



**An Archaeological Survey
Of the .5 Acre Tract at 206 Arden Grove, San
Antonio, Texas**

By

Harry J. Shafer

SUBMITTED TO

**PSI
San Antonio, Texas**

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**ABASOLO ARCHAEOLOGICAL CONSULTANTS
San Antonio, Texas**



**Report No. 103
Abasolo Archaeological Consultants
San Antonio, Texas
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Abstract

Abasolo Archaeological Consultants (AAC) conducted Phase I archaeological investigations of the .5 acre tract at 206 Arden Grove in San Antonio, Texas. The Arden Grove tract is located on the banks of the San Antonio River channel at Arden Grove and 9th Streets. The archaeological survey was carried out under subcontract with PSI, Inc. of San Antonio to satisfy the cultural resource requirements of the City of San Antonio Office of Historic Preservation. The purpose of the survey was to record and assess any cultural resources on the property. The investigation included a 100% pedestrian survey and three backhoe trenches. The archaeological findings included a mid-20th century bomb shelter and one prehistoric archeological site discovered buried in the alluvial deposits. The site, named the Arden Grove (41BX1913) consists of a buried lithic scatter of unknown age, but probably Archaic and is not recommended for nominations to the National Register of Historic Places. No further work is recommended.

Introduction

Abasolo Archaeological Consultants (AAC) conducted Phase I archaeological investigations of the .5 acre tract at 206 Arden Grove in San Antonio, Texas (Figs. 1-5). The project was carried out under subcontract with Professional Services Incorporated, Inc. (PSI), of San Antonio to satisfy the cultural resource requirements of the City of San Antonio Office of Historic Preservation. The purpose of the survey was to record and assess any cultural resources on the property. Prehistoric archaeological sites are known to occur all along the banks of the San Antonio River from the headwater springs and downstream throughout Bexar County. The Arden Grove tract is located on the banks of the old river channel prior to re-channelization by the Works Progress Administration and is regarded as a high probability area for prehistoric archaeological sites.

The survey and assessment work was carried out in accordance with the “Archeological Survey Standards for Texas” to insure that no archaeological or historical resources eligible for nomination to the National Register of Historic Places are damaged or destroyed due to the planned construction. This Phase I investigation was designed to detect and record any archaeological or historical component that may be present in the project area.

Project Setting

The project lies at the intersection of Arden Grove and 9th Street in downtown San Antonio (Fig, 1). It is bordered by Arden Grove (formally known as Maverick Grove), 9th street, and the San Antonio River. The river extended across the northeast part of the property prior to re-channelization of the river by the Works Progress Administration in the first part of the 20th century. The remainder of the property is on a west high bank or first terrace of the river, an area that according to the Texas Archeological Site Atlas has previously been surveyed.

It is this terrace formation that has yielded prehistoric cultural material all along the banks of the river from the springs at Brackenridge Park (e.g. 41BX 13, 170, 264, 1392, and 1396) southward to Loop 410 (e.g. 41BX254, 256, and 1628) (Texas

Archeological Site Atlas). We were especially cognizant of the deeply buried cultural material at 41BX1396 located on an outer bend on the east side of the river at Mulberry Street and Brackenridge Golf Course that dated in excess of 10,000 years (Ulrich 2011), and wanted to test deep enough to insure that a similar situation did not occur at Arden Grove.

The Arden Grove tract lies in Quaternary alluvium valley fill overlying Late Cretaceous limestone and shale. The Trinity-Frio soils (Tf) (0-1% slope) are characteristic of floodplain deposits which are often capped with sediments (Taylor et al. 1991: 49, 50).

Archaeological Background

It is appropriate to review the archaeological background and setting before describing the results of the survey. The artesian springs along the eastern front of the Balcones Escarpment offered an attractive setting for prehistoric populations who ventured into the region from the first human inhabitants about 11,500 years ago to historic Indian groups and Spanish explorers and settlers (Hester 2004). The San Antonio River valley with its springs is no exception as past archaeological investigations have uncovered evidence of human occupations that date to the very earliest known cultural groups to inhabit the state to the most recent American Indian inhabitants. The evidence has been identified through the recovery of diagnostic artifact styles correlated with corresponding radiocarbon dates and cross-dates from contemporary sites elsewhere in central Texas and across the Balcones Canyonlands.

Archaeological Sites in the Vicinity

As previously noted prehistoric archaeological sites occur all along the San Antonio River from its origins at the springs on the Incarnate Word campus (Hester 1991) through its course in Bexar County (Osburn et al., 2007: 11-28) to San Antonio Bay. About a kilometer north of the Arden Grove tract at Brackenridge Park numerous archaeological sites have been recorded along the banks and terraces of the river (e.g. 41BX 13, 170, 264, 1392, and 1396). In addition, the Alamo acequia or Acequia Madre

extended east of the river (Cox 2005), and one 19th century mill dam (41BX1817) is located just above the Arden Grove tract along the river (Texas Archeological Site Atlas).

Regional Cultural Sequence

There are nearly 2,000 recorded sites in Bexar County. These reflect a cultural chronology spanning at least 11,500 years of prehistory, as well as a historic era that left many important structures. Archaeologists have divided this broad range of time into four general periods: Paleoindian, Archaic, Late Prehistoric, and Historic (Hester 2004).

The Paleoindian period, 9,200-6,800 B.C., characterized by highly mobile hunters and opportunistic gatherers, has distinctive chipped stone spear points used in hunting mammoth and other late Ice Age mammals early in the period. Other spear types appear with a shift to bison, deer and other game after the Ice Age ended around 8000 B.C. Known site types in Bexar County are *campsites* with diagnostic projectile points, along chipping debris from stone-tool making and repair.

The Archaic period is a time of settling in by the ancient Indian groups who exploited a wide range of plants and animals. The onset of the Archaic period happened at the end of the Pleistocene and extended throughout much of the Holocene until about AD 800. The intensity to which they exploited native plants increased through time as the population also increased putting stress on the easy to capture prey. Sites of the Archaic period are common across Bexar County. These peoples lived in an environment that was becoming warmer and drier through time, and when modern plant and animal communities became established. There were fluctuations from warm to cool and moist to dry but these climate shifts were so broad that people were unaware of the changes which often brought about important shifts in plant and animal resources (Collins 2011)..

The primary hunting weapon was the spear and spear thrower or *atlatl*. Projectile points used to tip spears (often erroneously called “arrowheads”) change in shape through time, from 6,800 B.C. to 800 A.D. Archaeologists use these forms to recognize more specific time frames within the Archaic (e.g., Early, Middle and Late Archaic). In northern Bexar County, the most distinctive Archaic site is the *burned rock midden* (large accumulations of fire-cracked limestone result from the use of earth-oven cooking

starting around 3,000 B.C.(see Black et al.1998; Potter and Black 1995). But in southern Bexar County, *open campsites* are found along creek and river terraces with large amounts of flint debris from tool-making; sometimes, animal bone (dietary refuse) and charcoal that can be used for radiocarbon dating. Other Archaic site types include *lithic procurement areas* (often called “quarries) in northern Bexar County, where flint cobbles eroded out of the Edwards limestone and were processed, and in southern Bexar County, exposures of hilltop Uvalde Gravels), *lithic scatters* (lightly-used areas probably representing short-term hunting and gathering activities), *cemeteries* and rarely, *sinkhole burials* (Archaic peoples often disposed of their dead by placing them in sinkholes and caverns; Bement 1994; Collins 1970).

By 800 A.D., there began to be some changes in the long hunter-gatherer lifeway. The Late Prehistoric is first seen with the introduction of the bow and arrow. Hunting and gathering was still the mode of subsistence as the Indians of south-central Texas never adopted agriculture until the arrival of the Spanish. The stone arrow points are very small (mistakenly called “bird points”), but could be used in hunting game of any size. The arrival of buffalo in the Edwards Plateau about 1300 A.D. brought a major change in the hunting and overall economic patterns. Most sites of this era include *campsites*, often in areas previously used by Archaic peoples, *lithic scatters* of this age; and the *lithic procurement areas* of earlier times continued to be used.

During the Historic period, Native Americans peoples from southern Texas and northeastern Mexico lived in and around the missions on the San Antonio River. Intrusive peoples such as Payaya, Jumano, Comanche and Lipan Apache are well documented historically, but they left few archaeological traces. The best known historic archaeological remains other than the Spanish missions are those associated later Spanish Colonial settlement in around La Villita, the acequias, stone and jacal residences, and German and Anglo ranch, and farm houses of cut stone dating from the 1840s through the 1880s. Such sites, including those without surviving structures, are recognized from 19th century pottery fragments, artifacts of glass and metal, etc. Later Historic houses (often of cut stone or board and batten construction) and farmsteads through the early 1900s, are also found. Associated with many of these old historic homesteads in the canyonlands are stacked rock fences (Shafer and Hester 2007).

Scope of Work

The scope of work called for an archaeological survey to comply with the “Archaeological Standards of Texas” and the City of San Antonio’s Unified Development Code standards. To accomplish this scope, the following tasks were performed.

Task A: Pedestrian Survey: A 100% pedestrian survey was conducted on the property.

Task B: Backhoe testing. It was necessary to excavate a series of backhoe trenches to examine for buried cultural resources due to the historic uses of the property and surface modifications. Fill removed by backhoe was carefully emptied and sight-screened by troweling through the spoil as it was dumped for traces of cultural material.

Task C: Compile a report of the survey describing the project, goals, and results. This report fulfills Task C.

Survey Findings

The archaeological survey was carried out on December 21, 2011 by the author with backhoe assistance provided by Steve Frost. The pedestrian survey covered the entire property and yielded little information with regards to the presence of prehistoric archaeological sites. Only one man-made chipped stone flake was observed on the property. The likely reason for the negligible results is that the property once contained 19th century residences that existed well past the mid 20th century (Figs. 6 and 7) and later commercial buildings and parking lots. This historic use of the property created a new layer of cultural material in the form of concrete and asphalt surfaces. The remnants of one 20th Century structure, a bomb shelter built during the atomic bomb scare of the mid-1950s, remains on the property (Fig. 8).

The lack of surface indication of historic and prehistoric material culture called for subsurface testing beyond that detectable by shovel testing alone. Knowledge of deeply buried cultural resources in this San Antonio River geomorphic feature also called

for deeper probes beyond shovel testing (Ulrich 2011). Therefore, three backhoe trenches were excavated to test for buried archaeological deposits (Figs. 3 and 9). The locations of the trenches within the project area are shown in Figure 3; testing results for each trench are provided below. Traces of prehistoric cultural material were found in each backhoe tests 1 and 2, and a sufficient amount was found in BHT3 to designate the area as an archaeological site. These backhoe tests and descriptions of the cultural material area provided below.

BHT1: This trench was located as the western part of the tract about 5 meters east of Arden Grove near the 9th street intersection at GPS coordinates 14R 550072E/3256333N (Fig. 3). It was 4 meters long and reached a depth of 1.2 meters. The upper 40-50 cm was disturbed and consisted of construction fill composed of concrete blocks, bits of asphalt and gravel (Fig. 10). Beneath this was a layer of very dark grayish brown clay (10YR3/3) from 50-65 cm; below this level the clay loam became lighter (10YR5/3). One flake and several *Rabdotus* shells were noted at about 65 cm with a few *Rabdotus* shells occurring below that level. No other traces of cultural material were noted.

BHT2: BHT2 was located near the river in the southeast part of the property (Fig. 3) at GPS coordinates 550094E/3256333N. It was about 4 meters long and reached a depth of 1.1 meters. The upper 40 cm was introduced fill that contained some burned material, bits of coal, fragments of a cast iron wood stove, and ash (Fig. 11). The burned material and ash marked the bottom of the contact between disturbed and undisturbed fill. Below 40 cm to the bottom of the trench the soils consisted of a moist very dark brown clay loam (10YR3/2). One flake was noted in the upper (40-60) cm part but no other cultural material was observed.

BHT3: This test was placed near the northern end of the property on the terrace bank at the east end of a paved driveway overlooking the old filled in river channel at GPS coordinates 550083E/3256364N (Fig. 3). The top layer consisted of a pea gravel mix that was about 15 cm thick on the west end of the trench but tapered to the surface near the east end (Fig. 10). Beneath this was an undisturbed layer of dark brown moist clay loam

(10YR3/3) that was sterile in the upper part but yielded a few *Rabdotus* shells near the bottom or at about 40 cm. The moisture had not penetrated below that point (see Fig. 12). A concentration of chipped stone flakes was noted about 50 cm along with a few small fire-cracked rock and more *Rabdotus* shells. From 50cm to 1.4 meters the calcareous soil became lighter (10YR4/3). At about 1 meter depth a burned flake and more *Rabdotus* shells were observed. No other traces of cultural material was seen below this level.

Arden Grove Archaeological Site (41BX1913)

A moderately dense concentration of flakes (Fig. 13) and a couple of small fire-cracked rocks along with more *Rabdotus* shells were observed at about 40-50 cm below the surface in BHT3 at GPS coordinates 550083E/3256364N. Based on this observation the concentration certainly merits a formal archaeological site designation, hereon referred to as the *Arden Grove Site*. The cultural zone is intact and has stratigraphic integrity. The horizontal extent of the site is unknown, but based on the near negative findings in BTH1 and BHT2, it does not extend across the tract. Figure 14 shows the projected extent of the site on the Arden Grove tract, and in all likelihood it extends northward along the outer bank of the old river channel. No diagnostic artifacts other than biface thinning flakes were observed, however, so no date estimate for the occupation is possible with any degree of confidence. Considering the depth within the terrace, however, this writer would guess the cultural resources date to the Late Archaic, or about 2,000 BC to AD 0. The cultural deposit consists of a thin lithic scatter and no features were encountered. The site is not recommended for nomination to the National Register of Historic Places for reasons explained below.

Summary and Recommendations

Backhoe testing at the Arden Grove tract lead to the discovery of a buried prehistoric archaeological site. The Arden Grove archaeological site (41BX1913) consists of an intact prehistoric lithic scatter of unknown age but probably dates no earlier than about 4,000 to 2,000 BP. This very provisional age estimate is based on the kinds of

chipped stone flakes observed in the profile of BHT3. Biface thinning flakes can occur at any interval in the long prehistoric cultural sequence in south-central Texas, but they are particularly prominent in the Late Archaic period when thin, broad-bladed projectile points were being made.

The full extent of the site is unknown but most likely extends some distance northward along the old west bank of the San Antonio River. Our testing showed that it does not extend southward to the locations of BHT1 and BHT2 or the property limits in that direction. Figure 14 shows our best guess as to the approximate limits of the site on the Arden Grove tract. While a trace of cultural material was noted across the property, the density clearly increased northward. Either this was the extent of the buried component or, more likely, the trench encountered the edge of a more concentrated cultural deposit that extends northward on the terrace along the bend of the old river channel. The buried cultural deposit encountered in BHT3 is intact and has stratigraphic integrity although detailed geoarchaeological investigation might show this to be an old stable surface. Nevertheless, we do not recommend further work at the site for the following reasons:

First, a rather extensive block excavation will be necessary to retrieve a sufficient artifact sample for analysis and interpretation; we feel the results would be minimal. The artifact sample might include time sensitive diagnostic artifacts such as projectile point styles and other tools.

Second, the calcareous soils are not conducive to the preservation of bone or charcoal and it is doubtful if either class of organic material suitable for dating will be recovered. Only a lithic sample would be recovered adding little new information about the site or region.

Thirdly, the notable absence of organic material and other subsistence-related items except for snail shells precluded the opportunity to gain information on subsistence. *Rabdotus* snails were a source of food and represent the only trace of subsistence observed.

Fourthly, no features were encountered that would provide information on cultural activities carried out at the site. This is not to say that no features are present at

the site because our view of the deposits was minimal. The discovery of features, however, would give cause for further investigations.

In sum, further investigations would add little information beyond what is already known about the well-studied and dated south-central Texas cultural chronology. Block excavation would unlikely provide information beyond dating the lithic scatter with time-diagnostic artifacts. What is needed to further our information about the prehistoric cultural systems in south-central Texas are extensive horizontal exposures of isolated living surfaces with cultural features and a full complement of material culture, including bone preservation, to gain better information on site structure and function. While a buried intact component is present, The Arden Grove Site does not offer that opportunity based on our assessment.

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Figures

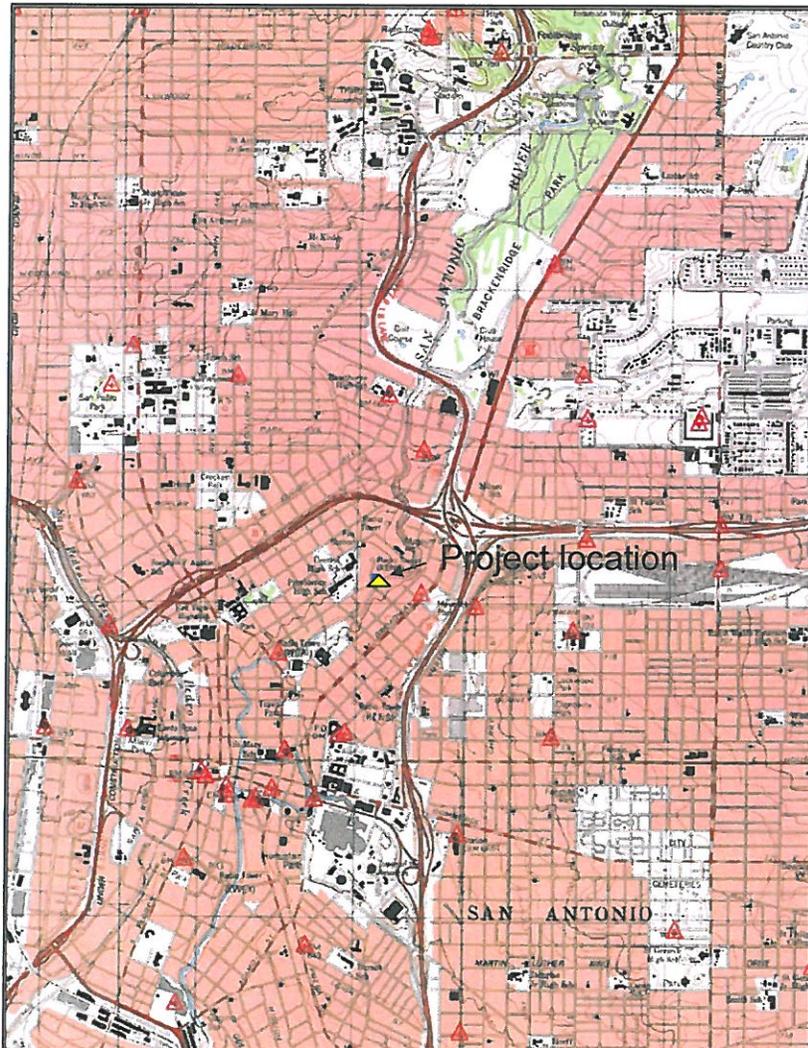


Figure 1. Location of the project within downtown San Antonio, Texas. Map provided by Steve Frost.



Figure 2. Views of the project area. Top, looking south with the San Antonio River on the left and 9th Street in the background. Bottom, looking north with Arden Grove on the left.



Figure 3. Google Earth perspective of the Arden Grove tract showing the approximate locations of the three backhoe trenches and the bomb shelter.

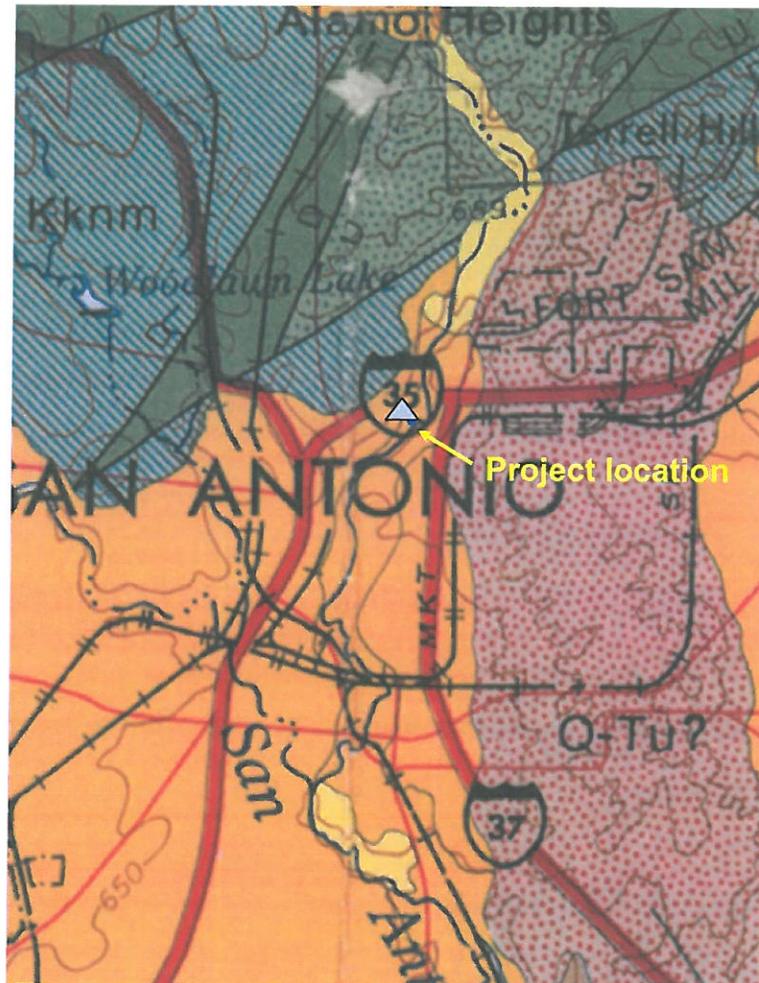


Figure 4. Geological map showing the location of the project in valley fill consisting of Quaternary alluvium. Map provided by Steve Frost.

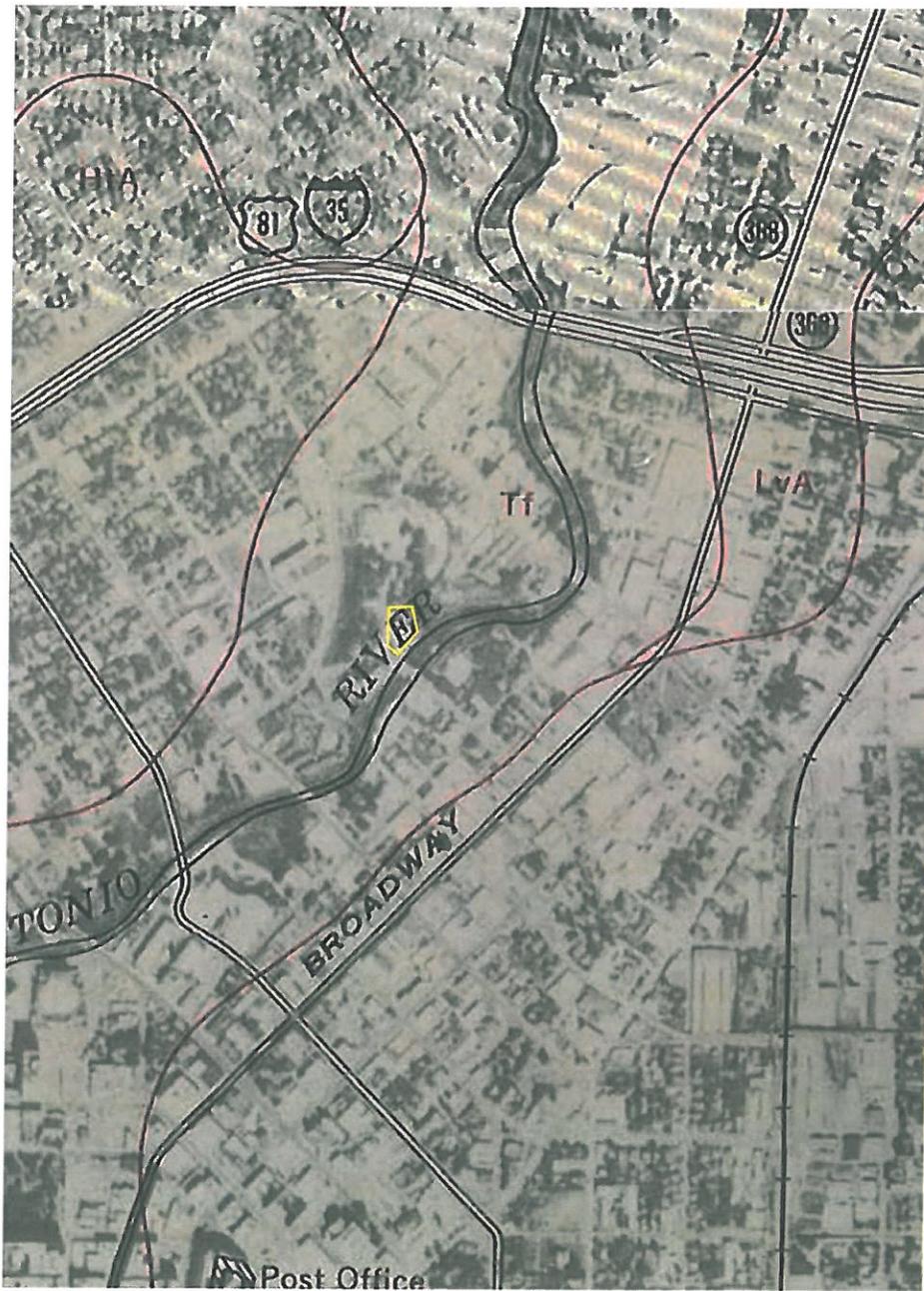
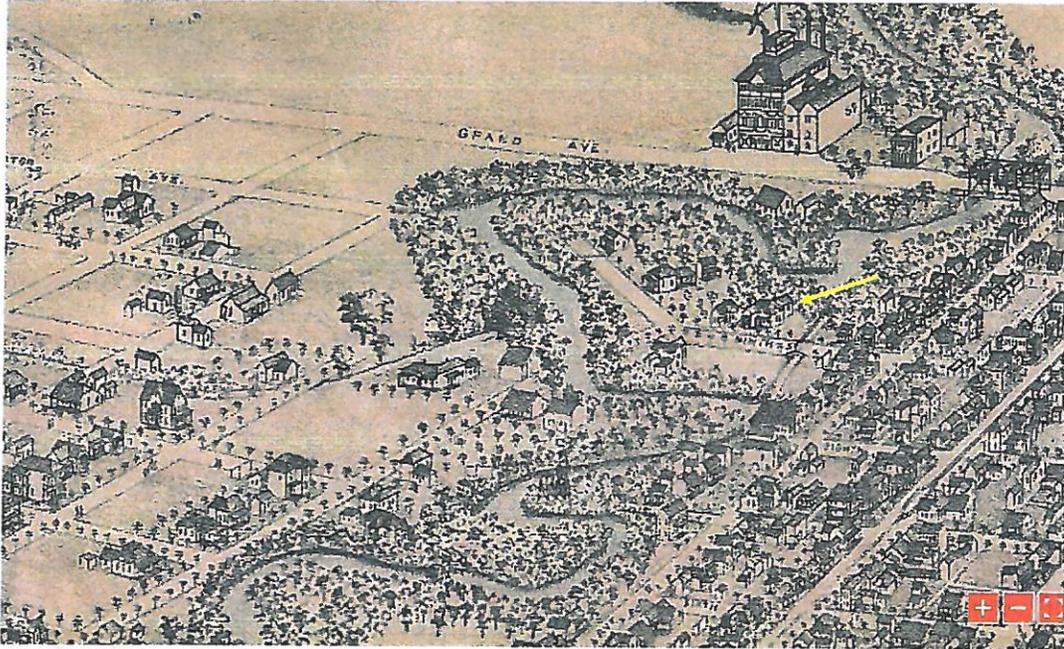
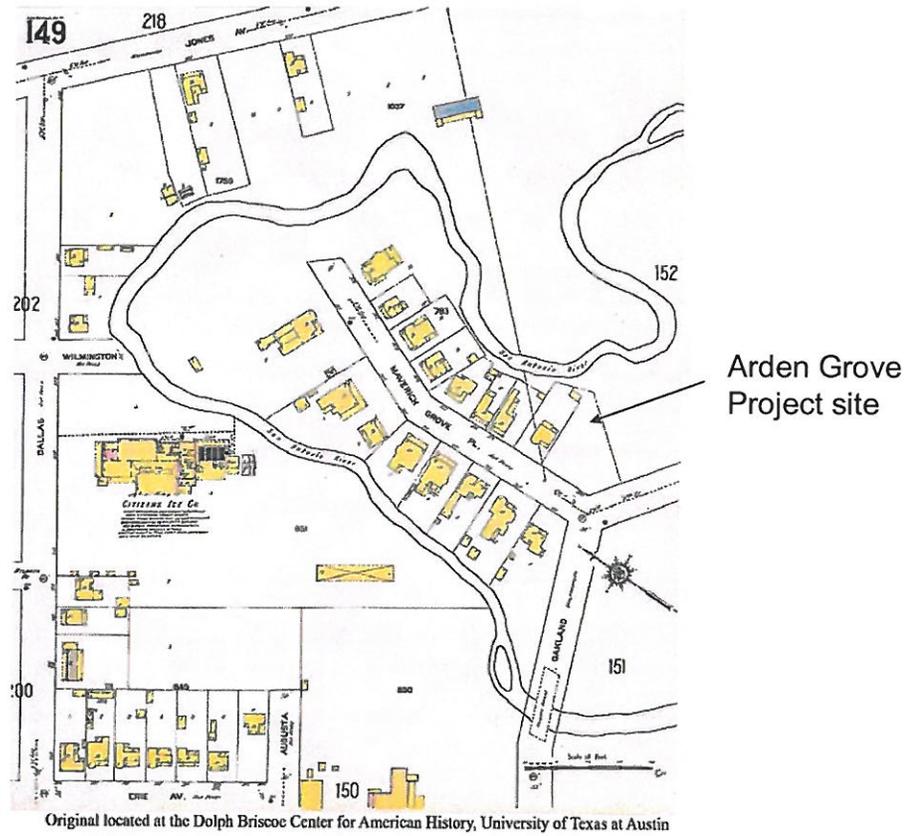


Figure 5. The project area lies within the Trinity-Frio (Tf) soils association. Map provided by Steve Frost.



San Antonio in 1886

Figure 6. Augustus Koch's bird's eye view of San Antonio in 1886 shows a house located about where the Arden Grove tract is located on 9th Street.



Original located at the Dolph Briscoe Center for American History, University of Texas at Austin
 1911 Sanborn map showing lots with houses along Maverick Grove, now Arden Grove before River was rechanneled.

Figure 7. 1911 Sanborn map showing the original course of the San Antonio River and houses along Maverick Grove which was renamed Arden Grove after the river was re-channeled by the WPA. The Arden Grove project site is shown with a house and outbuilding.



Figure 8. Remnants of the bomb shelter located near the San Antonio River bank in the east part of the project area.



Figure 9. Steve Frost excavating BHT1.

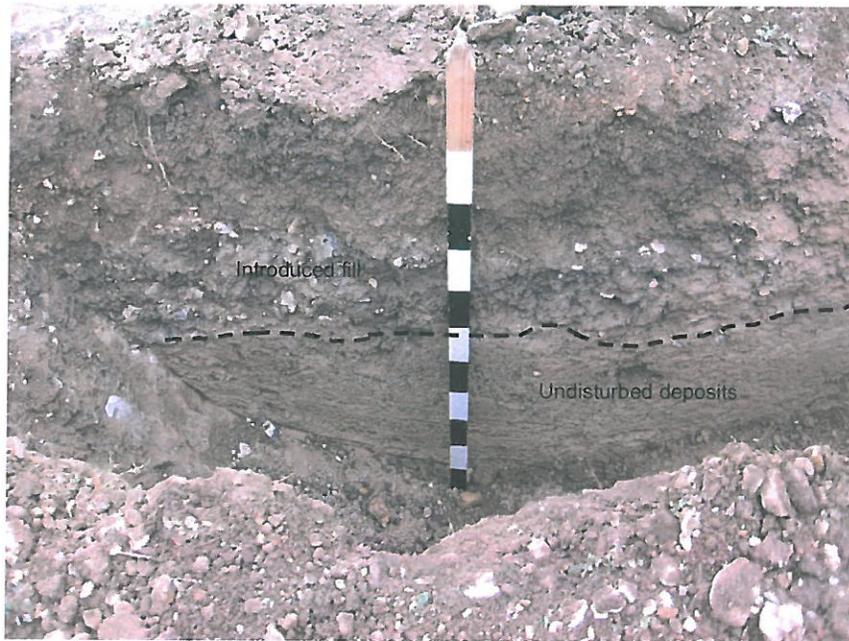


Figure 10. Profile view of BHT1 showing the introduced fill overlying the undisturbed deposits.



Figure 11. Profile view of BHT2 showing the disturbed fill overlying undisturbed deposits.

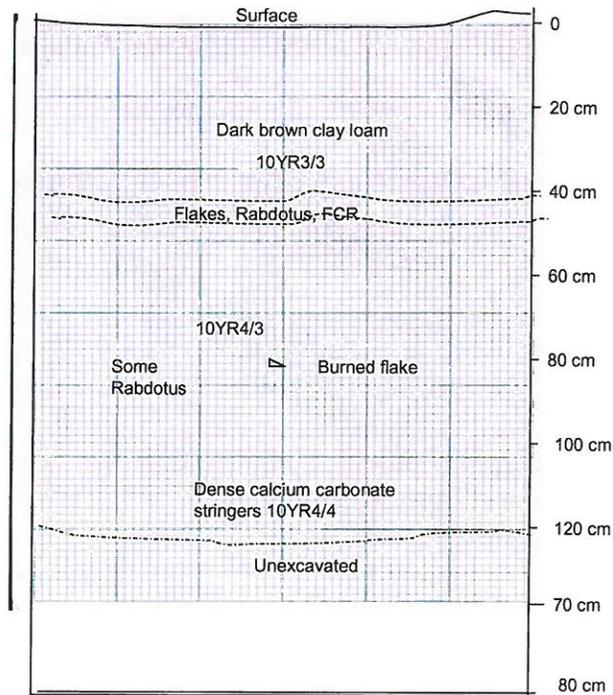


Figure 12. Top: BHT3 profile view showing the approximate depth of the buried cultural deposit at 41BX1913. Bottom: Schematic profile. The cultural layer occurs along the moisture line and is about 10-15 cm thick.



Figure 13. Chipped stone flakes from BHT3; this type of flakes was removed during the process of manufacturing biface tools such as projectile points probably during the Late Archaic period about 4,000 to 2,000 years ago.



**IMAGE
REDACTED**



Figure 14. Projected boundary of the Arden Grove archaeological site (41BX1913).