

***AN ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVALUATION
OF 41BX784 A HISTORIC HOMESTEAD
IN BEXAR COUNTY TEXAS***



By
William E. Moore

***Brazos Valley Research Associates
Contract Report Number 162***

2006

AN ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVALUATION OF 41BX784
A HISTORIC HOMESTEAD IN BEXAR COUNTY, TEXAS

BVRA Project 06-02

Principal Investigator

William E. Moore

Prepared for

Rosillo Creek Development Ltd.
1616 Calle del Norte #48
Laredo, Texas 78941

Prepared by

Brazos Valley Research Associates
813 Beck Street
Bryan, Texas 77803

ABSTRACT

Brazos Valley Research Associates (BVRA) conducted an evaluation of previously recorded historic site 41BX784 in central Bexar County on March 13, 2006 for Rosillo Creek Development Ltd. of Laredo, Texas. This action was initiated by a request from the City of San Antonio, Office of Historic Preservation. The Texas Historical Commission, Archeology Division has no jurisdiction in this project; therefore, an antiquities permit was not required.

This site was recorded by Leonard K. Voellinger of Espey, Houston & Associates, Inc. (now PBS&J) in 1987 as the Richard Hild farm which was occupied during the early part of the 20th century (circa 1903) until 1987. At the time of this survey the investigators observed two water troughs, two cisterns, a tank (earthen pond) and associated wood frame pump house, three concrete slabs, and seven rubble piles representing two house sites and five ancillary structures. Espey, Huston & Associates, Inc. recommended additional work at this site to determine its eligibility for listing in the National Register of Historic Places.

This site was found by BVRA to be virtually destroyed with only five intact or partially intact features present. These are the pump house, a rectangular water trough, a sandstone and mortar retaining wall, a sandstone and mortar feature of unknown function, and a metal cattle guard. The cinder block cistern noted by Voellinger is no longer present, and the piles of wooden rubble from bulldozed structures are also absent. Based on the evidence observed by BVRA, site 41BX784 is not eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places or for designation as a State Archeological Landmark. No further work is recommended, and construction should be allowed to proceed as planned.

Copies of the report are on file at the City of San Antonio, Office of Historic Preservation; Texas Historical Commission; Texas Archeological Research Laboratory (TARL); Rosillo Creek Development Ltd.; and BVRA.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

BVRA is grateful to the following individuals for their assistance and support. Kay Hinds, Staff Archeologist for the City of San Antonio, discussed the project with the Principal Investigator prior to commencement of the evaluation. Jason Arechiga of Rosillo Creek Development Ltd. provided maps and permission to enter the property. James E. Warren visited the site and shared his knowledge of early 20th century farmsteads. The background check was conducted by Jean Hughes, Records Conservator at the Texas Archeological Research Laboratory. Jennifer McMillen and Nora Rogers performed technical editing.

CONTENTS

ABSTRACT.....	ii
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS	iii
INTRODUCTION	1
PREVIOUS INVESTIGATIONS.....	6
METHODS	7
RESULTS AND CONCLUSIONS.....	8
RECOMMENDATIONS.....	17
REFERENCES CITED.....	18

FIGURES

Figure 1. General Location	2
Figure 2. Project Area (drafted from engineering map)	3
Figure 3. Project Area on Topographic Map Martinez.....	4
Figure 4. Site Map Depicting Features A-Q.....	9
Figure 5. Feature D.....	10
Figure 6. Feature E.....	11
Figure 7. Feature G.....	12
Figure 8. Feature N.....	14

INTRODUCTION

Rosillo Creek Development Ltd. proposes construction of a subdivision to be known as Rosillo Ranch on a 679-acre tract of land within the city limits of San Antonio, Texas in central Bexar County (Figure 1). The property is bounded on the north by Interstate Highway 10, on the south by St. Hedwig Road, on the east by Foster Road, and on the west by private property. The center of the tract is bisected by Rosillo Creek, a tributary of Ackerman Creek (Figure 2). The major drainage basin in the area is the San Antonio and Nueces rivers. The project area is depicted on the 7.5' USGS topographic map Martinez dated 1992 (2998-134 (Figure 3).

This project will consist of 14 phases, is scheduled to begin in 2007, and be completed in 2021. Tax Increment Reinvestment Zone (TIRZ) will provide part of the funding for this project. This funding is provided by TIRZ to developers for lands that are hard to develop, underdeveloped, or blighted.

The engineering firm for this project is Bury Partners of San Angelo, Texas. Construction of the subdivision will consist of commercial and residential lots, streets, utilities, a sewer system, parks, and a school site. The entire tract will be cleared of its natural vegetation, and ornamental trees and shrubs will be planted throughout the development.

A previous cultural resources survey by Espey, Huston & Associates, Inc. of Austin, Texas discovered six archaeological sites in the area. Five of these sites (41BX770, 41BX771, 41BX772, 41BX782, and 41BX784) are located within the footprint of the proposed Rosillo Ranch. Site 41BX783 is outside the project area and has been destroyed as a result of construction of the Trans America truck stop at the intersection of Interstate Highway 10 and Foster Road.

In order to avoid adverse impacts to significant cultural resources, on city property, Kay Hinds, staff archaeologist for the San Antonio Historic Preservation Office, requested an investigation of all sites on the tract viewed to be potentially significant by a professional archaeologist. The legislation regulating cultural resources is the City of San Antonio's "Historic and Preservation Design Section of the Unified Development Code (Article 6 35-630 to 35-634)." Disturbance of any site or the collection of artifacts from any site on City property prior to a determination of significance is a violation of the code. Since this is a privately funded project that falls under the jurisdiction of the City of San Antonio, an antiquities permit from the Texas Historical Commission is not required.

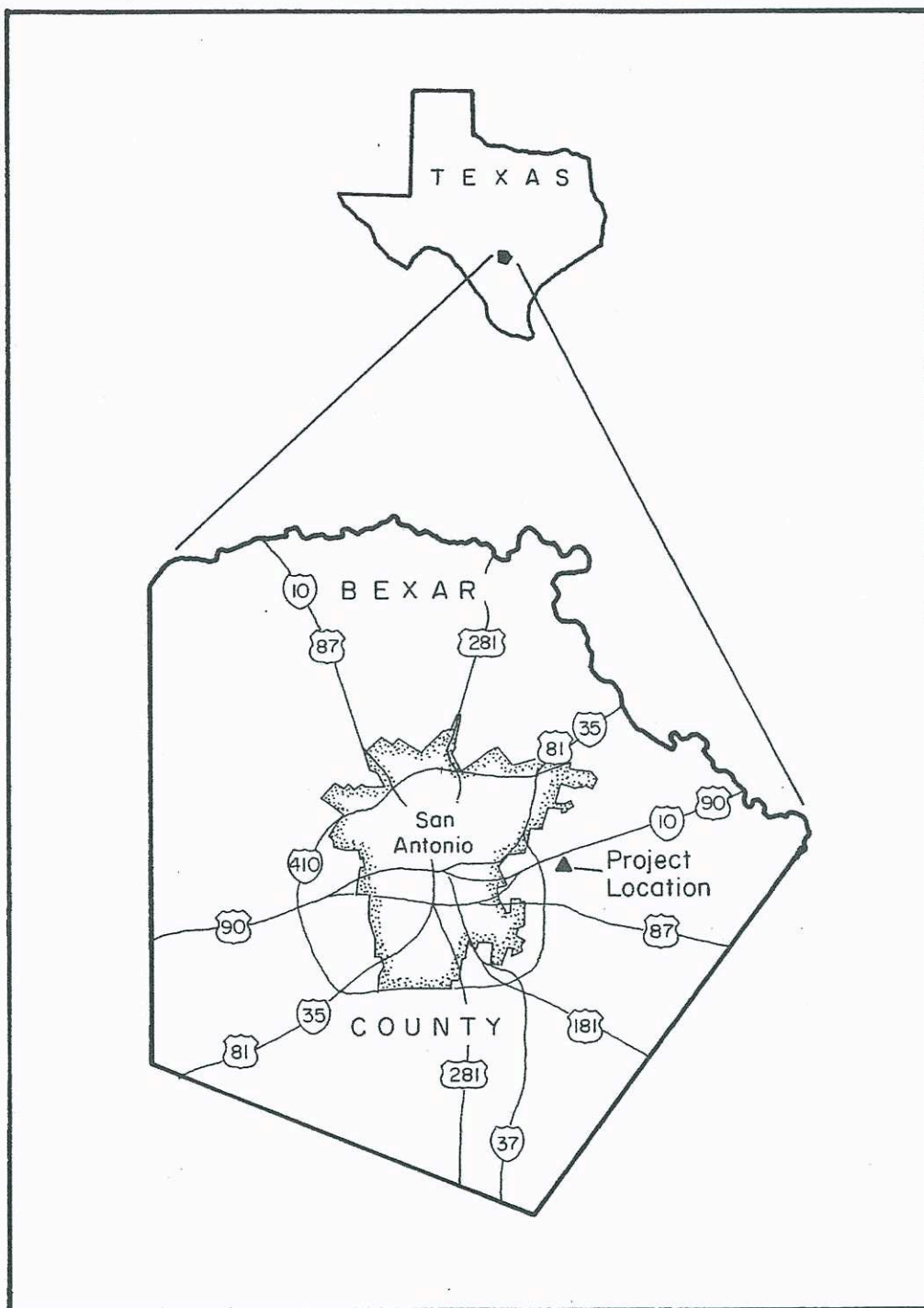


Figure 1. General Location

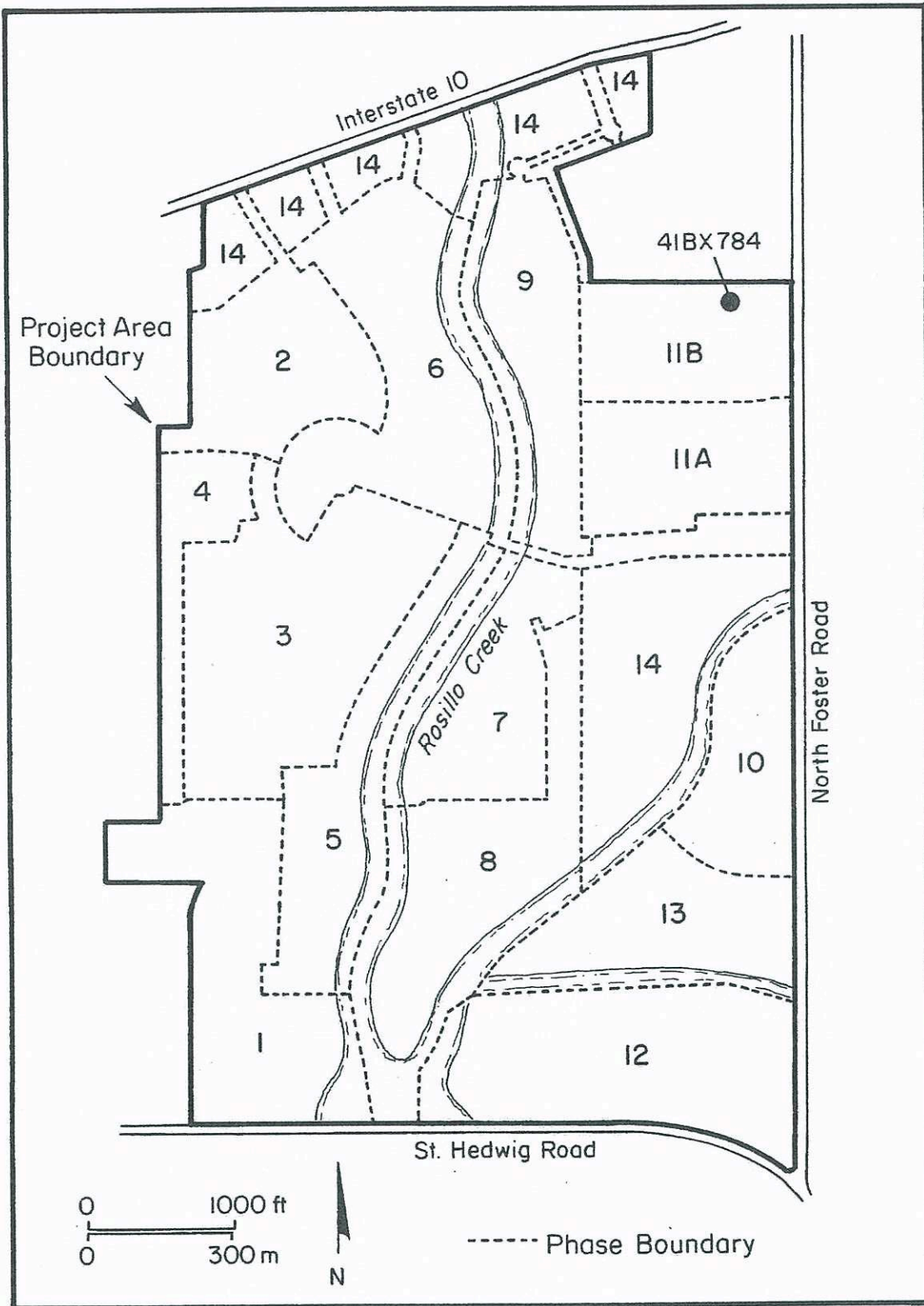


Figure 2. Project Area (drafted from engineering map)

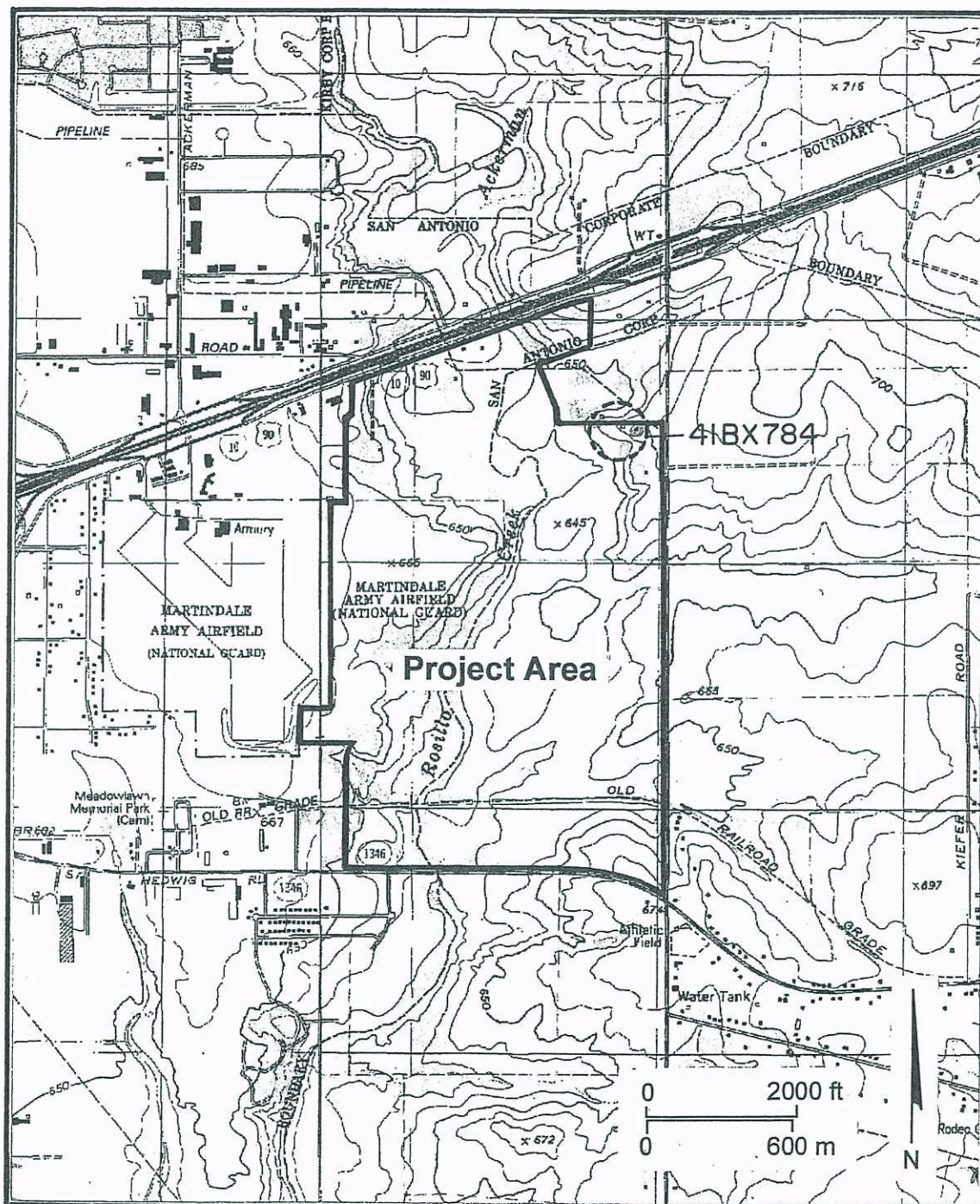


Figure 3. Project Area on Topographic Map Martinez

In order to comply with this request Rosillo Creek Development Ltd. retained BVRA to investigate historic site 41BX784, the only site viewed by Espey, Huston & Associates, Inc. to be potentially eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places. The location of this site as depicted on the USGS 7.5' topographic quadrangle Martinez is depicted in Figure 2. This plotting is taken from the map files at the Texas Archeological Research Laboratory and the Texas Historic Sites Atlas.

PREVIOUS INVESTIGATIONS

Leonard K. Voellinger of Espey, Huston & Associates, Inc. examined the current project area, in 1987 as part of the Rosillo Creek Development project (Espey, Huston & Associates, Inc. 1988). Following a records check at the Texas Historical Commission and the Texas Archeological Research Laboratory, a 100% Pedesrian Survey of the project area (800 acres) was conducted. In addition, interviews with persons knowledgeable of the area were conducted. The field survey was performed by a two-person crew walking parallel linear transects (20-30 feet apart) across the project area. Their definition of an archaeological site was a "locus of cultural activity which is manifested by two or more artifacts" (Espey, Huston & Associates, Inc. 1988:24-25). This definition included all prehistoric sites and those historic sites older than 50 years. The historical research consisted of a review of maps and deeds previously acquired by the project engineers. In addition, attempts were made to locate maps and records at the Bexar County Courthouse, the Library of the Daughters of the Republic of Texas, the Texas State Library, the General Land Office, the Barker History Center, and on file with the Chairman of the Bexar County Historical Society. Interviews with members of the Hild family were also conducted.

As stated above, six archaeological sites were recorded. One site (41BX770) is listed on the site form by Voellinger as "unknown prehistoric." The remaining sites (41BX771, 41BX772, 41BX782, 41BX783, and 41BX784) are historic and date to the early 20th century. Only site 41BX784 is viewed by Voellinger as worthy of additional investigations to determine its eligibility for listing in the National Register of Historic Places (NRHP) or designation as a State Archeological Landmark. According to the site form prepared by Voellinger, the site "could be eligible because it is typical of the period of agrarian settlement of the area." He states that it "should be researched further to determine its place in local history and to acquire the information necessary to accurately assess it in terms of eligibility to the NRHP."

The investigation by Voellinger was conducted in June of 1987 and consisted of a surface inspection without shovel testing. At the time of his visit, the area was covered with grasses and various native shrubs. Trees present were oak, elm, hackberry, and mesquite. He observed numerous tree stumps which indicated the recent removal of trees in the area. Use of the land in 1987 is cited by Voellinger as a field scheduled to become a residential development.

A visual survey of the site area revealed the following: two cisterns (one concrete and one cinderblock), two concrete water troughs, one tank and associated wood-frame pump house, three concrete slabs, seven rubble piles representing house sites, and five ancillary structures. The structures, all of frame construction, had been bulldozed into individual piles. Their foundations were partially intact.

METHODS

Prior to the field assessment of historic site 41BX784, the Principal Investigator discussed the project with Kay Hindes, Staff Archaeologist for the City of San Antonio, to make sure the proper area would be investigated and the methods proposed by BVRA would be acceptable. Maps were obtained from Jason Arcechiga of Rosillo Creek Development Ltd. Jean Hughes at the Texas Archeological Research Laboratory was contacted in an attempt to obtain a copy of the report documenting the previous work at 41BX784 and to check for older versions of the topographic map as well as earlier Texas Highway Department maps. The Texas Historic Sites Atlas was checked for site forms and locations. At the time of this survey the report prepared by Espey, Huston & Associates, Inc. was not on file at the Texas Archeological Research Laboratory or the Texas Historical Commission. A copy was finally obtained after the survey was completed and most of this report had been written.

The field survey consisted of an on-site visit by William E. Moore and James E. Warren on March 13, 2006. The entire site area was traversed on foot in an attempt to locate the various features identified by Voellinger in his report. Each feature was designated with a letter (i.e., Feature A) and depicted on a field map. Because of the thick brush, the site map (Figure 4) was made by pacing in conjunction with a compass. Use of a tape was considered to be not practical. Photos of selected features were taken with a digital camera and appear in the *Results and Conclusions* of this report. A hand-held GPS was used to record the UTM coordinates at a point on Foster Road.

The Criteria for Evaluation for listing in the National Register of Historic Places were applied to site 41BX784 in order to determine its research potential. These criteria (in addition to the age requirement of 50 years) are:

- Sites associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.
- Sites associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.
- Sites that embody the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction, or that represent the work of a master, or that possess high artistic values, or that represent a significant and distinguishable entity whose components may lack individual distinction.
- Sites that have yielded, or may be likely to yield, information important in prehistory or history

RESULTS AND CONCLUSIONS

The on-site visit identified 17 features (A-Q) associated with historic site 41BX784. They are discussed below and depicted on a map sketched in the field as Figure 4 below. Not all of the features observed by Voellinger in 1987 were present at the time of this investigation. No piles of lumber from the former structures, for example, were noted, and the number of rubble piles seen by BVRA did not equal the number described by Voellinger. The piles of lumber from the structures had been burned or removed.

Feature A

Old barbed wire fence and road. Two fences running east-west from Foster Road to allow property owner to drive onto property without opening the gate. This feature is not mentioned by Voellinger.

Feature B

Depression in the surface measured to be about four feet in diameter. No brick or concrete lining was observed visually, and scraping with a shovel produced only dirt. The function of this depression is unknown. Voellinger does not mention this feature.

Feature C

Concrete cistern (5 feet in diameter). This cistern was filled in with dirt. No artifacts were observed in or around this feature. An iron inlet pipe was observed at the north edge of this feature. This pipe probably brought water from the roof of a structure. Voellinger does not mention this feature.

Feature D

Brick-lined cistern (4 feet in diameter). This cistern was filled in with dirt. No artifacts were observed in or around this feature (Figure 5). The bricks were identified as Williams. A plastic pipe was observed near feature, and it may have been used as a replacement for an earlier iron inlet pipe. Voellinger observed this feature.

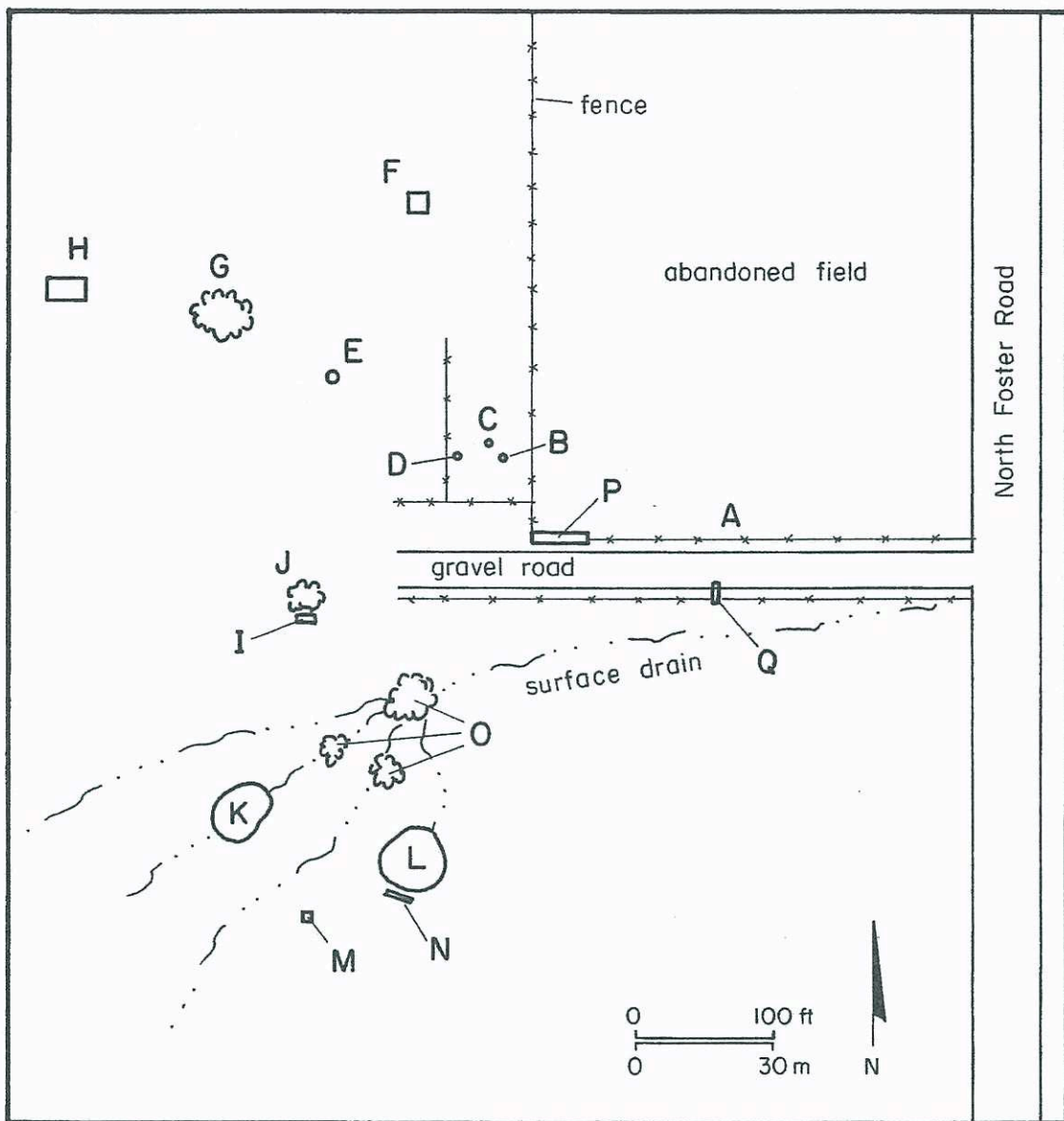


Figure 4. Site Map Depicting Features A-Q



Figure 5. Feature D

Feature E

Circular brick water trough (8 feet in diameter) (Figure 6). This trough was lined with brick using Portland mortar and plaster and filled in with dirt. No artifacts were observed in or around this feature. The bricks were identified as Alamo. BVRA believes this is one of the cisterns observed by Voellinger.



Figure 6. Feature E

Feature F

Concrete foundation (16 feet x 16 feet). This foundation was next to a rubble pile. Pieces of clay tile in the area suggest it may have functioned as a bathroom or a small dairy building. The clay tile would have allowed water runoff when the floor of the structure was washed. Scattered pieces of unidentified metal were observed near this feature. BVRA believes this is one of the foundations described by Voellinger.

Feature G

Concrete and brick rubble pile (40 feet in diameter) (Figure 7). Based on the presence of fire brick (D'Hanis and Loclede St. Louis), a firebox with a chimney was once present at this location. The size of the rubble pile and the presence of the brick suggests this was the location of a residence. BVRA believes this is one of the rubble piles observed by Voellinger.



Figure 7. Feature G

Feature H

Concrete slab (15 feet x 30 feet). This small slab appears to be the location of an outbuilding and not a residence. Its function is unknown. No artifacts were observed in or around this feature. BVRA believes this is one of the slabs described by Voellinger.

Feature I

Concrete water trough (12 feet long, 4 feet wide, x 2 feet deep). This feature was cast in place using Portland concrete. It was used for watering livestock. No artifacts were observed in or around this feature. BVRA believes this is one of the water troughs observed by Voellinger.

Feature J

Concrete rubble piles. These piles of rubble appear to have been brought in and deposited in this location, possibly to prevent erosion in gullies. The pieces of concrete were massive and lacked steel reinforcement. No artifacts were observed in or around this feature. BVRA believes these are some of the rubble piles observed by Voellinger.

Feature K

Earthen pond (approximately 40 feet in diameter). This pond may have functioned as a tank for watering livestock.. At the time of this investigation it was dry and overgrown with river canes. The canes may have been brought in as a soil erosion measure. Voellinger only mentions one tank. This earthen pond may be the one he observed.

Feature L

Dirt pond (approximately 50 feet in diameter). Same as above.

Feature M

Small wooden frame building with corrugated iron roof. This is the same structure that Voellinger refers to as a pump house. It is approximately 6 feet x 8 feet in plan and 8 feet in height). No artifacts were observed in or around this feature. This is the pump house observed by Voellinger.

Feature N

Sandstone structure plastered with Portland cement (Figure 8). It is approximately 8 feet x 8 feet in plan and 5 feet tall. It was built into an earthen embankment below the two earthen ponds. The hackberry tree to the left was already in place when the feature was constructed; otherwise, there would be cracks or movement of the left wall. This feature is not believed to be very old because of the use of Portland cement and the absence of mold or fungus on sandstone that occurs over time. It did not appear to be weathered. The function of this unusual feature is unknown. Voellinger does not mention this feature.



Figure 8. Feature N

Feature O

Concrete rubble piles. These piles of rubble appear to have been brought in and deposited in this location. No artifacts were observed in or around this feature. BVRA believes Voellinger observed these rubble piles.

Feature P

Retaining wall made of sandstone and plastered with Portland cement. It is 12 inches wide and at least 40 feet long. It is located next to the barbed wire fence along Foster Road. This may have been constructed to help prevent erosion from the adjacent cultivated fields. Voellinger does not mention this feature in his report.

Feature Q

Welded pipe cattle guard 6 feet x 12 feet in size. Voellinger does not mention this feature in his report.

Summary

The field investigation revealed the presence of a 20th century farmstead located in a pasture of local grasses and scattered trees, mainly hackberry and mesquite. Many of the hackberry trees were present along fence lines and adjacent to many of the site's 17 features. Birds carrying seeds probably planted them. The site is situated on an elevated landform just to the east of Rosillo Creek. A small drainage or gully passes through the site area from east to west.

No diagnostic artifacts were observed to help date this site; however, the use of Portland cement and modern brick is an indication that this site is not early. No indication of lime plaster was observed. Lime was commonly used in late 19th century and very early 20th century sites. Only five intact or partially intact features were observed. These are the small "pump house" near the earthen ponds (Feature M), the rectangular concrete water trough (Feature I), the retaining wall (Feature P), the sandstone structure near one of the earthen ponds (Feature N), and the metal cattle guard (Feature Q)

According to the soil survey for Bexar County (Taylor et al. 1991: Sheet 55), the soils in the area of site 41BX784 belong to the Houston Black series and consist of Houston Black gravelly clay, 1 to 3 percent slopes (HuB) and Houston Black gravelly clay, 3 to 5 percent slopes (HuC). Soils in this series are described by Taylor et al. (1991:20) as clayey soils that are deep, dark gray, and calcareous. They are found on landforms that are nearly level to strongly sloping. Nearly all Houston Black soils have gravels on the surface and in the plow zone. These soils have slow to rapid runoff drainage, and internal drainage is slow to none. Rainfall is very rapidly absorbed when the soil is dry and cracked. These soils are often cultivated with grain sorghum and corn being the main crops. Small grains, cotton, other dry land crops, and native grasses or varieties of perennial grass are also grown.

Voellinger conducted extensive archival research and interviewed members of the Hild family. He found that residents of German descent occupied the site from the early 20th century until 1987. They subsisted by raising cotton as their money crop and dairy cattle for butter and other dairy products that were sold in town by family members. Hogs and chickens were also kept. Water was obtained from a cistern. Rosillo Creek and a spring-fed tank provided water for crops and cattle. The interested reader is referred to the report by Voellinger as a source of additional information regarding the Hild family and site 41BX784.

Although this site is probably greater than 50 years of age, it is not believed to be eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places due to its poor condition. Voellinger discusses the condition of 41BX784 when he remarks on page 47 that "The physical portions of this site have been severely altered and no longer reflect their original character, therefore, the integrity of this site is questionable." In his argument for site significance Voellinger states "the building foundations are still in place making it possible to map the site for comparative analysis with settlement patterns of farms of persons of similar and different ethnic backgrounds" (Espey, Huston & Associates, Inc. 1988:47). He reasons that the site could be eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places because it is typical of the period of agrarian settlement of the area.

BVRA found the site to be in worse condition than in 1987 when Voellinger assessed it. The wooden rubble piles have disappeared, and not one of the cement slabs is in good condition. At this time it is not possible to create a map that would accurately show the footprint of the Hild farm, as it was when it was occupied. BVRA does not believe that additional archival research would add to the extensive work done by Voellinger. Since diagnostic artifacts were virtually absent at this site, a controlled surface collection would most certainly provide little information. Also, it is doubtful that artifacts exist below the existing ground surface unless the cisterns were used at some time as a dump. Any such artifacts would simply support an occupation that spanned a period of about 80 years (1903 through 1987).

Applying the four criteria for listing in the National Register of Historic Places, the following comments describe the significance of site 41BX784:

- This site is part of a regional agrarian existence in Bexar County, but BVRA does not believe it has made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.
- Richard Hild and his family are not viewed by BVRA as significant persons in Texas history
- The construction of the features of the Hild farm is not the work of a master craftsman, nor do they possess high artistic values. The features at this site are typical of numerous similar farmsteads.
- Although the Hild farm may yield information that is important to the history of Bexar County, this site is not unusual. Also, very little can be added to the research conducted by Voellinger.

RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that the Rosillo Creek Development, Ltd. be allowed to proceed with construction as planned. Although all archaeological sites have value, BVRA believes that site 41BX784 is typical of farmsteads of this period in Bexar County. Therefore, the information gained from extensive archival research, also interesting, would probably not provide new data regarding the use of the area by agriculturalists during this period.

REFERENCES CITED

Espey, Huston & Associates, Inc.

1988 *Archaeological Survey of the Proposed Rosillo Creek Development, Bexar County, Texas*. Prepared by Espey, Huston & Associates, Inc. Document Number 870647; Job Number 10323.

Taylor, F. B., R. B. Hailey, and D. L. Richmond

1991 *Soil Survey of Bexar County, Texas*. Published by the United States Department of Agriculture, Soil Conservation Service, In Cooperation with the Texas Agricultural Experiment Station.