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Long-buried parts of acequia unearthed

By Scott Huddleston, Staff Writer

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Excavators Ray Smith (from left), Rud Krisch, Filemon Gallegos and Armando Tierranegra, clear material from a sluice gate at a dig site in Brackenridge Park. Photo: Darren Abate / For The San Antonio Express-News





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Irrigation features buried for almost 300 years, including portions of an early 1700s dam, have been found in the northern area of Brackenridge Park, the city, [San Antonio River Authority](#) and [Witte Museum](#) announced Thursday.

Local and state officials will provide more details Friday of recent excavations that unearthed waterway features linking the park to the Spanish colonial era in San Antonio.

City Archaeologist [Kay Hindes](#) said the discoveries, done under contract with the river authority for trailheads and other features of the [Museum Reach](#) of

the San Antonio River Improvements Project, revealed “one of the most concentrated groupings of acequia features in the past 10 or 15 years.”

She called them “truly significant finds” that reveal a part of the Spanish colonial history of the park.

The acequias, or irrigation waterways, were essential lifelines for early settlers under Spanish rule.

The dam, built around 1719 during the Spanish colonial era, was part of the Acequia Madre, or Alamo Acequia, to serve the Mission San Antonio de Valero.

A team with the [University of Texas at San Antonio's Center for Archaeological Research](#) found a portion of the dam during an investigative dig, Hindes said.

When the dam was built, the mission was located south of today's Alamo, possibly in or near La Villita.

After a damaging hurricane in 1724, the mission moved to the north, to the site now known as Alamo Plaza.

The dam is the oldest unearthed in San Antonio, Hindes said.

An older dam believed to have been built in 1718 in today's San Pedro Springs Park never has been found, she said.

In another nearby excavation, UTSA archaeologists were surprised to find a system of walls, gates and overflow channels associated with a second dam, initially discovered in 1996.

Those structures are believed to be connected to the [Upper Labor Acequia](#), which was built around 1778 and ran west of the mission.

“We had no idea that all of that was there,” Hindes said.

The recent archaeological work supports the belief that German stonemasons of the 1800s used the original Spanish colonial walls to update the waterway system.

Officials of the [Texas Historical Commission](#) and Brackenridge Park Conservancy also will attend the announcement.

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