion San Antonio, Bexar County, Texas

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*ARCHAEOLOGICAL INVESTIGATION TO LOCATE
THE NORTHWEST CORNER OF
MISSION CONCEPCIÓN
SAN ANTONIO, BEXAR COUNTY, TEXAS*

Anne A. Fox

*Center for Archaeological Research
The University of Texas at San Antonio
Archaeological Survey Report, No. 212*

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ABSTRACT

On May 2, 1990, the Center for Archaeological Research (CAR), The University of Texas at San Antonio, conducted an archaeological investigation to locate the north wall of the compound of Mission Concepción for the San Antonio Missions National Historical Park. The purpose of the investigation was to obtain information in order to be able to project the north wall line and the west wall line and locate the original northwest corner which has been eliminated by street and utility construction.

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We would like to acknowledge the contribution of Los Compadres de San Antonio Missions National Historical Park for financing this small project. Also, the cooperation and interest of the members of the park staff are appreciated. I. Wayne Cox of the Center staff mapped and recorded the location of the investigation in relation to the known landmarks on the site.

INTRODUCTION

On May 2, 1990, the author directed the excavation of a short backhoe trench across the expected location of the north wall of the mission compound at Mission Concepción (Figure 1). The work was done under contract between the UTSA Center for Archaeological Research (CAR) and the National Park Service. Mission Concepción is a part of the San Antonio Missions National Historical Park. It is also a State Archaeological Landmark, is listed on the National Register of Historic Places, and has been recorded by the Historic American Buildings Survey. The investigation was done in compliance with Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 (as amended) and Executive Order 11593.

The work was completed within one day, and involved a backhoe and several CAR staff members. The purpose of the investigation was to establish the location of the north wall in order to project the line of the wall until it met the line of the west wall, as previously established, so as to determine the location of the northwest corner of the compound. During completion of a recent archaeological investigation (Brown n.d.) this corner was found to have been destroyed by utility trenches.

PREVIOUS INVESTIGATIONS

A number of archaeological investigations have been conducted to locate and map the outer walls of the mission compound, with special emphasis on the north and west walls. In the fall of 1971 and spring of 1972, investigations under the direction of Dan Scurlock of the Texas Historical Commission (Scurlock and Fox 1977) located traces of the west wall in what was then an open field across the road from the mission buildings.

During the fall of 1981 and spring of 1982, the CAR (Ivey and Fox n.d.) conducted selective excavations to locate a number of structures and walls, including the northeast corner and the line of the north wall, and a portion of the west wall not far from Scurlock's excavations.

In 1985, the City of San Antonio initiated a project to realign Mission Road to run outside the west wall of the mission. After several false starts, the project began in February of 1987 with the investigation by CAR of the area to be impacted by the new roadway (Labadie 1989). It was determined that the road would not impact any Spanish colonial resources, and that it would pass over and without severely damaging the *acequia* that once ran across the area.

At this point, the first half of the realignment of the road was accomplished and traffic was routed away from the front of the mission. In 1990, the CAR conducted a second phase of work (Brown n.d.). This was to find and map the section of the west wall between the old location of Mission Road and the proposed new location, before the second half of the road was moved. During this investigation, a series of backhoe trenches across the wall line exposed sections of the wall and also disclosed areas disturbed by later construction of houses and utility lines (Figure 2). When it was determined that the northwest corner of the mission had been removed by utility trenches, it was decided to undertake one additional backhoe investigation to confirm the location of the corner. The result is the subject of this report.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

For a comprehensive history of the mission, the reader is referred to Father Marion Habig's 1968 book, *The Alamo Chain of Missions, A History of San Antonio's Five Old Missions*, as well as to the historical background sections of several publications resulting from archaeological investigations, including Ivey and Fox (n.d.), Fox (1988), and Labadie (1989).

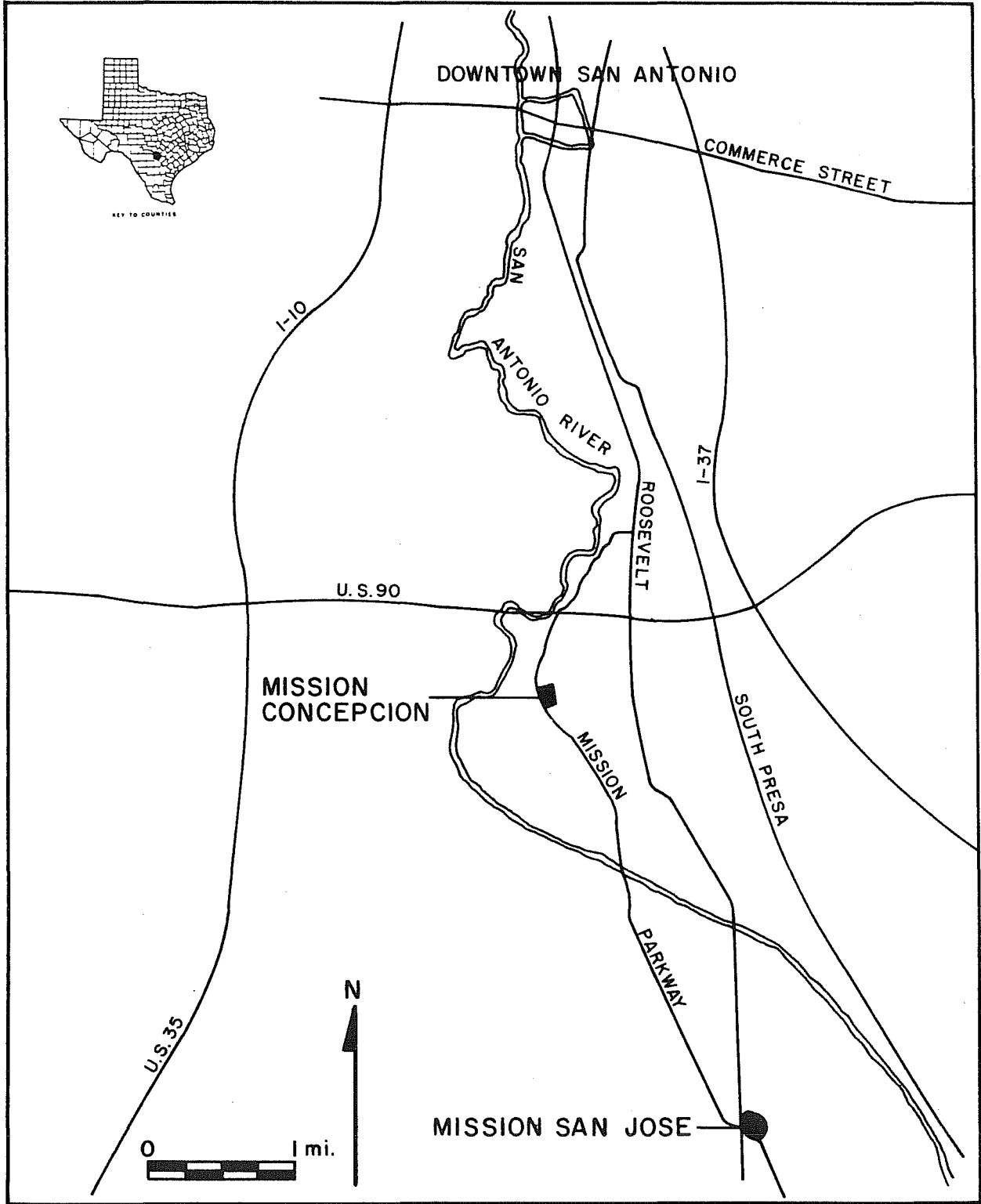


Figure 1. Location Map.

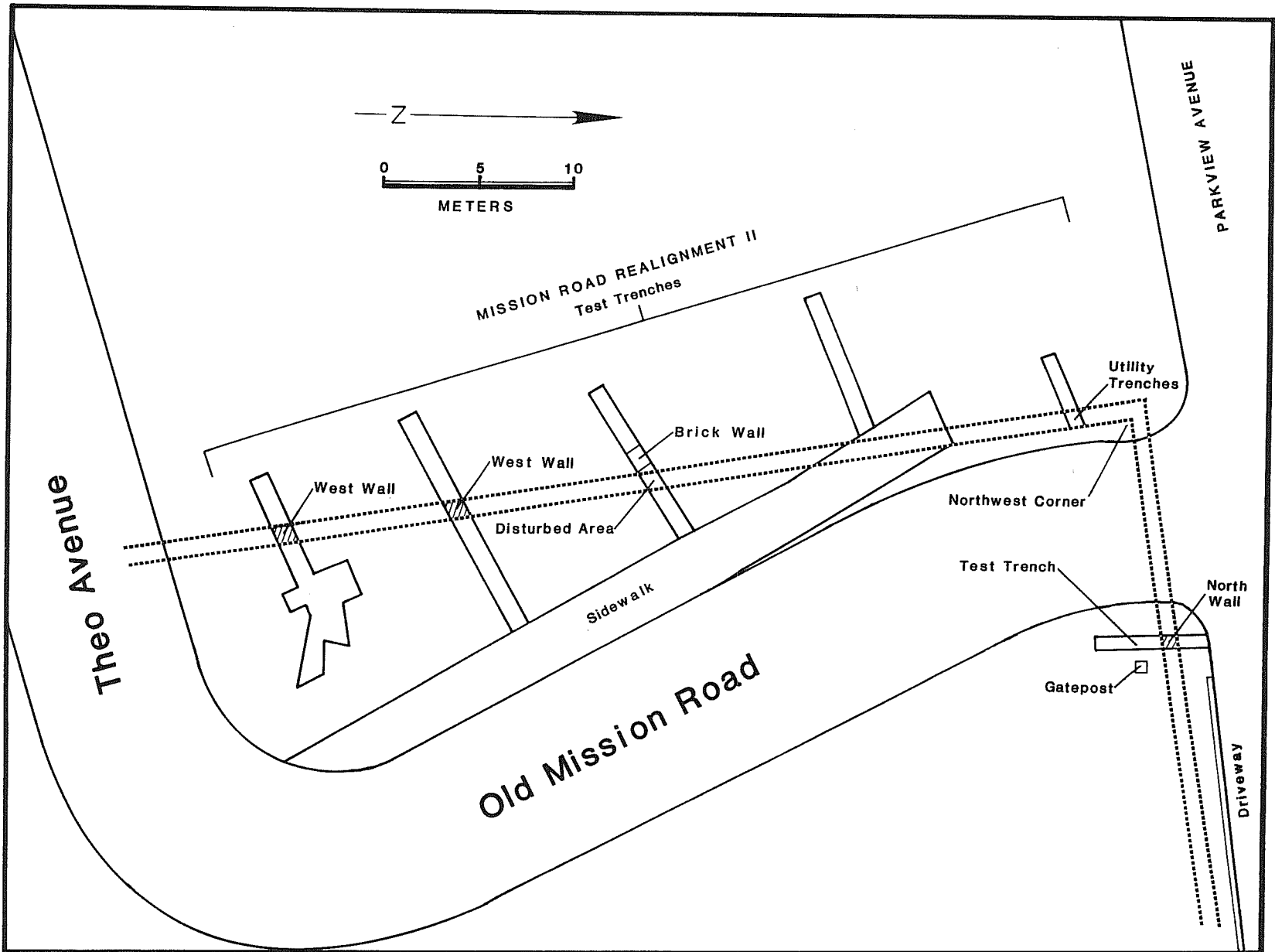


Figure 2. *Project Map*. Shown are previous and current test trenching that indicate the west and north wall alignments, and the projected northwest corner of the Mission Concepción quadrangle.

THE INVESTIGATIONS

A backhoe trench 80 cm wide and approximately 5 m long was laid out 60 cm from the western face of the southernmost brick gatepost on the south side of the entrance drive to the St. John's Seminary buildings (Figure 2). The trench long axis was oriented to magnetic north. Approximately 1.25 m north of the gatepost, at ca. 75 cm below the surface, the top of the north wall of the compound was found. The wall was found to measure approximately 75 cm in thickness. The depth to the bottom of the wall was not determined, but it continued more than 1 m below the surface, where the trenching stopped.

CONCLUSIONS

The location of the northwest corner of the mission compound can be determined by projecting the lines of the west and north walls until they meet (Figure 2). This bit of information can now be added to the accumulated data about the outlines of the mission recovered by previous archaeological investigations. It can also be used in the future to relocate the northwest corner on the ground when the time comes to suitably indicate the mission walls on or above the ground surface.

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