

Restoration and Previous Archaeology
At the Spanish Governor's Palace, San Antonio, Bexar
County, Texas.

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Prepared by
Center for Archaeological Research-
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Project Location

The Spanish Governor's Palace is located on the edge of Military Plaza in downtown San Antonio, Bexar County, Texas. Robey Architecture Inc., has contracted the Center for Archaeological Research (CAR) of the University of Texas at San Antonio (UTSA) to complete a review of the previous archaeological work carried out within the premises of the site. The information will aid in determining the extent of disturbance within the Spanish Governor's Palace complex prior to beginning the planned installation of electrical lines throughout the compound. The review document will in turn be used by the Texas Historical Commission to determine whether archaeological investigations may be necessary in association with this planned project and what form these archaeological services may take. A draft of this report was provided to Robey Architecture Inc., and, in turn, forwarded to the San Antonio Historic Preservation Division for review. Miss K. Hindes conducted the review and the CAR addressed the review comments in this draft.

Robey Architecture, Inc., plans to install electrical lines within the rooms of the Spanish Governor's Palace, as well as in the rear courtyard as shown in Figure 1. Impacts derived from the installation of the electrical wiring will consist of trenching and the excavation of holes for in-ground lights, floor outlets and pull-boxes. According to the engineering schematics, the trenches allowing the installation of the wiring will be 6-inches deep and 6-inches wide. The installation of the in-ground lighting will necessitate excavation to a depth of 1-foot 8-inches to accommodate the necessary hardware and wiring. A total of 13 in-ground light units are to be installed. Floor outlets and pull-boxes will be installed to a depth of 7.25-inches below the floor and will necessitate holes measuring approximately 4.25 inches in diameter. The conduits connecting these pieces of hardware will be installed immediately below the existing pavers.

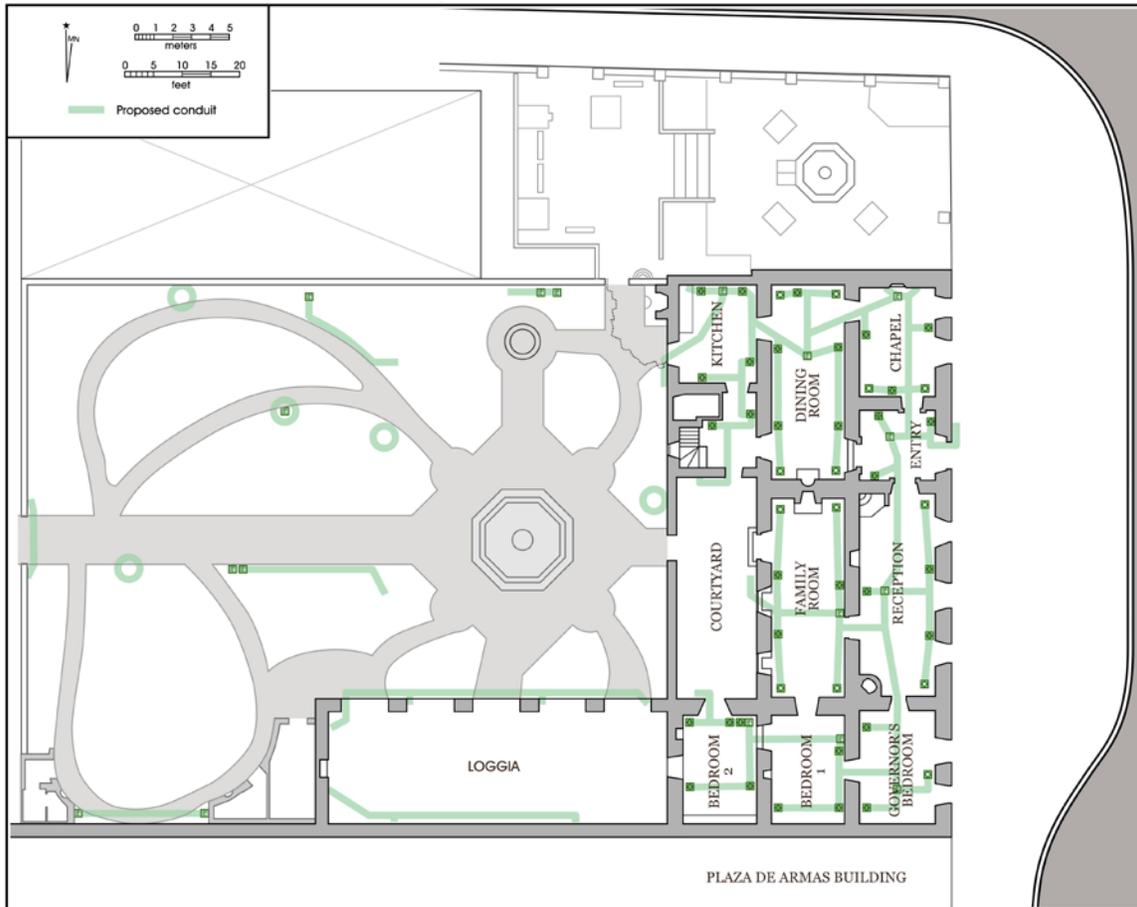


Figure 1. Plan map of the Governor's Palace and residence showing proposed conduit routes.

Background

Much of the history of the Spanish Governor's Palace is clouded by the romanticized notions of the Spanish involvement and occupation of San Antonio during the 18th and 19th centuries. The building is often portrayed as the residence of the Spanish Governor during the early years of San Antonio. However, it is more likely that the structure only housed an office for the Governor, while it was the residence of another family.

The structure is believed to have been constructed circa 1749 based on the date carved in the keystone found above the main entrance. However, it is uncertain as to whether the date represents the start or completion of the original construction, or the date of subsequent renovations. In 1762, Governor Navarete recounted that he had an office within the captain's house. He went on to describe that the residence was constructed of "stone or rubble and mortar, and a very strong edifice" (cited in Ramsdell 1959: 122). The structure appears on the 1764 Menchaca map of San Antonio. On this map, the structure was depicted as a long rectangular

building, with a main entrance located across the plaza from San Fernando Cathedral. In front of the structure was a fence likely used to pen in livestock. A map drawn by José de Urrutia in 1767 indicates that the structure was referred to as the “*Casa del Capitan*” and very well may have been his residence. The structure was passed on to Luis Antonio Menchaca in 1778, and then later to his son, José Menchaca. José Menchaca conveyed the property to Juan Ygnacio Pérez in 1801.

When Juan Ygnacio Pérez obtained the property, the structure was recorded as having a living room, a kitchen, a bedroom, another room, and two hallways. The structure was entirely built of stone. A portion of the structure was owned by another individual until 1819 when it was obtained by Ygnacio Pérez. Pérez acted as interim governor between July 27, 1816 to March 20, 1817 (Hafertepe 2003). The property and structure remained in the hands of the Pérez descendants until it was purchased by the city of San Antonio in 1928. During the mid-to late-1800s, space within the building had been rented out as commercial property. The structure underwent various renovations to accommodate the businesses. Included in these renovations were a new tin roof, new windows, a wooden partition in the main room, a new wooden plank floor in the corridor, and replastering of the inside and outside of the building (Bexar County Deed Records [BCDR] XI:28). Additional renovations consisted of a new stone wall in the rear room as well as a new fireplace. It is unclear as to whether the new stone wall was constructed on a foundation and therefore its construction would have resulted in any subsurface impacts.

At the time the city obtained the property, the structure was in disrepair. After several years, Adina DeZavala and the Conservation Society had convinced the city to purchase the property to preserve the Spanish Colonial history of San Antonio. DeZavala wrote several articles discussing how the structure was once the residence of the Spanish Governor and should be preserved. It was during this time that the structure began to be referred to as the Spanish Governor’s Palace. Archival research indicates that the structure was not the Governor’s residence, rather housed the governor’s office for him to conduct business while in town (Hafertepe 2003).

Renovation of the Spanish Governor’s Palace

Immediately after its purchase by the city in 1928, various plans were drawn up on how to restore the structure to its grandeur. Several different ideas were developed as to what the structure had originally looked like, and how the structure should appear when reconstructed. Prior to the city purchasing the property, Adina DeZavala had prepared a drawing that depicted a two-story structure with the style reminiscent of Mission San José. Ultimately, DeZavala’s design was

grander than the original (Hafertepe 2003).

The city requested that full documentation of the property be done prior to restoration activities. San Antonio contracted Harvey P. Smith, an up-and-coming architect who studied many Spanish colonial structures throughout Mexico, California, and Texas, to draw up plans for the reconstruction of the Palace. Based on archival research and the Gentilz painting that was believed to depict a dance held at the Palace, Smith concluded that a total of six rooms composed the structure. Smith was the first to identify the date on the keystone. This one piece of information is the only solid evidence we have concerning the age of the structure. Smith also proposed to excavate around the buildings to expose and outline the wall foundations. The mayor of San Antonio supported this idea and provided laborers. Unfortunately, we do not know exactly which walls Smith trenched along nor how deep and wide the trenches may have been.



Figure 2. *Back yard and wall of the Spanish Governor's Palace, prior to restoration. Looking from the west.* From the *San Antonio Light* (22 December 1929) collection, the Institute of Texan Cultures.

Prior to any excavations at the Palace, all material deemed modern was removed from the

grounds. This included remnants of the tin roof, rafters, the brick additions in the rear, and the wood flooring. A photograph of the courtyard taken during the reconstruction efforts reveals the amount of material present prior to the construction, and the location of some trenches along the courtyard walls (Figure 2). The entire back wall of the feed store that had been located within the structure was removed. Several structures located in the rear of the complex were also demolished because they were seen as modern. Smith reported in his newspaper article that only the front wall and small portions of two adjacent walls (which we assume are the north and south wall of the complex) were original, although his floor plan for the restoration efforts shows more walls may have been intact, according to Hafertepe (2003). The drawings indicate that the interior entrance walls of the main hall were original. The walls in the room to the right of the main entrance (likely the Chapel), and the outer walls of the room directly behind (we surmise is the Dining Room) were also intact according to Smith's plans (Hafertepe 2003).

To determine where the other walls were located, in an article for the *San Antonio Express*, Smith indicated that they started excavations from

...a few old walls in the rear that in a dilapidated condition, and digging down to the original footings of these, we started trenches out in various directions where we found that stone footings extended from the original walls, and in this way we located, and thereby had positive proof of, the rooms we added in the rear (Smith 1931, Architect Who Restores Palace Appeals to San Antonio to Keep Individuality All Its Own, 1 March:4A)

During the course of excavations in the rear of the complex, workers uncovered a foundation approximately three feet below the surface. According to Smith, the foundation extended approximately forty feet from the main portion of the building. We assume that this refers to a westerly direction or behind the building but we cannot be certain. It is unclear to us what Smith was referring to as the main portion of the building. It is unknown what the foundation represents. Smith speculated that it was the family's living quarters, but offered no reasoning.

Approximately one foot beneath the surface, Smith encountered an adobe layer that may have been the original floor. He does not exactly indicate where within the compound he encountered the adobe flooring, or if he encountered it on more than one occasion. Smith apparently was not satisfied with locating the adobe floor and continued to excavate to see if flagging stones or tile were used as flooring (Hafertepe 2003). Adobe floors were common in San Antonio during the

18th century, even in the higher class homes.

Archaeological Investigations at the Spanish Governor's Palace

Two archaeological investigations were conducted at the Spanish Governor's Palace (Figure 3). The first investigation was conducted in 1976 by The University of Texas at San Antonio-Center for Archaeological Research (UTSA-CAR) (Fox 1977). CAR archaeologists excavated test units just north of the north wall of the Palace (Figure 2, in red). When CAR initiated the project, the property was covered with broken bricks, concrete rubble and other construction debris. Four test pits (labeled Test 1 through Test 4) and three systematically excavated areas (Areas A, B, and C) were opened over the course of the project (Fox 1977). The location of Test 1 was not shown on original project maps. However, Test 1 is described as a shovel test located near the northeast corner of the site excavated to examine the extent of disturbance caused by the removal of a slab. The excavation indicated that in that area the soil was disturbed to a depth of 30 cm below surface.

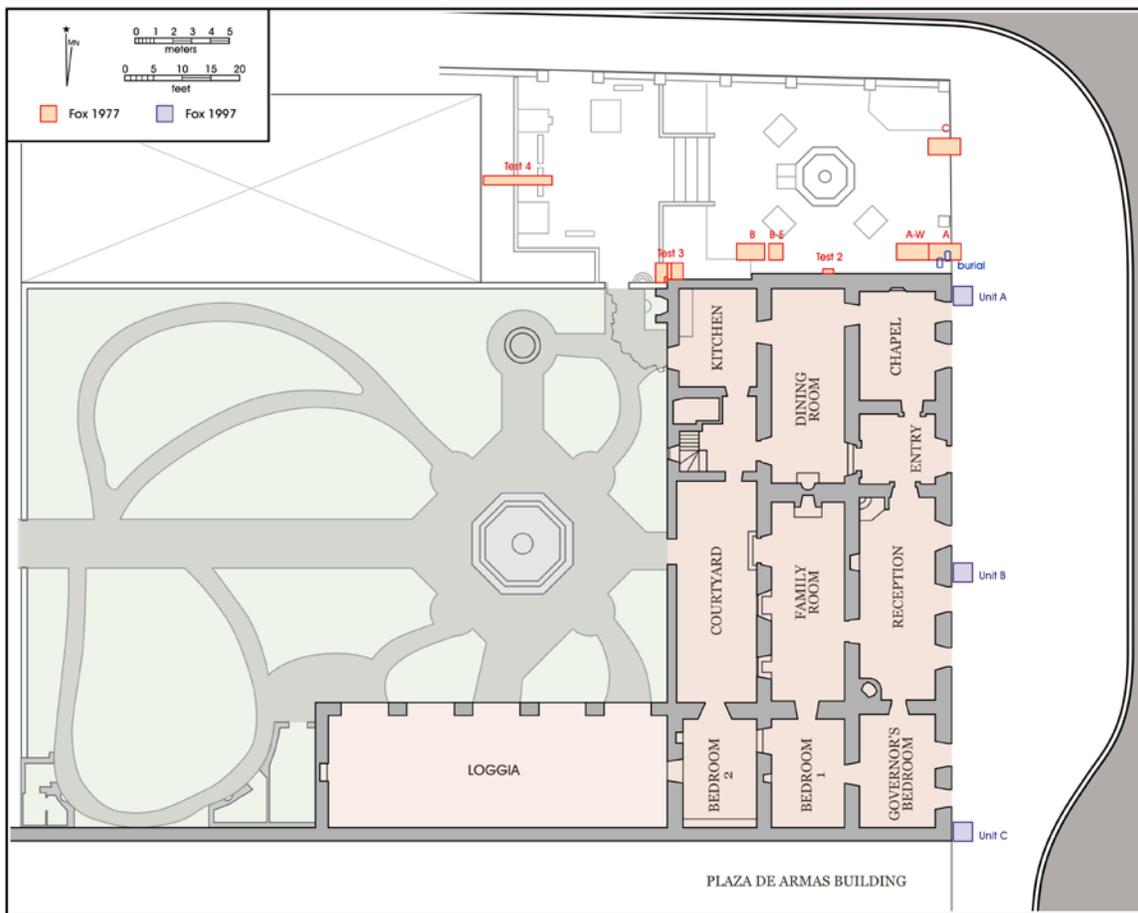


Figure 3. Plan map of previous archaeology at the Governor's Palace and residence.

Test 2 was located along the center of the north wall. The unit was excavated to examine the construction of the slab. Test 3 was excavated at the exterior of northwest corner of the Palace. The test unit was excavated to determine if the wall dated to the 18th century and extended further north. A wall was located, but appeared to be much narrower in comparison to Spanish Colonial walls. In addition, artifacts encountered dated to the 19th and early 20th century. Some colonial material was found in mixed context and probably represents an admixture of materials during reconstruction. Test 4 was located north of the north wall of the Palace, and has no bearing on the current project.

Excavations in Area A revealed that at least two caliche floors were located along the north wall of the structure. The first caliche floor encountered at 47 cm (18.5 inches) below datum (soil surface was approximately 25 cm/10 inches below datum) appeared to date to the early 19th century and lacked 18th century artifacts. Artifacts encountered included building materials, glass fragments, nails, and scrap metal. Just below the first floor was a level of heavily burned material. The second caliche floor encountered at 58 cm (23 inches) below datum appears to date to the mid-18th century. The artifacts recovered above this floor were consistent with those recovered from other sites occupied in San Antonio during 18th century. In addition, ceramics recovered from below the second floor are consistent with an early-18th century date. Puebla Polychrome, which ceased being manufactured in 1725, was recovered in the levels beneath second floor. The presence of this type of ceramic also indicates that people resided in the area prior to 1749. The artifacts may be related to the construction of the adobe presidio in 1721.

In addition to the floors, CAR archaeologist uncovered a human burial located near the eastern corner of the front wall. The burial was located approximately 74 cm below the surface, and cut through the first floor. The burial was that of a small infant and appears to date to the mid-19th century. It is unlikely that the burial was interred while the structures were in use. Instead, it was speculated that the burial occurred after the structure had been razed, and the lot left vacant.

Area B excavations were located along what was believed to be the back wall of the presidio, and in line with the back wall of the second room of the Governor's Palace. Two units were excavated. The first 20 cm of excavations in the larger of the units produced a mixture of 18th and 19th century artifacts. Below this level, to a depth of approximately 50 cmbs, were artifacts that dated from 1860 to 1880s. The excavation unit also encountered a basement that was filled in sometime between the 1860s and 1880s. Adjacent to the larger unit in Area B, a 1-x-1 meter unit was opened to examine a stone wall that was encountered at 38 cm below the surface.

Artifacts recovered on top of the wall appeared to date to the 19th century. Just below this level (greater than 38 cm below surface), an intact Spanish Colonial deposit was encountered extending to a depth of 160 cm below the surface. Puebla Polychrome and San Agustin fragments were collected during the excavations. Puebla Polychrome ceased production ca. 1725, and San Agustin dates to as early as 1730. The presence of these wares supports the possibility of early 18th century occupation.

Area C was excavated in the northeast portion of the project area, though not adjacent to the Palace walls. Area C is located approximately 52 meters north of the north wall of the Palace. The results of the excavations revealed 19th century artifacts and no trace of colonial floors.

In summary, excavations conducted during the 1976 project found that portions of the area north of the Spanish Governor's Palace appear to have been disturbed. Disturbances range from residential use to impromptu burial ground.

The second archaeological investigation that occurred at the Spanish Governor's Palace was conducted by UTSA-CAR in 1996 (Fox 1997) (Figure 3, in blue). The purpose of the excavations was to gather more information on the foundation of the front wall of the structure prior to the city fixing the roof and exterior walls of the Palace. Three units were excavated during this project. Each of the units was centered on a drain spout coming from the roof to a pipe beneath the sidewalk. The current sidewalk was placed on top of a layer of gravel and the pavers that were installed during restoration. The layers of sidewalk and gravel base were removed prior to excavating the units.

Unit A, a 3-x-3 foot unit, was excavated adjacent to the north corner of the front of the building. The first six inches (7-13 inches below the sidewalk) revealed a mixture of plaster, mortar, window glass and wire nails. Level 2 (13-19 inches) produced a mix of English and Mexican ceramics, animal bone, and glass fragments. The top of the foundation of the wall was located in this level. Level 3 (19-25 inches) produced artifacts that were a mix of late-18th century and early-19th century artifacts. The last level excavated, Level 4 (25-42 inches), revealed the footer of the foundation.

Unit B, a 3-x-3 foot unit, was located near the center of the façade of the Palace. This unit was also excavated in 6-inch levels. Level 1 (7-13 inches below the sidewalk) produced fragments of metal scrap, animal bone and wire nails. Level 2 (13-19 inches) revealed the top of the foundation and artifacts that dated to the colonial period and early-19th century. Level 3 (19-25

inches) produced artifacts that were dated to the second half of the 18th century. Level 4 (25-31 inches) produced additional colonial artifacts, though only half of the unit was excavated from this point on. Level 5 (31-37 inches) also produced colonial material, though the density decreased. The base of the foundation was encountered in Level 6 (37-44 inches).

Unit C was a 40-x-36 foot unit excavated at the south end of the front of the Palace. The unit was excavated in 6-inch levels. Level 1 (7-13 inches) encountered a mixture of construction material and animal bone. Artifacts collected included glass fragments, nails, plaster, and metal scrap. Level 2 (13-20 inches) produced both colonial and native ceramics as well as glass fragments, metal scrap, nails, animal bone, and window glass. Level 3 (19-25 inches) encountered the top of the original foundation at 22 inches below the sidewalk. Unlike the other two units, the foundation found here was in line with the restored wall. Artifacts recovered from this level included colonial ceramics, animal bone and chert flakes. Level 4 (25-31 inches) continued to expose the foundation. Artifacts recovered from this level included colonial ceramics, chert flakes, a large amount of animal bone, and one rein chain link. Archaeologists determined this to be an intact Spanish Colonial deposit. The next two levels, Levels 5 and 6 (31-40 inches), continued to follow the foundation, uncovering Colonial artifacts with no evidence of disturbance. The base of the foundation was located at 40 inches below sidewalk.

In summary, the 1996 archaeological investigation found that signs (e.g., materials remains) of the previous use the property may exist buried below the Spanish Governor's Palace. The quantity and types of Spanish Colonial artifacts recovered from the excavations supported the idea that the Spanish Governor's Palace does not represent the first use of the property.

The archaeological investigations also produced information concerning the original construction of the Spanish Governor's Palace. The foundation was found to have been constructed by digging a trench approximately two feet deep for the footprint of the building. Stones were placed in the trench and then filled in with sand and lime mortar. A portion of the wall built on top of the foundation appears to be slightly off line. In addition, the base of the foundation of the front façade appears to be deeper than the foundation along the back wall encountered in Test 3 during the 1976 excavation. This suggests that they were constructed at separate times.

Summary and Conclusions

Three projects have been conducted at the Spanish Governor's Palace between the 1930s and present. The first project, the reconstruction of the Palace by H.P. Smith, lacks information that

is useful in precisely identifying the extent and location of the areas of disturbance. The architect spoke of his excavations as “archaeological” investigations of the site, though he did not record locations of trenches, nor the types and quantities of artifacts encountered while digging. The best information available is that Smith dug trenches in various directions from known standing walls and excavated approximately 4 feet below the surface. How much within the interior of the structure he disturbed is unknown. In addition, if Smith was excavating trenches to locate the foundation of certain walls within the compound, portions of the area in the center of the rooms could have been untouched. The interior of the rooms may still contain intact deposits, especially in the front rooms that had retained some of the original walls. Wood flooring had been removed when Smith initiated the restoration process. It is unknown exactly how much was removed of the matrix below the flooring to accommodate the new tile and flagstone floors. Smith also reported that he encountered “adobe” flooring in one area approximately one foot below the surface. The area just outside of the kitchen (Figure 3) likely underwent a great amount of disturbance when Smith was searching for remnants of the fireplace. Doorways likely were disturbed subsurface, either in the creation of new doorways or to renovated the original doorways.

Excavations conducted in 1976 revealed that the area adjacent to the north wall exhibited pockets of undisturbed matrix. The first few levels produced artifacts that dated to the 18th and 19th centuries. The mixed context could be a result of the restoration efforts or the several renovations that occurred during the mid- to late-19th century. Below the areas of mixed context, appears to be relatively intact matrix containing colonial artifacts. Intact colonial deposits were encountered at 58 cm below datum (23 inches below datum). The datum was approximately 25 cm (10 inches) above the ground level. This means that intact colonial deposits could be encountered at approximately 13 inches below the surface. Above this depth, the artifacts encountered were a mix of 18th and 19th century material. Due to the long use of the structure, this is not abnormal.

The human burial uncovered in Area A poses a unique problem. The burial appears to have occurred during the mid-to late-19th century. It does not represent the location of a cemetery but rather the impromptu use of the locality as a burial site. Such undesignated uses of this location could not have been predicted and it is not know if the documented instance has repeated in other places across the property.

An important aspect of the 1976 excavations is that they all occurred outside of the Spanish Governor’s Palace compound. No excavation occurred within the rooms of the Palace.

Therefore, all information gathered is related to what the deposits are like on the exterior of the building.

Excavations conducted in 1996 also found that the first 13 inches exhibited a mixture of 18th and 19th century artifacts. Below this level, the artifacts tend to reflect the different periods of occupation, with the lowest levels revealing intact Spanish Colonial deposits (19 inches below the sidewalk and below). In addition to noting intact deposits, CAR archaeologists were able to determine the construction method of the original building. Construction of the foundation was accomplished by excavating a trench approximately 24 inches deep outlining the entire building. From here, stones and mortar were placed in the trench to form the foundations. Walls were constructed on top of the foundation, and in one portion are slightly off center on the foundation. Construction technique appears to be reminiscent of colonial methods exhibited at mission sites. The foundation of the façade of the Spanish Governor's Palace appears to be deeper than the foundations encountered during the 1976 excavations along the north wall, indicating that the foundations were possibly constructed at different times.

Conclusions

The review of the materials available to the CAR staff indicates that no detailed records could be located documenting the specific impacts of the work conducted by H.P. Smith at the Spanish Governor's Palace. Indications are that his workers trenched along the existing walls to expose buried foundations upon which the modern walls were erected. This strategy suggests that areas immediately adjacent to/along standing walls have been impacted by previous trenching. However, what the degree of trenching may have been when the workers could not relocate a foundation cannot be determined. If they stayed close to the walls, impacts in the centers of rooms and floors may be relatively limited. If they trenched randomly, impacts to deposits within the complex of rooms may be rather extensive. Also, it is unclear how much of the pre-reconstruction deposits may have been removed. While it appears that the laying down of pavers necessitated the installation of fill, it is unclear whether the introduction of fill was preceded by grading and removal of existing rubble and historic deposits.

Two previous archaeological excavations were carried out in proximity or adjoining the Spanish Governor's Palace. The results of these investigations conducted in 1976 and 1997 do not contribute a great deal of information to the present project because none of the units were positioned inside the rooms or within the courtyard where utilities installations are planned.

The archaeological investigations demonstrate that there are archaeological deposits below the Spanish Governor's Palace that date to the period preceding the construction of the Place. In addition, the excavation results also show that the property has been use after it was no longer a functioning administrative office and prior to its reconstruction. The nature of this incidental use may have been varied and impossible to predict as shown by the recovery of a human burial.

The stratigraphy of the deposits exposed by the archaeology indicates that the upper portion of the deposits (the upper 18.5 inches in places) contained disturbed materials. Near the northeast corner of the complex (Area A on Figure 3), the first intact floor was noted at a depth of 18.5 inches and the second was found at 23 inches below datum or roughly 8.5 inches and 13 inches below surface, respectively. Whether this stratigraphic sequence applies to what is found inside the reconstructed rooms and the courtyard is not known. Remnants of the floors or other deposits may be found closer to the surface or buried even deeper than 8.5 inches depending on whether deposits were graded prior to reconstruction or fill was added as part of the site preparation. Cultural materials found immediately below the pavers may be entirely disturbed or they may represent materials sealed between the flooring episodes. Unfortunately, the documents available to the CAR staff did not have detailed information related to the levels of impact resulting from the reconstruction activities.

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