

**LETTER REPORT ON ARCHIVAL AND ARCHITECTURAL RESEARCH FOR  
BUILDINGS LOCATED ON THE CROWNRIDGE PROPERTY,  
SAN ANTONIO, TEXAS**

By Mindy L. Bonine

**BACKGROUND**

Embrey Partners, Ltd. plans to develop a 16-acre Crownridge property located on the southwest corner of IH 10 and Camp Bullis Road, with an address of 19625 IH 10 W. The property is a semi-circle shaped plot with the IH 10 frontage road on the east side, Camp Bullis Road curving around from the north to the west sides, and commercial property to the south (Figure 1). The property slopes upward from the IH 10 frontage road and a steep hill is located just to the west. Several buildings are located on the property, consisting of a primary residence made of stone, several outbuildings for domesticated animals, an elevated water tank, septic tank, asphalt paved driveway, and several buildings of unknown use. These structures are planned to be torn down prior to development of the property. As part of the developers compliance with the City of San Antonio's Historic Preservation and Design Section of the Unified Development Code, Embrey Partners, Ltd. contracted SWCA Environmental Consultants to conduct an archival review of the area and perform an architectural evaluation of the standing structures, particularly the stone buildings, to determine possible historic significance and integrity of the site. The buildings were first evaluated to determine their likely age, and if found to be over 50 years, were evaluated according to criteria for listing on the National Register of Historic Places (NRHP), which is the benchmark for evaluating a property's historic significance.

**HISTORIC CONTEXT**

The principle European settlement of the San Antonio area began in 1718, with the founding of Mission San Antonio de Valero and Presidio San Antonio de Béxar. By the 1730s, the population of the area was about 900, with about 300 Spanish and 600 Native American converts (Long 2005). Through the years, San Antonio switched from Spanish rule, to Mexican, Texan, and finally United States influence. Constant fighting kept the population of San Antonio low, but after the 1840s, more immigrants decided to settle in the area. Subsistence farming was the norm, until cattle drives and the arrival of the railroad in the 1860s and 1880s turned San Antonio into an economic hub (Long 2005). The population began to grow, and surrounding areas in Bexar County were settled. The closest community to the project area, Beckmann, was settled sometime before 1900 and named for John Beckmann, who spent his last years there and died in 1907. Beckmann had been trained as a locksmith, a woodworking craftsman, and a blacksmith. He moved to San Antonio in 1846, and was employed by the U.S. government as a

blacksmith at the Alamo (Pease 2005). In the mid-1930s, the town of Beckmann was a flag stop on the Texas and New Orleans Railroad, and a limestone quarry provided most of the employment in the area. In 1940, the settlement had a population of about 25 persons, who had built a store and a church for the community (Cameron 2005). After World War II, most of the residents had moved away from the area, while development activities at nearby Camp Bullis, which had begun in the 1930s, continued to increase (Leatherwood 2005). In the 1970s, San Antonio expanded into the areas just south of the project area, called “Loopland,” as it was bounded by Loop 410 on the south and Loop 1604 on the north.

## **METHODS**

First, SWCA conducted an archival records search of the project area. An SWCA historic archaeologist searched the Texas Historic Sites Atlas (Atlas) online database for any previously recorded historic archeological sites, NRHP properties, State Archeological Landmarks (SALs), official Texas historical markers (OTHMs), Registered Texas Historic Landmarks (RTHLs), cemeteries, and local neighborhood surveys located in or near the project area. Records at the Texas Historical Commission (THC) were reviewed for details on any properties located during the records search. Online catalogs and finding aids of the Handbook of Texas Online, the Austin Public Library, the Center for American History, the Benson Latin American Collection, the Perry-Castañeda Library, and the Texas State Library were consulted for material relating to the local history. The property was also reviewed on the Bexar Appraisal District website, and through current and past aerial photographs and topographic maps.

Following the records search, an SWCA architectural historian conducted a site visit to the Crownridge property to determine the site’s historic significance. The buildings were evaluated under the criteria for eligibility to the NRHP, which is used to determine the significance of historic resources. One of the criteria is that the property be over 50 years of age, and this was determined first by any documentation on the construction of the buildings, and lacking that information, an evaluation of the built environment, including architecture and site layout, to determine the style and possible age of the property. All buildings potentially over 50 years of age were photo-documented, sketch plans were made, notes as to construction method, building function, and alterations were completed. Nearby temporally diagnostic debris was identified to assist with the possible dates of occupation.

In order to determine historic significance, a property’s integrity is evaluated, which is the ability of a property to convey its period of significance. This is established by looking at seven aspects: if the property is in its original place, if it retains its original design, if the environmental setting is intact, if the original materials are still present, if the workmanship is visible, if the property evokes a feeling of a particular time, and if the association with past persons or events

are present. The property must suitably represent the time period of significance through these aspects in order to be eligible for the NRHP.

## **RESULTS**

### ***ARCHIVAL REVIEW***

No NRHP properties, SALs, OTHMs, RTHLs, cemeteries, or local neighborhood surveys were found to be present in or near the Crownridge property. According to the Bexar Appraisal District, the property does not contain any recorded improvements, and it is listed as undeveloped land (Bexar County 2005). However, an aerial photograph dating to 1959 and used by the Soil Conservation Service in the compilation of the soil maps, shows one standing structure at the same location as the existing standing structures today (Taylor et al. 1962). One possible standing structure was plotted on the Castle Hills 7.5-minute USGS topographic map dating to 1992, but the location is plotted approximately 70 m to the east of the existing complex of buildings, at the edge of the IH 10 frontage road. The most accurate aerial photograph of the complex as it stands today is a 2002 photo of the area, which can be found on the City of San Antonio's GIS Mapping Application (Figure 2). The roofs of the main residence, feeding shed, and water tank can all be seen.

### ***ARCHITECTURAL EVALUATION***

A site visit was conducted on April 7, 2005, and the buildings present at the Crownridge property were evaluated for their integrity and potential historic significance. Seven structures were found on the property, in addition to a concrete pad, a linear cut in the bedrock, and sporadic sections of asphalt paving (Figure 3). A broken wire mesh fence was seen surrounding portions of the buildings. Several refuse items were seen on the ground surface, including liter-size brown glass bottles, clear glass bottles with screw tops, pull tab beer cans, soda cans, aerosol paint cans, and plastic bottles.

The residence is a one room mortared coarse stone building with two doorway openings and two window openings, covered with an asphalt shingle side gable roof (Figure 4). A small shed roofed stone addition is split into two equally sized rooms. One room shows evidence of being a shower, with water pipes sticking out of the wall, while the other room is of unknown function. A short floor to ceiling interior wall separated the two rooms and extends slightly into the main room, but no other walls or dividers were observed. The interior is coated with plaster or drywall, and all of the windows and doors have been removed. Evidence of a fire was seen in the rafters, and one half of the wood floor was burned away (Figure 5).

The adjacent chicken coop is also made a mortared coarse stone, and consists of a corrugated tin shed roof on the main part of the structure, and a small bumpout with a stone foundations, wooden frame walls, and a corrugated tin shed roof (Figure 6). The walls are partially covered with wooden boards, plywood sheets, and chicken wire. A “door” of wood and chicken wire is located in this addition, and a small hole in the bottom of the stone structure covered on the inside by tin was observed.

West of the chicken coop, a large structure at least partially used as a feeding shed was seen; it has a poured concrete foundation, wood frame walls, and a shed roof covered by corrugated tin (Figure 7). Large portions of the walls were not seen with sheathing of any kind, but other portions are covered with plank siding. The structure is divided into two rooms, separated by wood walls and plank siding, and one room contains a feeding troth for a medium or large sized animal, such as an adolescent to adult horse, mule, or cow (Figure 8). Portions of the wood floor have rotted away.

North of the chicken coop, a cluster of three structures was found during the survey, and include a small corrugated tin shack with wood frame walls, a gable roof, and a small entryway (Figure 9), a concrete septic tank, and an elevated water tank (Figure 10). The foundation of the water tanks is constructed similarly to the residence, of mortared coarse stone walls about 6 feet high. Large wooden posts were laid across stone pillars inside the building, and a wooden floor was constructed for the water tank. The tank appears to be relatively new, with no signs of rust, and the manufacturing stamps still visible. A doorway and window opening are present in the stone base, and the structure may have been used for some activity that required a cool damp environment.

The last standing structure is also made of stone, but the walls extend only to 5 feet or so, and one side of the structure is completely open, with just a low wall connecting it to the other walls (Figure 11). No roof was seen during the survey, but rotten wooden planks inside may have been the roof at one time. A doorway with the remains of a wooden door are present, as well as a small opening covered with chicken wire. Portions of the wire mesh fence can be seen more prevalently around this building, forming a “U”.

The other observed features on the property include a square concrete foundation pad of unknown use, a square-shaped cut in the limestone bedrock downslope of the buildings, and segments of an asphalt drive weaving up the hill between the frontage road and the structures (Figure 12). The asphalt was too patchy to determine a definitive path, and no observable route to the residence was observed.

## SUMMARY

The complex of seven standing structures and associated features are likely the remains of a small ranch that has been abandoned for many years. Evidence of a fire in the residence may explain this abandonment. As many of the features that help define the age of a structure are missing from the residence, an exact time frame of construction and occupation is difficult to discern. The house and any of the stone buildings may date back to the 1930s, but as the 1959 aerial photograph only shows one structure, most were likely built in the 1960s. As their age was difficult to discern, the structures were treated as if they were over 50 years of age and evaluated for their integrity. All of the structures appeared to be located in their original position, and the original design can still be seen for the residence and all of the outbuildings. However, the historic character of the environmental setting has likely changed, as significant growth of small trees and underbrush prevented easy access to all of the standing structures, which would have been absent while the complex was inhabited. The residence is lacking in many of the original materials, (i.e., doors, windows, roof sections, etc.), as is the feeding shed and unknown outbuilding, and the water tank appears to be a replacement of an older tank. The chicken coop, septic tank, and tin shack do appear to retain their original materials. The stonework for the residence, chicken coop, and water tank are in reasonably good condition and of good workmanship, but the auxiliary wooden and tin structures/additions have not survived the ravages of time, and are in poor condition. Finally, the property does not appear to retain the feeling or association with a specific period of time, or a link with persons or events in the past. Thus, the structures do not exhibit enough aspects of integrity to be considered historically significant. Based on these observations and analysis, the complex of structures at the Crownridge property does not appear to be eligible for the NRHP, and no further historic or archaeological investigations are recommended.

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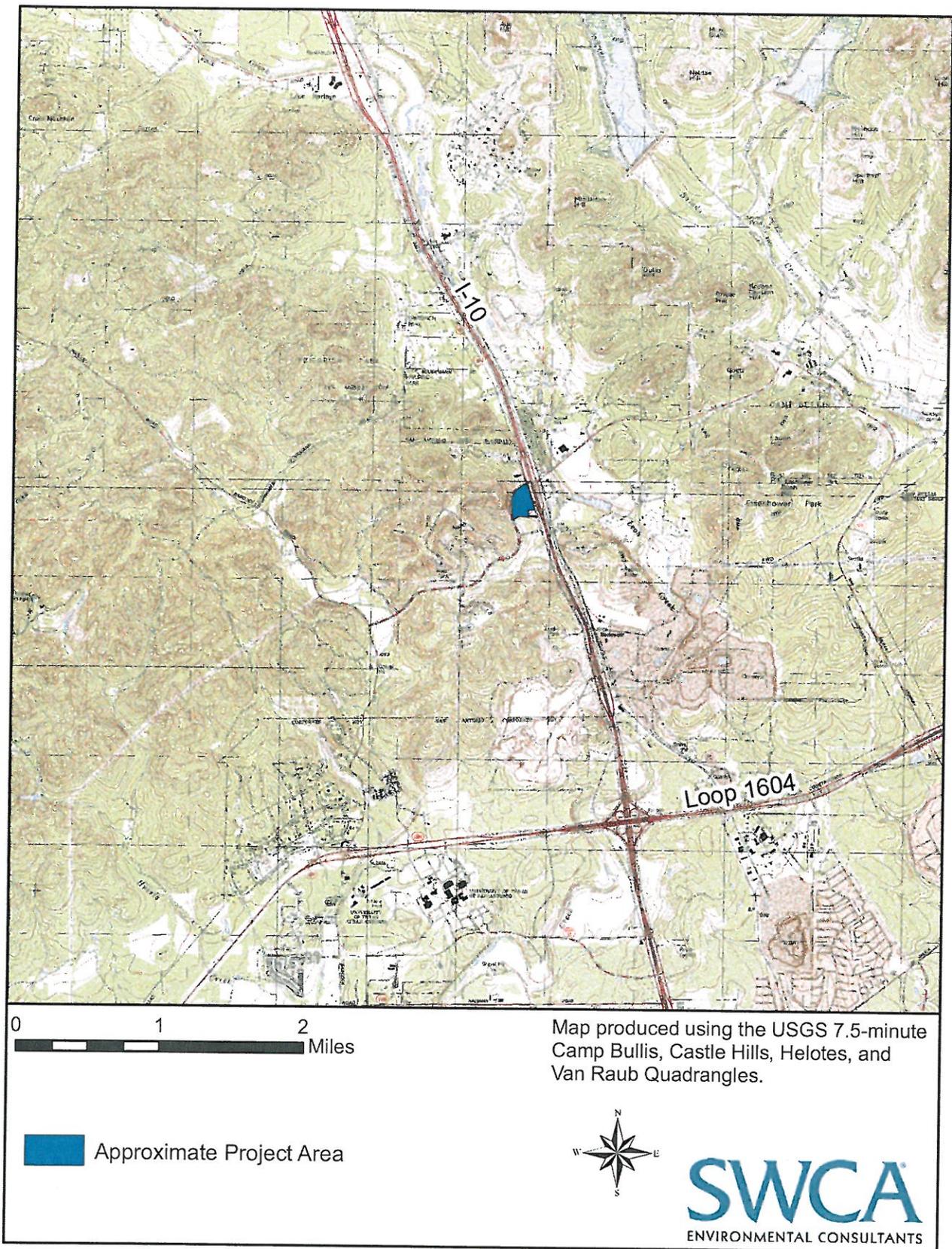


Figure 1. Project Location Map.

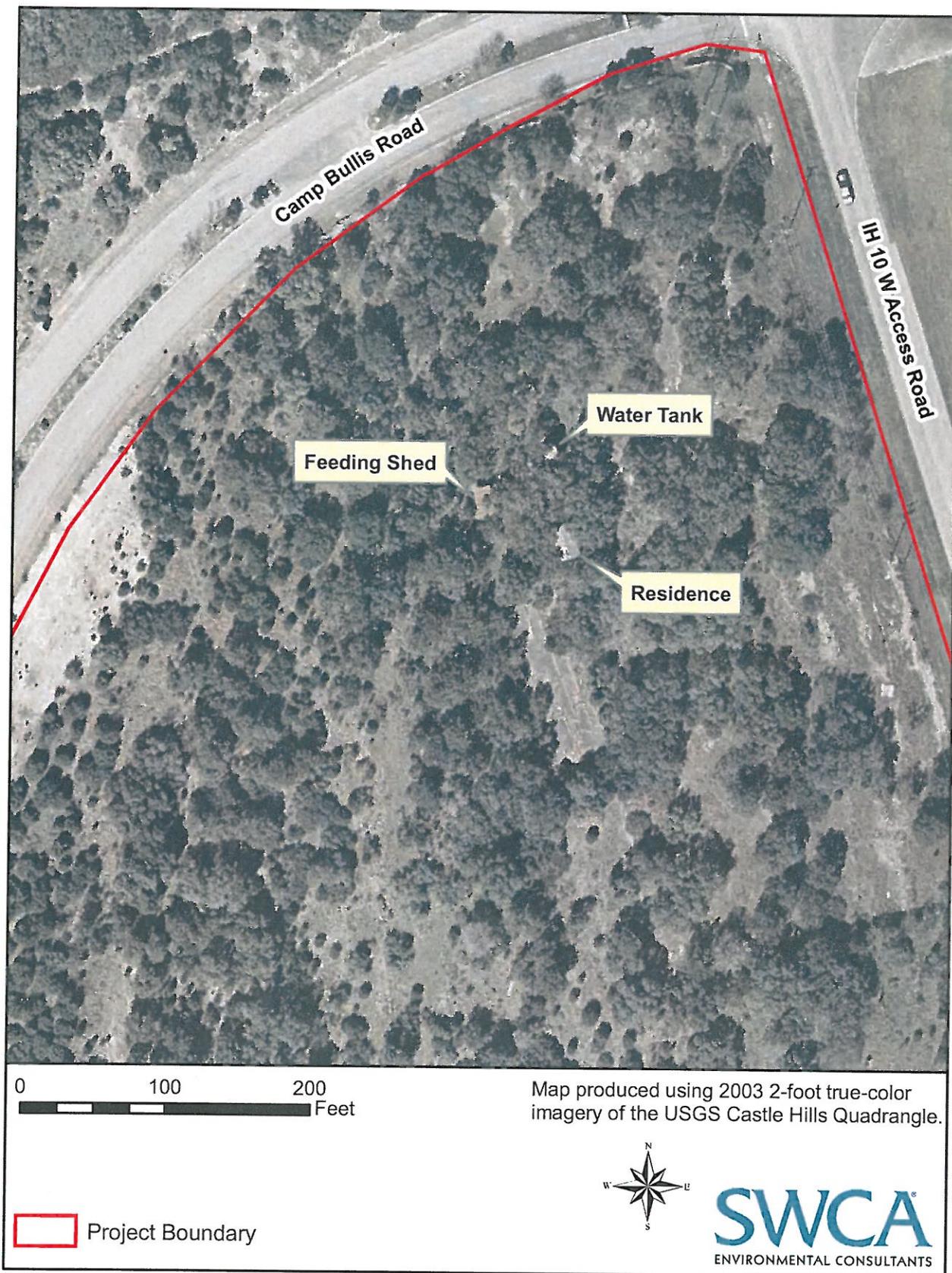
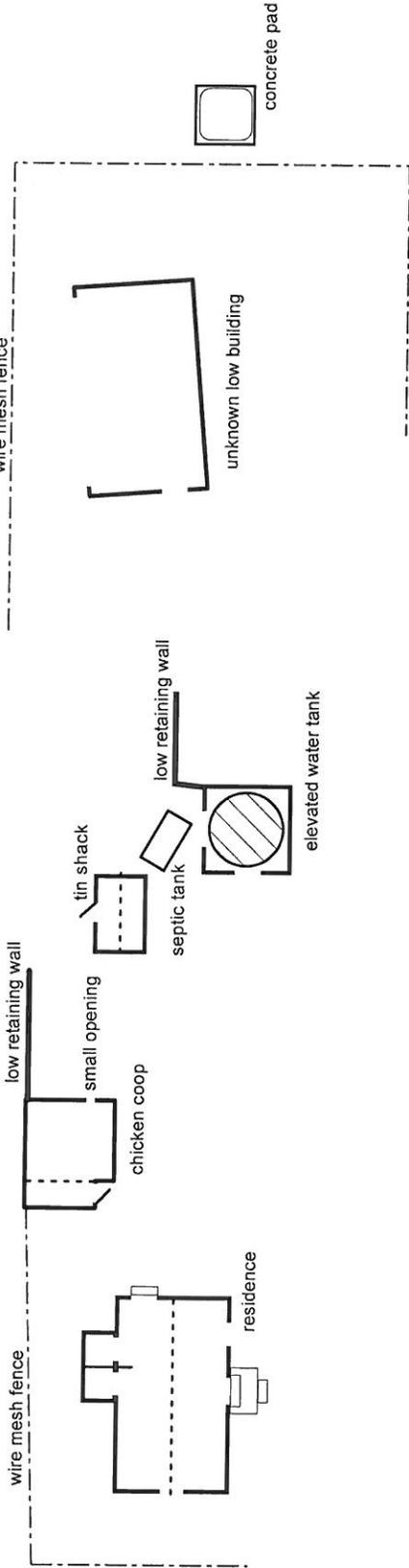
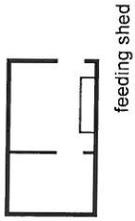


Figure 2. Aerial photo of project area, note roofs of residence, feeding shed, and water tank.



asphalt drive sections

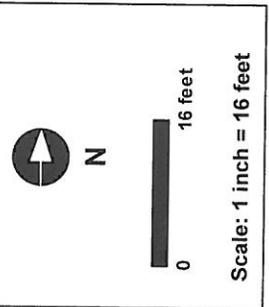


Figure 3	
Site Sketch Plan	
Project:	
Archival and Architectural Research for the Crownridge Property	
Project No.	9465-143
Date:	April 20, 2005

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Figure 4. Residence.



Figure 5. Interior of residence.



Figure 6. Chicken coop.



Figure 7. Feeding shed.



Figure 8. Trough inside of feeding shed.



Figure 9. Tin shack.

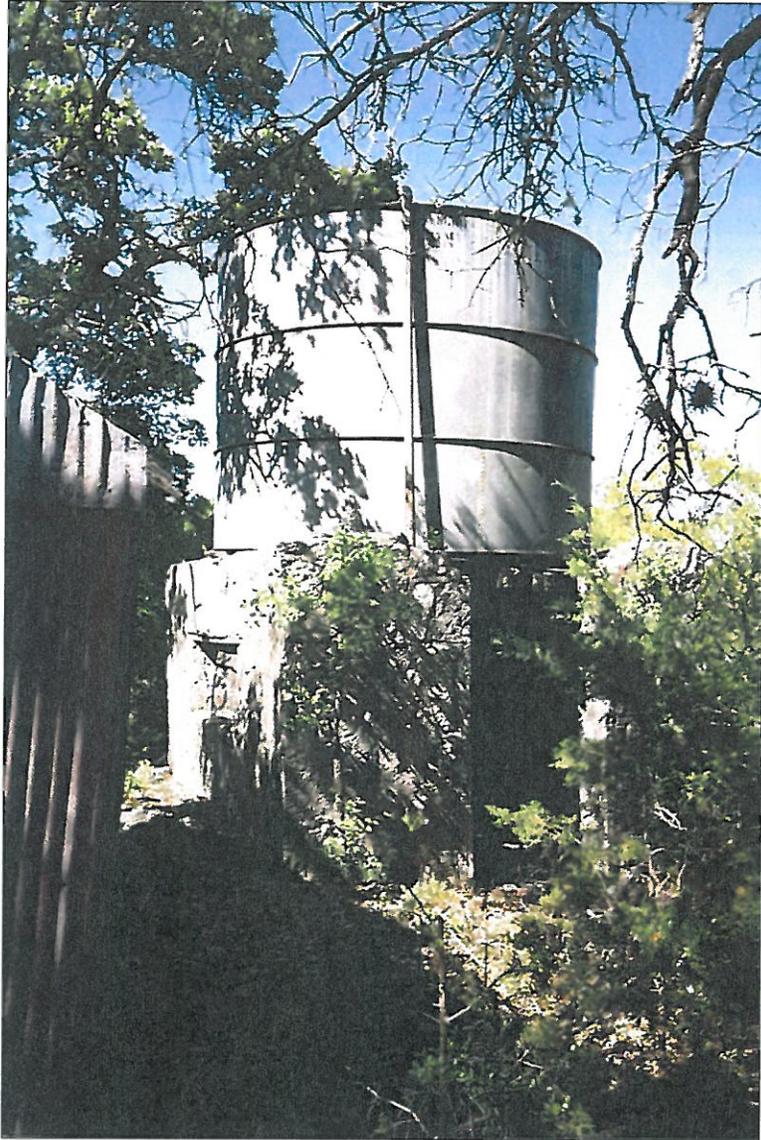


Figure 10. Elevated water tank.

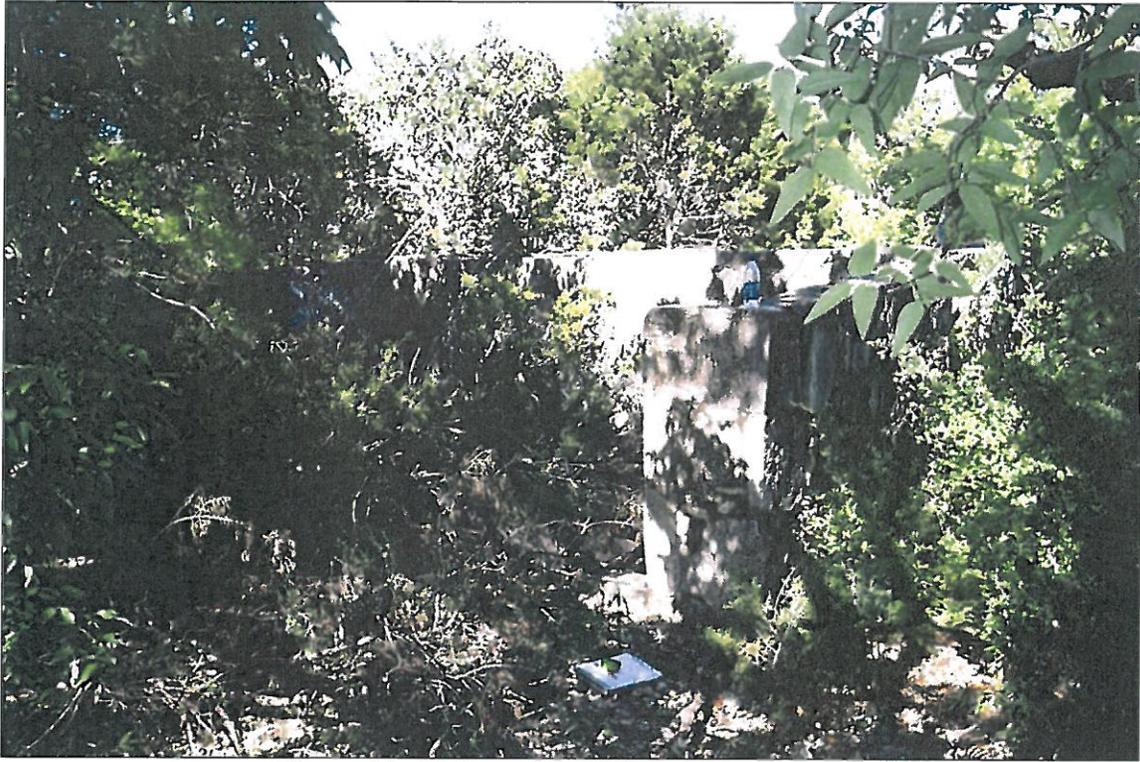


Figure 11. Unknown building with open wall.



Figure 12. Asphalt paving.