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An Archaeological Survey of Knollcreek Subdivision, Northeast San Antonio, Bexar County, Texas

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AN ARCHAEOLOGICAL SURVEY OF KNOLLCREEK SUBDIVISION,
NORTHEAST SAN ANTONIO, BEXAR COUNTY, TEXAS

I. Wayne Cox

Submitted to Nash Phillips/Copus, Inc.

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ABSTRACT

During June 1984, the Center for Archaeological Research, The University of Texas at San Antonio, conducted a pedestrian survey of the 155-acre Knollcreek subdivision in northeast Bexar County for Nash Phillips/Copus, Inc. Although no prehistoric cultural resources were found, two historic sites (41 BX 263 and 41 BX 264) with standing features were recorded. However, these structural remains are not considered significant cultural resources and therefore not eligible for nomination to the National Register of Historic Places.

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INTRODUCTION

The archaeological survey of Knollcreek subdivision was carried out by the Center for Archaeological Research (CAR), The University of Texas at San Antonio (UTSA), during June 20-21, 1984. The survey was done under contract between the CAR-UTSA and Nash Phillips/Copus, Inc. It was requested as part of the requirements for Veterans Administration grant application and is in compliance with the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, as amended, and Executive Order 11593.

The field work was done by Wayne Cox, Center Research Associate, and Darla Cox, volunteer, under the supervision of Dr. Thomas R. Hester, Center Director and Principal Investigator, and Jack D. Eaton, Associate Director.

THE SURVEY AREA

Knollcreek subdivision, Units 1 and 2, is located on 155 acres in northeast Bexar County between Classen Road and Jung Road, south of F.M. 1604 (Fig. 1). The southern portion of Unit 2 is flat with a sparse cover of grasses and whitebrush; the northern portion and all of Unit 1 is situated atop a limestone knoll approximately 60 feet higher in elevation. The higher terrain consists of limestone outcrops densely covered with typical Edwards Plateau vegetation, i.e., juniper, Mexican buckeye, mesquite. Because of the outcropping there is little to no soil depth on the northern two-thirds of the site. The developer has already established the street pattern for the subdivision, therefore the survey was limited to the undisturbed portion that is designated for house lots.

THE SURVEY

The entire area was covered by a pedestrian survey with transects approximately five yards apart when terrain and vegetation permitted. The survey revealed very little evidence of prehistoric occupation in the study area. Three chert flakes were collected from the entire acreage surveyed. It is highly unlikely that this upland area ever experienced any occupation beyond an occasional hunting camp. No significant evidence of prehistoric activity worthy of further investigation was discovered.

During the survey three structural remains were found on four of the lots to be developed. Two of the structural groups are historic in date; these will be discussed below.

PREHISTORIC BACKGROUND

There have been several prehistoric sites reported in the project vicinity. To the west of the area, two sites (41 BX 355 and 41 BX 356) were located on Mud Creek, and to the south 41 BX 317 is located near Wetmore Road and the Missouri Kansas and Texas Railroad (Fox 1977:15). An extensive quarry site, 41 BX 300, is located approximately one mile north-northeast of the Knollcreek subdivision, and approximately three miles to the northeast is an

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occupation site, 41 BX 23, on the John L. Classen Ranch (site files, CAR-UTSA). All of these sites occur in areas where there is, or at one time existed, a close source of surface water. Generally the sites are along river or stream terraces. The Knollcreek development is on an upland location, an area of relatively low potential for prehistoric occupation sites, although quarry sites do frequently exist in upland areas. There are, however, small drainages on the north and south of the survey area that feed west to Elm Creek about a mile away.

HISTORIC BACKGROUND

The first recorded mention of the land destined to be the Knollcreek subdivision was as a small portion of a larger grant of land, Survey No. 323, of 607 acres of land granted to Thomas Jackson of Mexia, Limestone County, ". . . being part of the land to which he is entitled by virtue of Bounty Warrant No. 9480 . . . situated on the waters of the Salado . . ." (Bexar County Survey Book 1851:323). The survey was conducted July 12, 1851, by J. G. McDonald, deputy surveyor. Apparently this survey was transferred to McDonald as payment for other services, for in July 1853, he sold the property to James M. Simmons for \$450 (BCDR Vol. L1:231). In 1855, the property was transferred to Cassigin(?) Seay and James and Martha Seay, again by McDonald, Simmons apparently having defaulted on payment (BCDR Vol. U2:594). The land later passed to James T. Foster of Gonzales County, who sold it to G. H. Buchsenschuetz in June 1869 for the sum of \$200 (*ibid.*). George and Frediedrik Buchsenschuetz transferred title to the land, 13 February 1875, to Phillip and Augusta Benfer for \$106.50 (BCDR Vol 382:55). When, in March 1912, they sold 63.04 acres to Louis Osteryoung of Frio County, for \$1200, they stated, ". . . upon said land have had their home since they purchased same . . . and have said land continuously enclosed by fence, used and cultivated same . . ." (BCDR Vol. 388:223). The land later passed into the hands of Albert Theis, who in July 1923, deeded it to his son-in-law Richard Specht (BCDR Vol. 734:277). As a point of interest, a small knoll just outside the study area to the northwest is named Theis Hill (USGS 1967). The land later passed to Beverly W. Spillman Sr., who conveyed a portion of it to Solomon and Bettie Conen of Wicomico County, Maryland, who sold it to the present developers (BCDR Vol. 2663:1418; Alamo Title Company, personal communication).

DESCRIPTION OF HISTORIC SITES

The survey revealed two locations of historic interest within the project area. The first (41 BX 623) is a complex of structures in Unit 2, Block 1, Lots 18 and 19, designated the Benfer homestead, off Classen Road on what will become Knollvalley Road (Fig. 2). The primary structure consists of a limestone two-room house with a board and batten room appended to the west. The stone vernacular structure is stucco with plaster on the interior and portland cement on the exterior. The easternmost room, which apparently served as a bedroom, measures approximately 17 x 19 feet with five windows and an interior doorway. The western room, with built-in fireplace, measures approximately 17 x 11 feet, with two windows, an exterior doorway opening toward the south, and an interior doorway communicating with the wooden

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structure opening toward the west. The wooden structure, gabled at right angles to the stone house, measures approximately 17 x 13 feet. The construction on both structures incorporates square cut nails, with the exception of the flooring and added electrical connections in the wooden structure, which have modern wire nails. The stone house has been enhanced with poured portland cement floors and steps. The original mortar is sandy lime. To the west of the house beneath a large live oak, there is a gabled limestone structure approximately 10 x 12 feet, with a metal vent in the south gable and small windows on the east and west side. This structure has also been enhanced with poured portland cement floor and steps. Between the two structures is an oven or kilnlike construction 5 feet tall, 5 feet wide, and 7 feet long. The arched opening, approximately 3 x 2 feet, has no apparent provision for a door. The mortar is portland cement, and it appears to be recent in construction. Further to the west, a natural drain of a sink has been lined with portland cement and partially painted with light blue pool paint, to form a small free-form pool.

The second site (41 BX 624), designated the Theis site due to its proximity to Theis Hill, is the ruins of a limestone structure in Unit 1, Block 12, Lot 17. The one room structure is constructed of limestone set with sandy lime mortar, approximately 8 x 8 feet. Only about 4 feet of the structure still stands, having been displaced by the growth of a mesquite limb approximately 12 inches in diameter. There was no evidence of the structure ever having a floor. The only artifact found in association was a pontiled base of a dark green "black glass" molded bottle.

A third complex noted in the Knollcreek subdivision is in Unit 1, Block 3, Lot 13. This area contains of a cement platform, 6 feet 5 inches x 6 feet 5 inches, with a 7-foot high telephone pole set at each corner. Approximately 15 feet to the south is a pipe-cased draw well 15 inches in diameter, and is estimated to be 15 to 20 feet deep. This appears to be the remains of modern construction and has no apparent historical value.

SUMMARY AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The survey revealed no evidence of prehistoric occupation. From the available records examined, the stone vernacular house at Unit 2, Block 1, Lots 18 and 19 (41 BX 623), was constructed by or for Phillip and Augusta Benfer shortly after February 1875. The board and batten appendage was added at some later date, but due to its manner of construction, certainly within the 37 years of their occupation. The small stone structure to the rear is probably contemporary. The "kiln" structure and the "pool" are most likely of more recent vintage. It is evident, from a sturdy tree house constructed in the live oak tree and the plastic childrens' toys found on the surface near the house, that the site has been occupied recently, but the record does not reveal by whom. The house was vacant in 1952 (USGS 1967).

The Theis site at Unit 1, Block 12, Lot 17 (41 BX 624), does not have the appearance of being a house structure, but rather that of an isolated utility or support building. Construction techniques appear to be contemporary with the older structures of the Benfer homestead, but who actually constructed it, and by whom it was used has not been established.

Both historic sites are in areas scheduled to be developed into house lots and are probably scheduled for removal or destruction. Neither are structures unique for the period, nor were they occupied by persons of historic importance. We recommend that they are not significant cultural resources, and would not be eligible for nomination to the National Register of Historic Places. Therefore, no further work is recommended. The Texas Historical Commission has reviewed this report and concurs with this assessment.

REFERENCES CITED

Bexar County, Texas

Bexar County Deed Records (BCDR)

Originals and microfilm in Bexar County Courthouse, San Antonio, Texas.

Bexar County Survey Book

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