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# 65-An Archaeological Survey of the Coves Apartments, Vicksburg, Michigan

William M. Cremin  
*Western Michigan University*

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DEPARTMENT OF ANTHROPOLOGY  
WESTERN MICHIGAN UNIVERSITY

REPORT OF INVESTIGATIONS NO. 65  
1984

AN ARCHAEOLOGICAL SURVEY OF THE  
COVES APARTMENTS, VICKSBURG, MICHIGAN

William M. Cremin

Prepared for:

Mr. Louis P. Schimp  
Lou Schimp and Associates, Inc.  
P.O. Box 57  
Vicksburg, Michigan 49097

through

Gove Associates, Inc.  
1601 Portage  
Kalamazoo, Michigan 49001

## INTRODUCTION:

At the request of Mr. Karl Freed, Vice President-Director of Planning, Gove Associates, Inc., Kalamazoo, Michigan, acting on behalf of Mr. Louis P. Schimp, Lou Schimp and Associates, Inc., Vicksburg, Michigan, the Principal Investigator, Dr. William M. Cremin, submitted a proposal and budget for on-site evaluation of a two acre parcel of land at the intersection of Prairie Street and The Boulevard and adjacent to Sunset Lake in the Village of Vicksburg, Kalamazoo County, Michigan. There follows a report of fieldwork conducted on 6 Dec 84, together with the appropriate background information and recommendations based upon our findings.

## PROJECT PERSONNEL:

Principal Investigator - William M. Cremin, Ph.D., Associate  
Professor of Anthropology, Western  
Michigan University

Field Assistant - David De Fant, M.A. Candidate in  
Anthropology, WMU

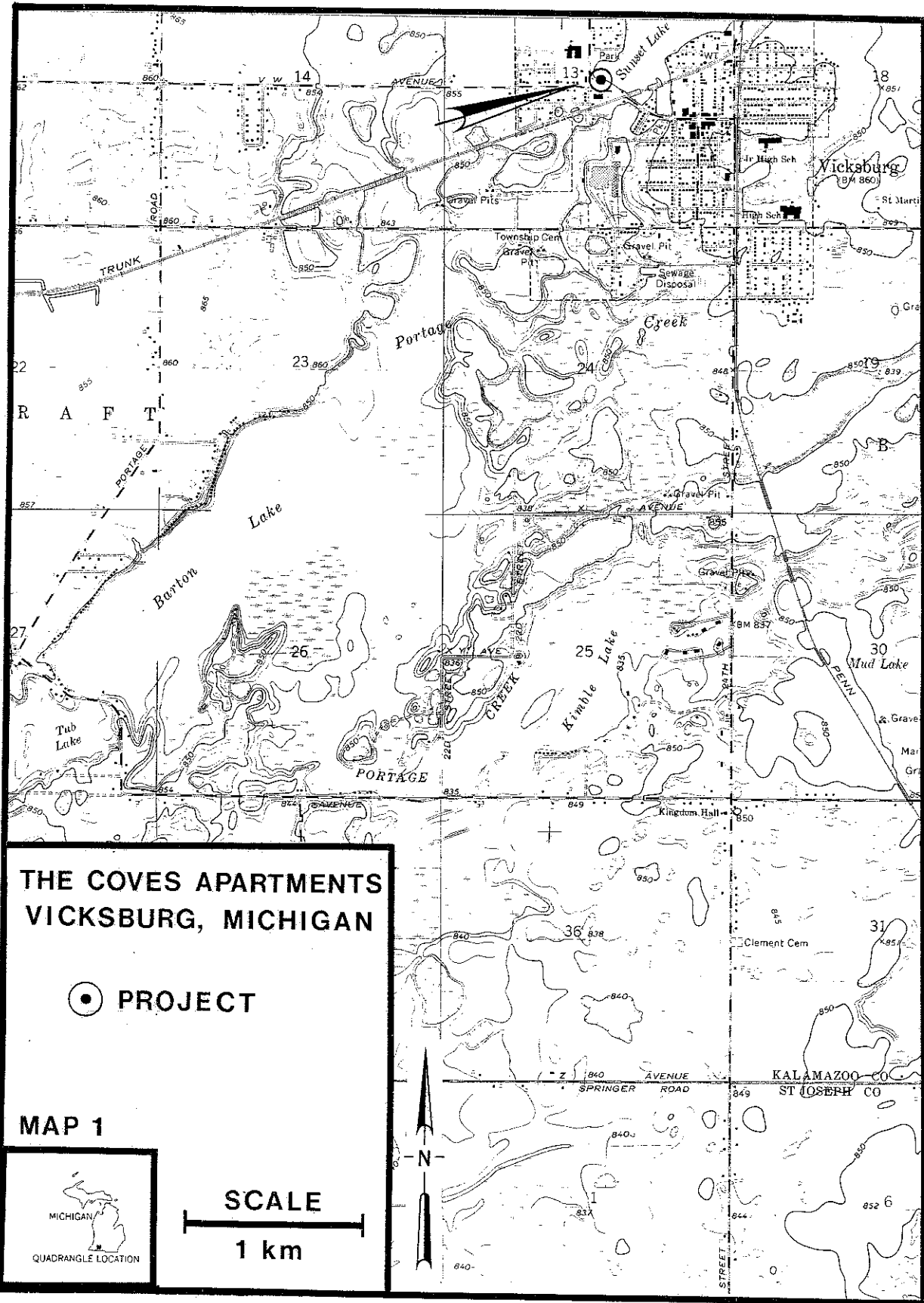
## DESCRIPTION OF THE PROJECT AREA:

The research area of this study and future site of The Coves Apartments is a two acre (0.81 ha) parcel located in the SW 1/4, SW 1/4, SW 1/4, NE 1/4 of Section 13, Schoolcraft Township, T4S R6W, Kalamazoo County, Michigan. The property is today situated entirely within the limits of the Village of Vicksburg. Presently, the study area lies adjacent to an arm of Sunset Lake; this body

of water, depicted on Map 1, is shown on all maps of this town published since the 1860s, but in various configurations. It had its origin as a mill pond, created for the purpose of water power generation at the sites of both a gristmill and a sawmill on Portage Creek a short distance downstream and to the east of the study area.

The initial dam constructed on Portage Creek was built by John Vickers, the first settler and namesake of the village, in 1831. And after about three decades of mill rebuilding and relocation, the waters backing up behind the dam and race complex slowly began to assume the form of a lake. The evolution of this impoundment on Portage Creek-Sunset Lake as it is known today-is clearly documented in a series of maps and village plats published between 1855 and 1910 (Beers 1873; Geil and Hurley 1861; Innes 1855; Ogle 1910; and Sauer 1890). By the last mentioned date, Sunset Lake had achieved its present configuration.

At the time of our fieldwork, this parcel on the south shore of Sunset Lake supported a cover of thickly matted grasses, dense brambles and thickets of cockleburs, and several dozen mature hardwoods. There was also evidence of recent tree clearing in the form of numerous stumps ranging from 30-70 cm in diameter. However, when Robert Clark first surveyed this township in 1826 (Hodgman n.d.), the study area, then located about 170 m west of the creek and approximately one km SE of the edge of Gourd-Neck Prairie, supported what Hodler et al. (1981) have identified as oak savanna. Oak savanna or "barrens" typically featured 1-15 trees/acre and was heavily dominated by the white oak. Other

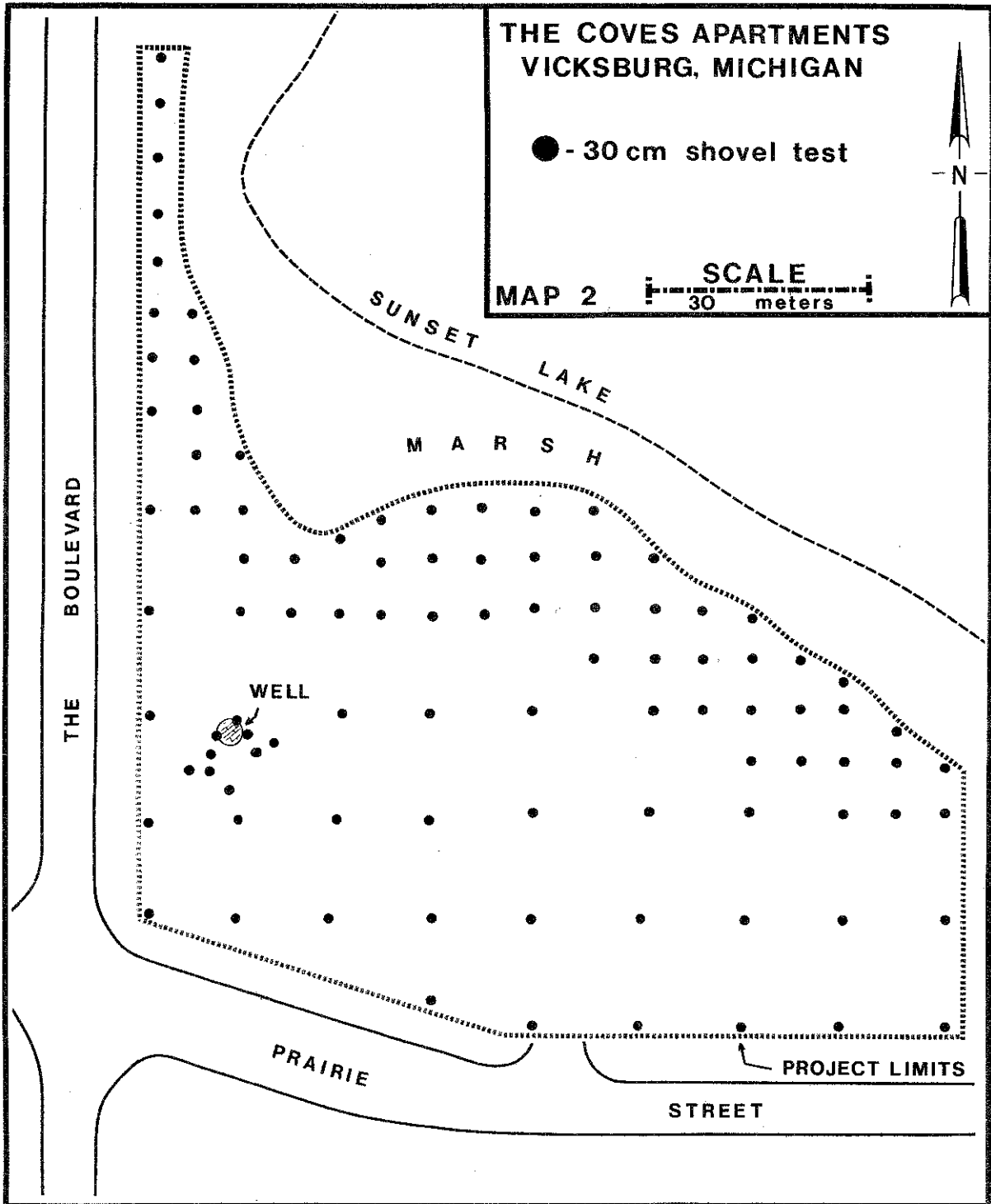


tree species occurring in this plant association were the yellow oak, black oak, bur oak, pignut hickory, and shagbark hickory. And the herbaceous understory was very similar to that of the adjacent prairie (Hodler et al. 1981).

#### PREVIOUS RESEARCH:

Examination of the literature, documents, and state site files revealed that no archaeological sites had ever been recorded for the project area. However, recent archaeological fieldwork by the author and the WMU archaeological field school in the Spring of 1984 downstream from the project near the head of Barton Lake in Section 23 (see Map 1), resulted in the discovery of three new prehistoric sites and confirmation of the presence of a fourth on what had been the southeast margin of Gourd-Neck Prairie (Cremin, De Fant, and Adams 1984).

The historical materials examined indicated that the project was formerly part of the Nottawa-Sepee Reservation created in the year 1827. This tract comprised 115 mi<sup>2</sup>, including "the entire township of Brady, a strip two miles wide on the west side of Wakeshma, and a like strip on the east side of Schoolcraft Township" (Durant 1880: 76). Moreover, in a letter from A.H. Scott to Henry Bishop, cited in Durant (1880: 78), in the year 1833 the Indians "had a village or collection of wigwams in the grove just east of the prairie, on the farm now owned by James N. Neasmith, Esq." The Neasmith Farm, in 1880, occupied the N 1/2 of Section 23. And from this village of Sagamaw's people, the residents hunted deer during most of the year, trapped raccoons and muskrats, fished the lakes and streams with spear and hook,





collected wild fruits such as the blueberry and blackberry, and raised Indian corn (Scott cited in Durant 1880: 79).

#### FIELD PROCEDURES:

Ground surface visibility across the parcel was such that systematic and intensive shovel testing provided the only means by which it could be effectively evaluated. The study area was traversed from south to north along transects spaced approximately 15 m apart, with this interval being halved as the survey team neared the edge of the property overlooking the lake. The spacing of individual shovel tests along each line of survey reflects the same consideration; thus, probes were located at intervals of 7.5 - 15 m along transects. In total, 97 shovel tests, ranging in depth from 30 cm to 60 cm, or until sterile subsoil was encountered, were excavated across the parcel. The approximate locations of all shovel tests are indicated on Map 2. Systematic and intensive examination of the project area by means of shovel testing, together with a review of the literature, documents, and state site files, provides the basis upon which the following comments and recommendations are made.

#### RESULTS OF THE SURVEY:

On-site examination of this parcel revealed that it has been significantly impacted over time. Across the property we seldom observed undisturbed soil profiles, and while we did find historic debris to be scattered over the west half of the parcel and have located the remains of a field stone-lined well (see Map 2), these observations are diminished in potential value by the following:

1. historical debris of both 19th and 20th century origin occurred together in shovel test after shovel test, suggesting an absence of context across the property as might be expected had it served in modern times as a trash dump;
2. nothing in the collection of material from shovel tests is especially diagnostic and informative with respect to the matter of temporal placement and/or site function; and
3. the well, albeit partially collapsed and filled in, might be anticipated to yield some information if further studied; for in all probability it was associated with a residential structure that was formerly located on this property. However, nothing remains of the structure that is shown on maps to have stood here from 1855 until perhaps as recently as 1910, making it impossible to determine if it was in any manner unique or especially representative of the architecture of the period. And, based on the documents examined as part of this Phase I assessment, there is absolutely nothing to indicate that the R. Lewis Family, presumably responsible for erecting the house and residing here until 1873, or a Mr. Asa Briggs, who subsequently purchased this parcel of land to add it to the adjacent properties which he already owned, and retained ownership until the Briggs Addition was annexed to the Village of Vicksburg, gained any measure of local, regional, or national prominence that would necessitate a more thorough investigation of the property and the land-owners of record.

## RECOMMENDATIONS DERIVED FROM THE SURVEY:

Based upon a systematic and intensive survey of the parcel in question, resulting in the acquisition of information to the effect that the area has been impacted by dumping and filling activities for many years, and for the above mentioned reasons, it is felt that our observations can be regarded as being of little consequence with respect to additional impacts resulting from proposed construction of The Coves Apartments. It is therefore recommended that the project be permitted to proceed as planned.

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INVENTORY OF CULTURAL MATERIAL:

In addition to numerous observations of cinder, brick fragments, particles of field tile, and metal soft drink containers, the following items were recovered and returned to the laboratory in the Department of Anthropology for closer examination:

- 2-rubber bushings
- 7-particles of plastic, presumably from a container(s)
- 2-pieces of clear window glass
- 2-pieces of clear bottle glass
- 4-square-cut nails of varying sizes
- 1-rim sherd of a crock, gray in color and embossed with an unidentified design. This example of salt glaze stoneware is not unlike crocks still commonly made by potters today
- 1-metal implement with a saw-tooth margin and a backing for the hand on the opposite edge
- 1-metal buckle for the end of a harness strap(?)
- 3-pieces of unidentified metal
- 5-fragments of a common white plate or saucer, one of which bears a partial maker's mark that has not been identified. These exhibit a uniform ground color over the paste biscuit that has subsequently been covered with a transparent glaze. In the absence of brush marks, these earthenware specimens could have been produced at any time since 1826